

Dialogue

Emma Bryant (Judas), Emmie Evans (Joseph), Hope Barnhart (Jebediah)

**While Joseph, Judas and Jebediah are watching TV, a news alert appears announcing that Steve Johnson, the evil axe murderer who killed 45 people, has been sentenced to death.*

Joseph- That's a shame! The death penalty should have been abolished a long time ago. It's just not right.

Judas- Why? He deserves what he has coming to him.

Joseph- How dare you say something so horrible? No one should be treated that way, even an evil axe murderer.

Jebediah- Here we go...

Judas- You're joking right?

Joseph- Don't you start with me Judas. We are all created in the eyes of God. Therefore, Steve himself is an image of God and should be respected as such. ¹ The same can be said for anyone else who has been sentenced to death.

Jebediah- You're not actually saying that Steve, the murderer, is a reflection of God himself right?

Judas- Yeah whatever happened to "Thou shalt not kill?"²

Joseph- My point exactly! We can't just kill people, because they have broken the law.

¹ Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*

² Exodus 20:13

Judas- First of all, people sentenced to death don't just "break the law." They commit the worst crimes in our society. Murder, rape, even treason! Second of all, Steve is just another example of the weak falling short.

Joseph- Really? I would argue that he was too powerful. I mean he killed like 45 people right?

Judas- That makes him even more weak. I mean he couldn't even resist the urge to kill someone. A living, breathing person. And beyond that, he was dumb enough to get caught.

Jebediah- Yeah killing people isn't exactly a part of human nature and if we kill him as punishment, doesn't that make us weak too?

Judas- Exactly. The death penalty is just a way for the powerful to stay in power over the weak, as it should be.³ You're just mad, Joseph, because you are not a member of that club.

Joseph- Oh shut up! Whether I'm in "the club" or not, those in power don't have the right to treat people like objects. Let alone objects that can be thrown away when they stray from the path.

Judas- But what's the path? Who determines what straying from the path even looks like?

Jebediah- There is no set path! Everyone can decide who they want to be or what they want to do in their life.

Joseph- That's besides the point. Look, I am not saying that Steve, or anyone else sentenced to death, is a good person. I'm just saying that it's not up to us to deem who has the right to live and who doesn't.

Jebediah- I agree, no one is perfect. People are always growing and becoming better versions of themselves⁴.

³ Nietzsche, *Nietzsche I PDF*

⁴ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

Judas- Okay so what do you suggest then? Can they just eat, sleep, and be merry in jail for the rest of their lives?

Joseph- Maybe for the rest of their human lives, but they will all meet their judgement in the eyes of God one day.

Jebediah- And who are we to say that he doesn't get another chance at redemption? God decides if our sins will be forgiven or not.

Judas- Cut the magical, "otherworldly" crap! If you want them to be brought to justice, then it has to happen here. In this world. On Earth. They all deserve to suffer!⁵

Jebediah- People can be brought to justice in other ways than death. A human life should be treasured and valued and should not be used for punishment.

Joseph- I agree. Who are we to play God? Where do we draw the line? Our role is to keep our community safe and give the disturbed an opportunity to repent for what they've done.

Judas- I would argue that killing those weak links has kept our communities safe and will continue to do so. Don't be arrogant and think that if Steve lives, he will repent. Steve will remain the weak and disturbed individual that he is.⁶

Jebediah- People are always changing. You aren't the same guy you used to be, Steve could change and become a better man.⁷

Judas- Oh how lovely it would be to see the world through the eyes of Jebediah!

Jebediah- It's better than being pessimistic all the time.

Joseph- Stop bickering like children and listen! We are all made in the image of God. Therefore, we are ALL capable of grace.⁸

⁵ Nietzsche, *Nietzsche II PDF*

⁶ Nietzsche, *Nietzsche I PDF*

⁷ Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*

⁸ Maritain, *The Person and Common Good*

Judas- What if they don't believe in God? Then what's the argument?

Jebediah- They don't have to believe in God for it to be true. It's Eternal Law. It just is. The same way we are who we are.

Joseph- It doesn't keep the community any more safe by killing them than if they remained in jail for the rest of their lives, behind locked cell doors.

Jebediah- Does that even constitute as living though? Being kept in a 4x4 cell for the rest of your life? Isn't death the better option instead of getting your basic human rights taken from you?

Judas- I'd say so.

Joseph- Well let me ask you this then. Are we really sentencing people to death in the name of justice? Or is it just out of vengeance?

Judas- Whether it's out of justice or vengeance, it's what we do to maintain order and protect the common good. That's a little thing I like to call Natural Law!⁹

Joseph- It can't be called the "common good" unless it's truly good for everyone though.

Jebediah- I agree.

Judas- But-

Joseph- I know. I know Judas! You don't believe they deserve to be included in the common good, but even if I accept that, I don't believe that we can qualify the death penalty as a common good because it wasn't created with moral goodness in mind.¹⁰ Killing is not morally right in any capacity.

Judas- We know... you said that already.

⁹ Nietzsche, *Nietzsche I PDF*

¹⁰ Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, "Chapter 4"

Jebediah- Everyone has to make choices good or bad. Steve made a bad choice but that does not mean he should be killed for it. ¹¹ Life isn't life without risk.

Joseph- I'm with you on that...mostly. I mean let's keep it in perspective here though. A risk is choosing to go skydiving instead of snorkeling, not killing 45 different people for fun.

Jebediah- I get that, I didn't say Steve made good choices. Not everyone makes good choices, we all know I make some pretty poor ones.

Judas- Okay, okay. I can give you that. At least he's no longer like you Joseph, a slave to your burdensome Christian morality.¹²

Joseph- How dare you? In my own house? Get out!

Jebediah- Yeah why don't we take a minute to collect ourselves, maybe get some food because I think Judas is getting a little hangry?

Judas- Ok whatever. [walks out of room]

Joseph- I hate when he gets like this. [in mocking tone] Little baby Judas needs a snack?
[continues to grumble in frustration]

Jebediah- Don't antagonize him. He only gets angrier.

Judas- You know I'm standing right here and can hear you right?

Five minutes later, Jebediah, Joseph, and Judas have resumed watching tv in silence.

Joseph- Jeez! Got pretty heated there for a bit.

Judas- That tends to happen with us.

Jebediah- Yeah. Y'all are too much sometimes. I should really consider getting new friends
[laughs]

¹¹ Kierkegaard, pg 252-258

¹² Nietzsche, *Nietzsche II PDF*

Joseph- I know we'll never agree on religion and things like that, but can I at least try to apply to logic for a second?

Judas- Be my guest!

Jebediah- You can try but I don't think he will listen.

Joseph- 70% of countries have already abolished the death penalty in some capacity.¹³ If the United States is supposed to be a leader in innovation and modernity, then how come we still use it as a form of maximum punishment?

Jebediah- I don't get it either, death doesn't seem like a punishment but more of an out.

Judas- What do you mean?

Jebediah- Death does not give someone the opportunity to see and understand what they did wrong. When they are in prison they have time to reflect on the crime they committed and ask God for forgiveness.

Judas- Okay but considering the murderer consciously made the decision to kill, wouldn't you agree that they have forfeited their freedom? Their right to live?

Jebediah- According to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to life from the moment they are born.¹⁴

Judas- Yes... but they forfeited that right. Ever heard of eye for an eye?

Joseph- This isn't Mesopotamia Judas!

Jebediah- Don't you watch TV? Eye for an eye never works out and they both go to prison!

Judas- Okay. But consider this. Do you like to pay taxes?

Joseph- I mean not particularly, but I get why it's necessary..? Where are you going with this?

¹³ Death Penalty Information Center, 2021

¹⁴ UN Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

Judas- Okay so what if I told you, your hard-earned tax money is paying for these criminals to receive three meals a day, medical care, and a cozy place to sleep at night.

Jebediah- Cozy? You think a 4x4 prison cell would be cozy?

Judas- Jebediah that is not the point I'm trying to make here. We waste millions of dollars per year on keeping murderers, who have killed innocent, contributing members of our communities, alive.

Jebediah- It has been found that it costs more to have someone on death row than it does for them to be given a life sentence. In Maryland, for example, a death penalty case costs 3 times more than a non-death penalty case.¹⁵

Judas- Hmm didn't know that. However...wait- where's Joseph?

Joseph- [entering the room] I'm here! I figured y'all would be arguing for a bit, so I made myself a cup of coffee. What'd I miss?

Jebediah- What'd you miss?? I was finally beating Judas in an argument!

Judas- Woah there, you made some good points but I wouldn't say you were beating me.

Joseph- Gotcha. You know, while I was getting my coffee, I was thinking about something I read the other day. [pauses to sip coffee]

Jebediah- Well are you going to tell us what it was?

Joseph- It was about universal harmony and asked the question of whether it was possible to achieve real world peace. [pauses to sip more coffee]

Judas- Okay?

Jebediah- I don't understand how this correlates.

Joseph- Always in such a rush, aren't we? As I was saying, before I was so rudely interrupted [pointedly looks at Judas], humans shouldn't be treated as expendable. The death penalty is the

¹⁵ Urban Institute, 2008

perfect example of treating humans as expendable. If we continue to kill people for justice's sake, then universal harmony could never be reached no matter how hard we try.

Jebediah- So you're saying that if we keep killing people for killing people then we will never reach universal harmony?

Joseph- Yep. I know it's a bit idealist, but a good point to consider nonetheless.

Judas- You know, a bit too optimistic for me, but I can see where you're coming from. Do you guys think we are on a predetermined path?

Joseph- What? The atheist wants to talk about God? Never thought I'd see the day. Welcome brother.

Judas- [sarcastically] Ha. Ha. Very funny. No I didn't necessarily mean God but any force outside of ourselves, dictating our actions.

Jebediah- I think we are predetermined to certain options, but I don't think we are on a predetermined path. Everyone has the freedom to make choices based on their ideals and opinions.

Judas- No I mean deeper than that. For example, do our ideals and beliefs stem from something outside of ourselves? Like a universal order....

Joseph- I think there's a natural balance to things. You know? Like, every action has a reaction. With God especially, everything happens for a reason.

Jebediah- That's true. God sees everything, all of eternity, all at the same time. He can see the whole picture.

Joseph- Exactly, which is why I do think to some degree we are predetermined. Why do you ask Judas?

Judas- Because if you believe that, then God predetermined that Steve would be a murderer. In that case, it was predetermined that he would also die by the death penalty. Under your belief Joseph, then it's God's plan and we should accept that.

Jebediah- Well, I think that free will is still a factor, even on a predetermined path.

Joseph- What does that even mean? Isn't that contradictory?

Judas- That doesn't make sense Jebediah.

Jebediah- Yes it does if you think about it! Free will still exists. We can make our own choices and do as we please, as long as it isn't impeded. For example, I don't think God planned for Steve to be a murderer. Through a series of his own choices, that's what Steve became. Once he made that choice, the death penalty might be the only end for him.¹⁶

Joseph- Oh, so now you're for the death penalty?

Jebediah- Not necessarily. I'm just saying under that logic, it makes sense to me.

Joseph- In that case, if we're all offering up theoretical possibilities, then it's my turn. What if it wasn't all Steve's fault that he chose to kill people. What if it's his community that failed him?

Judas- Well Joseph, unless his community put the axe in his hand, I can't see how they played a role in this!

Joseph- Don't be so literal. I don't know his background or family history, but we can't deny that those things definitely impact one's life. Think about it! From the second we're born, we're learning from those around us. What if he grew up in a poor environment where violence was the only way people dealt with things? At a young age, that can stick with you. Repeat that thousands of times throughout his life and it's not that far fetched that he becomes a murderer.

¹⁶ McKenna, Michael and D. Justin Coates, "Compatibilism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Judas- I don't think it's fair to blame others for one's actions, let alone an entire community. Like Jebediah has been saying this whole time, a person is responsible for their own actions. Period.

Joseph- Who knows what he could have been though if he had been in a different community? An individual can't achieve their fullest potential if the community doesn't provide that person with the development they need to be successful.¹⁷

Judas- I guess I get so focused on the individual sometimes that I don't consider how outside factors affect us. Like, I know my parents messed me up a bit [chuckles] and I'm sure you guys could say the same.

Joseph- That's what I mean! Not for you though Judas, you were doomed from the get go.

Judas- Well at least I have my humor!

Jebediah- That only *some* find to be funny.

Judas- HEY! Why did everyone start attacking me!

Joseph- We don't need a reason. It's just too easy sometimes! Anyways, who would have thought that you guys coming over to drink some coffee and watch reruns of Jeopardy would turn into such a debacle, huh?

Jebediah- It's been happening for over thirty years, don't see why we would stop now.

Judas- Dare I bring up the *Wheel of Fortune* fiasco of '09?

Joseph- Don't you dare, Judas! You promised. It's settled.

Jebediah- I SWEAR I CALLED-

Joseph- It's been settled.

Judas- Anyone up for some *Jeopardy*?

¹⁷ Maritain, "Chapter 4" in *The Person and the Common Good*,

Joseph- Hopefully there aren't any more breaking news alerts. Am I right?

Jebediah- I don't think we'd make it if there were. Turn it on!

Judas- Don't tell me what to do. [moves to turn on TV]

Jebediah- That's what I thought.