How We Position Our Hearts

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The Bible tells us that the most deceitful thing on the planet is 'the heart' (Jeremiah 17:9). Our hearts are the centre point from which we make our every decision, and if they are not constantly checked and positioned towards God, they can go completely astray. This results in devastation: in our relationship with God, in relating to the people around us, and even in how we perceive our own identity.

To dig further into this truth, let's look at two men who both walked closely with Jesus as His disciples, but who had very different outcomes to their lives because of the way they positioned their hearts toward God: Judas and Peter.

Starting Point

Both Judas and Peter were called by Jesus. Both committed to leaving their previous lifestyles behind in order to follow Him. Both men lived together 24/7 with Jesus and the other disciples. We can comfortably assume they were all close friends. Both Judas and Peter were appointed to go out and preach and both were given authority by Jesus to drive out demons (Mark 3:13-19). They were both apostles of Jesus, both were the starting point of Christianity. They also both sinned terribly against Jesus. One was lost and the other restored.

The Prediction

Jesus predicted that both Judas and Peter would betray Him. We read in John 13:27 that at the point where Satan entered Judas, Jesus tells Judas to 'do what he is going to do, quickly'. We see that Peter was also under attack by Satan. We read in Luke 22:31 of Jesus telling Peter that Satan had asked to sift him. Jesus then correctly predicts that Peter will deny knowing Jesus (vs 34). Although our own hearts deceive us towards wickedness, Jesus has never been deceived. God is trustworthy because Jesus IS the Truth. We must always choose the Bible as ultimate Truth, because only God never lies and is never deceived.

> Sadly, both men failed Jesus. Judas betrayed Jesus...and Peter denied Jesus

Contradicting God

It's sobering to think that both men contradicted God when Jesus warned them of their coming deception and betrayal! Both men believed they would not let Jesus down and would not live up to His prediction. We read in Matthew 26:25 (NIV) that Judas said, 'Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?' Peter's response to Jesus' prediction was (in Matthew 26:33 (NIV)), 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.' Sadly, both men failed Jesus. Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty silver coins and Peter denied Jesus three times.

Why was Judas Lost and Peter Restored?

This question is a serious one, and working through it can help us to keep our hearts positioned well, so that we can serve Jesus faithfully. To answer it, we must compare who Judas and Peter understood Jesus to be.

Judas' Revelation of Jesus

Judas was a zealot. He believed that the Messiah would conquer the Romans and deliver God's people through a violent uprising! Considering this, it is logical for us to assume that, in Judas' mind, his actions weren't a betrayal of Jesus. Instead, he was simply nudging Jesus towards his destiny! Quite possibly, Judas' plan was to kickstart the Messiah's rule and reign. If this was true, imagine then the overwhelming shock for Judas when, in Mark 14:48, Jesus says that he is NOT leading a rebellion. He answers His disciples' move to attack those arresting Him by healing the wound inflicted on the Roman concerned. In that moment, everything Judas had wrongly believed about Jesus disintegrates and he finally realises that he has been deceived – by his own heart, his own desires.

> Judas' heart desired freedom from Roman rule. Peter's heart feared death more than anything

Peter's Revelation of Jesus

We read in Matthew 16:13–20 that Peter had a correct revelation of who Jesus is, and that this revelation was given to him by the Father. Peter, at that stage, was the only disciple who really knew that Jesus is the son of God. The disciple to whom Jesus would commit His church was the first disciple to be given the key into heaven. Peter's own heart deceived him into betraying Jesus when he denied three times that he was Jesus' disciple. Judas' heart desired freedom from Roman rule. Peter's heart feared death more than anything at that point in time. But because Peter had a God-given revelation about the true nature of Jesus as the Christ, Peter's heart was led ultimately to repentance and not despair.

Judas' Response

Judas did not understand that God was working all things toward man's eternal salvation. He could not see past his own current discomfort. He did not trust that God knew best and he tried to manipulate God's plans according to his own wisdom. As a result, when his own plans failed him, he had nowhere to turn. His fallback was religion. He went to the religious leaders of the time asking for answers, but they sent him away. Judas' hope was in a man and a system, not in God. Now that the basis of his hope has been shown to be false, he gives in to his devastation and takes his own life (Matthew 27:3-5). Right to the end, Judas denies God's power to save him.

Peter's Response

Luke 22:62 says that when Peter was confronted with the deceitfulness of his own heart, he wept bitterly. Yet he does not lose hope in God the way that Judas does. He has had a revelation of Jesus as Christ, though he does not at that point understand at all what God the Father is doing. And so Peter simply waits. Jesus had previously said that he would go to Galilee after he had risen from the dead (Matthew 26:32), and so Peter goes there. When God rewards his patient humility by forgiving him, Peter's heart is ready to respond to God's forgiveness with repentance and a heart to obey Jesus in whatever God sees fit to commission him to do (John 21:15-17). Peter's sin had been to rely on the strength of his heart, but because of a greater revelation of the omnipotence of Jesus Christ, Peter is able to transition from pride to a deeper reliance on the grace of God.

Positioning Our Hearts Towards Jesus

God desires to give us each a new heart; to put His spirit in us so that we have the power to love and obey Him, so that He would be our God and we His people (Ezekiel 36:26-28). Where is your heart at? Are you positioning your heart towards Jesus or away from him? Right now, are you a Judas or a Peter? God tells us in Revelation 3:20: 'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.' Let Jesus in and let Him change you from the inside out. Our own hearts are deceitful, but God is offering us His Spirit, His power, to say no to the lies of the evil one and the power to say yes to godliness and eternal intimacy with Him.