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Betrayal and Redemption: A Theological Exploration of Luke 22:1-6 and its Moral Lessons for Nigerian Christians

Daniel, Mary Taiye, PhD

Abstract

Nigeria is going through a period of political and economic transition after over 50 years of independence. Despite this fact, the country is richly blessed with linguistic, ethnic, political, cultural and religious diversity. There are three basic religions in the country which includes Christianity, Islam and Africa Traditional Religion. Christianity as one of the major religions has often addressed the issue of bribery as well as gave several moral lessons in guiding the lives of its adherents. This study explores the theological significance of Luke 22:1-6, focusing on Judas' betrayal and its implications for Nigerian Christians. Despite the religiosity, discipleship and the closeness of learning at the feet of Christ, he still managed to get deceived by the Devil and finally betrayed Christ. Through Biblical exegesis, narrative, descriptive and theological reflection, this paper examines the complex interplay between human sin and divine providence. The study reveals that Jesus' sacrifice serves as a paradigm for redemption, forgiveness, and loyalty. This research applies biblical principles to contemporary Nigerian contexts, addressing themes such as .:the nature of sin and Judas betrayal, bribery in Nigeria and its effects, trusting God's sovereignty amidst challenges, and embracing redemption and forgiveness. Findings reveal that, this study will contribute tremendously to biblical scholarship providing moral guidance for all Christians, and as well enhances understanding of redemption and forgiveness. It concludes and recommends among others that, the Nigerian Christians should embrace the valuable moral lessons provided in Luke 22:1-6, among which are, loyalty and faithfulness in the face of temptation, trusting God's sovereignty amidst uncertainty and embracing forgiveness and redemption

Keywords: Luke 22:1-6, betrayal, redemption, forgiveness, Nigerian Christians, biblical exegesis, theological reflection

Introduction

OVER THE YEARS, THE ISSUE OF BRIBERY HAS BECOME A PECULIAR PROBLEM TO all societies across the globe. Bribery in Nigeria is a phenomenon that began from the grass root which has expanded its roots to all parts of human endeavor. Bribery can be found in virtually all facets of life which is not limited to the religious endeavor of man. The concept of bribery in Nigeria is not new in Nigeria, the country had continued to experience various kind of bribery and corruption in the country as the years passed.

The preamble of the Nigerian constitution as amended in 1989, stipulates that

Nigeria is a sovereign nation under God. This indicates that the constitution recognizes Nigerians as religious people and as well as a moral nation. In addition, the constitution also recognizes Nigeria as a secular nation, with heterogeneous and ethnic groups coupled with many cultures. This has been specified in the constitution since independence. Thus, a secular state is a state where religion communities have no recognized role in politics and no formal relation to the state. Individual citizens have a freedom of conscience and religion; and freedom from discrimination on the basis of religion. This is different from a theocratic or a religious state.

The Bible has over often times served as a guide to how moral standards are laid for the Christians. It has served as a guide to modeling their lives on how to act at all times. The betrayal of Christ which can be seen in the book of Luke 22 explained how the devil can take charge of a life who is not firm in Christ. The manner at which Judas went behind all other disciples in betraying Jesus has often been a matter of great carefulness for all Christians at large. Ministers and preachers of the word, has often times employed several methods in addressing this issue and also by constantly reminding their congregation about how important it is to avoid any issue that pertains to betrayal and bribery.

This paper will be analyzing the biblical narration of the betrayal and bribery of Christ as written in the book of Luke 22:1-6, conceptualize the term bribery and point out the moral lessons in the bible passage and how it would influence the life of the Nigerian Christians especially in the navigation of their Christian Life.

Reason for Judas' Betrayal

The narratives of the four gospels in the scriptures concerning the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot are germane events of disloyalty in Christian theology. It is difficult to conclude exactly what Judas Iscariot thought of Jesus when he (Judas) became the disciple of Jesus and what transpired between them that made Judas decide to betray Him. Explanations are given as reasons for Judas's behaviour towards someone he addresses as "Master" or "Rabbi." These reasons include bribery and demonic possession as narrated by the gospels (Matt. 26:15, Luke 22:3, John 13:27).

According to the gospels, Jesus himself permitted it to happen. The Gospels suggest that Jesus knew earlier that Judas would betray Him, and he permitted the incidence in order to allow God's plan to be fulfilled (His betrayal is seen as setting in motion the events that led to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, which according to Christian theology, brought salvation to humanity. Another explanation is that regardless of the betrayal, Jesus was ultimately destined for crucifixion). Jesus had predicted earlier that "one of you will betray me" when they were having the last supper (Matt. 26:17-29, Mark 14:12-25, Luke 22:7-38 and 1 cor. 11:23-25).and immediately, Judas left the table to meet with the Roman authorities that were seeking to arrest Jesus. Judas requested for a monetary reward of 30 pieces of silver to hand over his master to them with a kiss. Betrayal is violating a person's trust or confidence, of a moral standard; to give over to an enemy by treachery; to be unfaithful to a very close person.

Judas whom Jesus had chosen was a close friend of Jesus, confidential servant, a partaker in apostolic ministry and given the honour of miraculous gifts: he was a trusted friend of Jesus. This implies that a person cannot be betrayed by an enemy but rather a very close person whom is trusted the most. To be betrayed is something that really hurts, and Judas Iscariot betrayed his master (Jesus) with a kiss for monetary gratification.

However, the actions of Judas Iscariot could be viewed as a mysterious blend of natural and spiritual factors. The natural aspect of it can be related to everyday choices made by Judas Iscariot. According to John 12:6, the treasurer of Jesus' ministry; and began stealing money from the account. The small purse that Jesus' followers, including women who had been delivered from evil spirits and diseases (Luke 8:1-3), used to collect contributions was entrusted to Judas' care, but he exploited this position, corrupting the sacred trust into an opportunity for personal gain and selfishness. Thus, Judas Iscariot eventually became a thief because of greediness and not being content, he thought he could make more money by selling his master to the Jewish authorities.

Besides the natural aspect of the story, lie is a mysterious operation of Satan. According to Luke 22:3, and John 13:27, Satan entered Judas's heart to betray Jesus; Satan had been preparing Judas by tempting him to steal money that was in his care, making him ready to accept the offer to betray Jesus for more money. The Scripture is silent whether God created Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus or not. However, it tells us that Judas betrayed Jesus by the choice he made. Judas became the betrayer by allowing himself to be used by satanic influence as a result of his lust and greed for money. This same Satan has not changed his strategy; what happened to Judas Iscariot is happening every day in Christendom. The desire for pleasure, luxury, wealth, power, or fame among people who calls themselves "Servants of God" cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, Judas betrayal of Jesus is seen as setting in motion the events that led to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection which according to Christian theology brought salvation to humanity. According to Ontario Consultants on Religions Tolerance, another explanation is that regardless of the betrayal, Jesus was ultimately destined for crucifixion.

Biblical Narration of Luke 22:1-6

According to Luke 22:1-6;

> Now the festival of unleavened bread, called the Passover was approaching and the chief priests and the teachers. The law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas called Iscariot, one of the twelve. And Judas went to the Chief Priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

Luke 22:1 "Now the festival of unleavened bread called 'Passover' was approaching."

The feast of the unleavened bread (Passover) was first celebrated at the last night the Israelites spent in the Egyptian captivity. God gave them instructions through Moses as to how the Passover would be celebrated. A lamb of a year old, to be killed and the blood to be applied to lintel of their houses, the meat to be roasted and eaten with bitter herbs. They must dress up, having their staffs in their hands, standing by the meal with an unleavened bread as they eat the meal in a hurry.

So God commanded them to observe it when they get to the Promised Land. It was a natural celebration where people travel far and near to participate in. it was a day of atonement for their natural sin. "So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it a feast by an everlasting ordinance forever. (Exodus 12:14).

Luke 22:2 "And the chief priests and the teachers the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people"—Every Jewish household had to kill and eat the meal of a male lamb of a year, apply the blood on their lintel according to the instructions and commandments of God. They were busy planning the death of an innocent soul while the feast was going on.

Luke 22:3 "Then Satan entered Judas Called Iscariot, one of the twelve"—The leaders of Israel were in a state of dilemma. They hated Jesus and they also feared the people. Judas walking up to deliver Jesus to them was an opportunity. The Bible recorded that Satan entered into Judas. Judas is someone who had walked with Jesus, he has preached the gospel, healed the sick and even cast out demon from people. It is written in James 4:3 that; "therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Assuming he had submitted himself to the leadership of Christ and is filled with the Holy Spirit, there is no way the devil can use him. "You are of God, little children, I have overcome them, because He who is in you, is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Judas' love for money and greed opened the door for Satan to have him. "This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. (John 12:6).Judas found himself under the influence of Satan who compels and controls him.

Luke 22:4 "And Judas went to the Chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and Discussed with them how he might betray Jesus"—Judas therefore went down to the chief priests to discuss with them on how he would betray Jesus. These steps were pointer to the fact that sin is premeditated and as such, man should recognize the voice of the devil and desist from coming sin.

Luke 22:5-6 "And they were delighted and agreed to give him money"—The leaders of Israel were glad, at least if they captured Christ and people raise questions, they can easily say it was Judas that brought the idea. It was a welcome idea on their part and on the part of Judas, he wants to get enriched. In the book of Matthew 26:15, Judas said "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him to you? And he was given thirty pieces of silver." Lack of contention led Judas to betray Jesus despite the fact that he was their treasurer.

He sought for the opportunity to betray Christ. When Judas betrayed Christ, it was in accordance with the plan of God. It was the will of Christ to die on the day of Passover, Jesus was handed over with God's foreknowledge. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said "Him being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:23).

It wasn't the leaders of the Israel or Judas that killed Jesus, it was God Himself who sent Him to die for mankind. Jesus said, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me" (John 6:38). He also said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work." (John 4:34).

From the foregoing, it is evident that Judas had the ability to rebuke the devil, someone would have still betrayed Jesus, but it might not necessarily be him.

Bribery in Nigeria

The issue of bribery is a fundamental problem that has continued to permeate all nooks and crannies of human society. Today, bribery and corruption captures all headlines as people are becoming aware of its existence. Indeed, bribery and corruption is one of the problems of the contemporary society which isn't limited to any country. Bribery distorts governmental policies which may lead to the misallocation of resources that can harm the society as well as affect the poor.

There are various aspects of bribery and corruption which includes fraudulent acquisition of property and receipts, using one's office for gratification, fraudulent bribery transactions, accepting gratifications and so on. Many factors contribute to the level of poverty in the country which includes the issue of bribery.

There are various vocabularies which can be used to describe the bribery, they are corruption and extortion. The term corruption will be used interchangeably with the concept of bribery in the cause of this work. Corruption is a socio-political, economic and moral malaise that is usually holistically permeates all the nerves of any society.

Corruption is when a state official steals from the public institution in which he/she is employed, betrayal of trust, unfair advantages, financial malpractice, *egunje*, dash, gratification, brown envelopes, tips, emoluments, greasing, softening the ground, inducements, sub-payments, side-payments, irregular payments, payment under the table, undocumented extra payments, facilitation payments, mobilization fees, routine governmental action, revised estimates, padded contracts, over (under) invoicing, cash commissions, kickbacks, payoffs, covert exchanges, shady deals, cover-ups, collusion, 10% rule (bribe surcharge), 50% rule (sharing bribe within the hierarchy), let's keep our secret, highly classified transactions, customary gift-sharing, tribute culture, nepotism (a special form of favoritism in which an officeholders prefers his/her kinfolk and family members. Corruption is seen as a daunting obstacle to sustainable development, a constraint on education, health care and poverty alleviation and a great impediment to the millennium development goal of reducing by half the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.

The C.B.N divided corruption into seven distinct types which are autogenic, defensive, extortive, invective, nepotistic, supportive and transactive:

- Autogenic corruption involves one person and it is usually self-generating. For instance, a person can influence a company's transaction and add to the usual/normal budget for his/her personal preference. Defensive corruption involves situation whereby a person is need of a service and therefore bribes his way through for his personal interest in other to avoid an unpleasant interest in other to avoid an unpleasant consequence. For instance, a person can bribe his way through for a university admission.
- Extortive corruption involves a person demanding for compensation in exchange for services rendered. Invectives corruption involves a situation whereby services are rendered in anticipation of futuristic gains. For instance, a person making or giving out help in other to increase his chances of getting the gain later on. Nepostic corruption refers to the preferential treatments of employing friends and families which in turn violates the recruitment guideline.
- Supportive corruption involves actions to protect or strengthen the existing corrupt practices, it doesn't necessarily involve monetary gains. Finally, transactive corruption refers to situations where the two parties are willingly ready to participate in the corrupt practices. Despite the efforts made by the Nigerian government, Nigerians still remain entangled in corruption, crime and poverty.

The legal instruments used to fight corruption in Nigeria include the criminal code, code of conduct Bureau, the recovery of public property Act of 1984 and the newly formed commission (the EFCC and the ICPC). Prior to 1966, the criminal code was the primary source of law dealing with corruption in Nigeria.

There are various causes underlining the issue of bribery and corruption in Nigeria, they include;

Poverty

The class distinction in the society stands as a foundation for bribery and corruption to grow and expand. Class distinction does not give room for easy circulation of wealth and therefore, some particular set of citizens tends to suffer from the crisis. Poverty also includes low civil service salaries and poor working conditions with little or no rewards. Once this issue is left unaddressed, the rate of bribery will increase as these citizens would begin to source for other methods of survival.

Poor governance

The fact that the government is getting worse by the day isn't a new trend. The government themselves, increase the chances of bribery and corruption in the society as most of the government officials are using their position of power in the embezzlement and diversion of public funds for their personal use

Mismanaging government works and budget procedures

This gives room for government officials to mismanage the public funds as well as to continuous mishandling of public allocations.

Lack of transparency, inadequate strategic vision and weak monitoring system

The society no longer fears the law enforcement agencies because of the level of corruption in the government, which has failed to be accountable for any decision they make. The intended democracy of the people, by the people and of the people has been futile.

Greed

This is also a major cause of corruption which does not only apply to government officials but also to the general public. The dissatisfaction of man to want more at the detriment of others.

Tribalism

This is one of the most fundamental cause of corruption in Nigeria, and a leading cause of tribalism, nepotism and favoritism whereby, a particular individual will choose to give preference to someone from his ethnic group, family or more particularly friends at the detriment of those qualified. This has often stands as a major cause of bribery and corruption in the Nigerian society.

Sudden disappearance of good moral and ethical values

Nwaobi (2002), stated that Nigeria must be one of the very few countries in the world where a man's source of wealth is of no concern to his neighbors, the public or the government. There is no law regulating individual's wealth as well as income, as such, it becomes difficult for those perpetrating corrupt practices to be apprehended. For instance, the issue of internet fraudsters popularly known as the 'YahooYahoo' is a typical example of the non-checkmating policy in the country. People just wake up with billons in their accounts, with little or no concern as to where the money is coming from.

Effects of Bribery in Nigeria

The effects of bribery in Nigeria are numerous, as this phenomenon has deepened its root in the fabric of Nigerian society. They include:

- **Diverting public expenditure**—Such expenditures are expected to be used to care for the poor. According to Audu (2008), Corruption is averred, it can bring about skewing of the composition of public expenditure from social services that are important to the poor.
- **Extreme reduction in the quality of goods and services made available to the public**—Most companies reduce the level of resources that should be used and water down their budgets leaving behind fake or inferior outcomes. Similarly, great number of contractors also bribe their way through getting a contract. Once the contract has been awarded,

the funds undergo the process of mismanagement leaving the job with inferior or insufficient materials which will be at the detriment of the public interest. For instance, a contractor who is awarded a contract of constructing a bridge, after bribing and paying for irrelevant bills which might have aided the contract, is caught up with the dilemma of either making profit or losing his capital. As a result the bridge might not be built according to the normal standard which will in turn put the public at the risk of losing their lives and properties in case anything happens to the bridge.

- **Social, economic and political inequality**—According to Osoba (2006), it is an anti-social behavior conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermine the authorities to improve the living conditions of the people. For instance, a country with bad and corrupt governance will pay little or no regard to people's fundamental human rights as well as the place of constitution in the affairs of its citizens. The enforcers of the law become the perpetrators of the crimes. Citizens become scared of reporting criminal cases as various cases had been turned over by the prosecutors.
- **Lack of effective management of human and material resources**—Most Nigerians leave the country for greener pastures, where their workability and experiences would be appreciated leaving the country to gradually get worse. Similarly, corruption has impacted negatively on national economic growth having reduced drastically the level at which financiers invest in the country.

Giving of Bribes

This has drastically reduced the expected fees, dues, taxes, public utility services like water and electricity without having to make its full payment into the government revenues, thus resulting in serious loss on the part of government. It may read thus: Corruption inflates expenditure through secretive, high-cost projects masked as national priorities, often funded by illicit deals.

Moral Lessons for Nigerian Christians

Judas Iscariot was not born again all along. He followed Jesus only because of what he stands to gain. So many people are in churches today because of the financial gains and connections leaving behind their primary assignment which is to communion with God. Most Christians have allowed the norm, culture and traditions of the world to blind their eyes against the right thing to do despite all the admonitions from their pastors and ministers.

Another moral lesson is by not allowing the material things of the world to consume the hearts of people. Most Christians finds themselves at various governmental sectors and they have the opportunity of rewriting the wrong of others, they still chose to continue in the path of Judas Iscariot as they persistently follow the path of bribery and corruption.

Also, it is always good to crucify the works of the flesh on a daily basis. As Christians, the Bible has been given to constantly serve as a reminder that heaven is the destination. Greed is a result of lack of commitment, it flows from the heart (Rom 8:12-14). According to the Christian faith, lack of contention could be eradicated by daily communion with God.

One of the fundamental lessons from Luke 22:1-6 is an admonition for the Christian leaders. Pastors and all ministers should be on the watch out for the type of followers they have. Many profess to be Christians but they are devil incarnate who only comes in to the church to steal and destroy. They are an avenue for Satan to strike against believers and the Church at large.

Christians today should take into consideration the story of Judas and how it correlates with the day-to-day affairs in the contemporary society. Although, many Ministers are constantly trying their best in ensuring that Christians adhere to the commandments set out for them in the Bible, some will still end up like Judas who followed Christ all through his ministry on earth and at the end of the day still served as an instrument of betrayal. The issue of bribery, corruption and betray are not alien to the Christians Faith and as such various measures and guidelines have been laid down for the Christians to follow. Non-adherence to these guidelines might lead to the greater consequences which might include the loss of eternal life of bliss.

Conclusion

It is evident that the concept of bribery is not new to the human society, it even has its basis in the Biblical texts. Christians have been admonished to learn from the story of Judas in other to have a hitch-free Christian journey. The illustrations of the story of Judas Iscariot which depicts an act of bribery and betrayal is often preached to navigate and model the lives of all Christians. It is no longer news that bribery has eaten deep into the Nigerian economy as well as affected every works of life including the religious sector. Undoubtedly, the pastors and ministers have often times admonished their congregants to live a life free from sin but some still fall into temptation just like Judas Iscariot. The paper therefore majorly recommends and admonished Christians to be persistently committed to the Christian race as the devil is eagerly ready to consume and destroy anyone who is disposed to his tactics.

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