

CPYU 3(D) REVIEW

Song/Video: "Judas" - Lady Gaga

By Walt Mueller

Background/summary: This song is the second single release from Lady Gaga's second studio album, *Born This Way* (2011). In typical Lady Gaga fashion, a pre-release publicity blitz ensured anticipation and a splashy debut when the song was released on April 15, 2011, and then again when the video premiered three weeks later on May 5. Because she's no stranger to controversy, this song's lyrical and visual references fostered backlash before, during, and after its release.

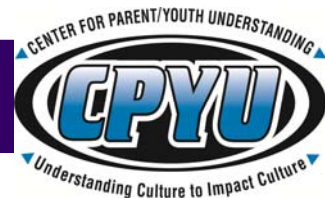
Discover: What is the message/worldview?:

- As with all Lady Gaga songs, *Judas* is a catchy dance-number that functions on a number of levels. Biblical imagery is prevalent in the video as Lady Gaga incorporates elements of the story of the night before Jesus' death. She writes herself into the story, playing Mary Magdalene riding with Jesus and his gang of motorcyclists (the disciples) into Jerusalem. Even though she's riding with Jesus, her attention keeps focusing on Judas.
- The song and video portray Lady Gaga's deep struggle as she goes back and forth in her allegiance from Jesus to Judas. She sings at the song's beginning, "I'm in love with Judas." The lyrics tell us that she continues to forgive this man (a former lover?) even though he lies to her and betrays her: "I'll wash his feet with my hair if he needs/Forgive him when his tongue lies through his brain/Even after three times he betrays me." Gaga has said that at one level, this song is about falling in love with the wrong man.
- The struggle continues as the cast arrives at and dances in the "Jerusalem" biker bar known as the "Electric Chapel." Lady Gaga vacillates between Jesus – who Judas eventually betrays – and Judas, singing "I'm just a Holy fool, oh baby he's so cruel/But I'm still in love with Judas, baby." As she points to Peter she confesses that "I've learned love is like a brick – you can build a house." Or - she sings as she points to herself - love can "sink a dead body." Still, Jesus loves Lady Gaga by gently pushing Judas away from her.
- At a deeper level, the song portrays Lady Gaga's constant struggle to follow and do what is good in the midst of a tempting and evil world. She sings to Jesus, "I wanna love you/But something's pulling me away from you/Jesus is my virtue/And Judas is the demon I cling to." She says of the song, "It's about constantly walking towards the light in my life, but always clutching onto the light while peering towards the devil in the back. . . I sing about what a holy fool I am. . . I'm still in love with Judas. . . . I still go back again to those evil things."
- Lady Gaga reveals her sense of herself in the middle of the song as she sings, "In the most biblical sense I am beyond repentance," a conclusion she's driven to as she defines herself as a "fame hooker" and "prostitute wench" who "vomits her mind." She goes on to sing that in the end she doesn't want to redeem herself from these things as she is "in a cultural sense" speaking "in future tense." If people don't like it, they should, she sings, "wear an ear condom."
- The video ends with a combination of biblical imagery that further depicts the struggle she experiences, including Lady Gaga being washed over by a wave, Lady Gaga washing the feet of Jesus and Judas, and her being stoned by the crowd.



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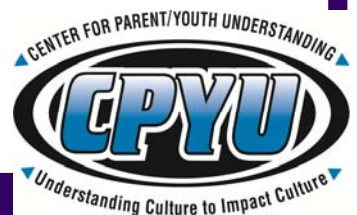
Discern: How does it stand in light of the biblical message/worldview?

- We live in a broken world. Everything that God made and declared “good” has been polluted and broken by sin (Genesis 3). Consequently, good and evil co-exist in our world as a battle rages on everywhere around us and within us between the Kingdom of God and those things that glorify and serve the world, the flesh and the devil. But thanks be to God, the story doesn’t end there. God put a redemptive plan in place that reaches its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The song portrays elements of this reality in straightforward ways, both lyrically and visually.
- Throughout the Gospels, Jesus calls His disciples in all times and all places to “come and follow me.” One of those followers, the Apostle Paul, speaks clearly about the struggle Christ’s followers have with sin in the “now but not yet” Kingdom of God, a struggle that will not end until all things are made new when the fullness of the Kingdom of God is ushered in by Jesus (Revelation 21&22). Until then, we will, like Paul, struggle with sin as we do those things that we don’t want to do (Romans 7).
- Lady Gaga has said that she believes that “it’s the darkness in your life that ultimately shines and illuminates the greater light that you have upon you.” While Lady Gaga is not orthodox in her beliefs, she does grasp the fact that having a deep doctrine of sin and a growing awareness of darkness in your own life is necessary to understanding the depth of God’s mercy and grace in Jesus Christ. The deeper the follower of Jesus goes in their understanding of either, facilitates a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the other. The good news is that no person is beyond redemption.

Decide: What do I do with it?

- Because of her consistent edginess, Lady Gaga has been branded (and rightly so) as controversial. One result is that anything she does is pigeon-holed long *before* it is released. In this case, “Judas” was labeled as blasphemous and sacrilegious by many. In reality, the song captures several biblical truths and realities that can be celebrated and affirmed. This serves to remind us to *always* listen, watch, or read *before* offering criticism.
- “Judas” is a perfect song to dissect and discuss with your youth group. On one level, it affords kids an opportunity to think critically and Christianly about a controversial artist and her messages. Students should be challenged to view the video, then look for elements that can be celebrated and affirmed from a biblical perspective, and elements that should be challenged and corrected according to God’s order and design. Note: parents should *always* be consulted before discussing an artist who is controversial.
- Because Lady Gaga has offered a compelling peek into the ongoing battle between good and evil and the struggles we face with our sinful natures, youth workers and parents should use this song to illustrate and teach on this reality. In today’s postmodern world, we see less and less of a willingness to admit or struggle with the doctrine of sin. We know that everything is not permissible. We know that ethics are not self-defined. Use “Judas” as a prompt for deep discussion and Bible study on the doctrines of sin and redemption, and the ongoing struggle we face with our sin natures.

Dr. Walt Mueller is the president of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding.



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