



"Cross Connection"

Radio Ministry of Hope Wesleyan Church and Wells of Salvation Ministries
Ultimate Oldies Radio – FM 97.7 and 101.5, Huber Heights, Ohio



Series: Christian Messages In Secular Music

01/06/08

Program 14 – “**Superstar**” © 1970 Music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, Lyrics by Tim Rice

From the heart of the Jesus Movement emerged this 1970 hit song – the flagship number from the rock opera, “Jesus Christ, Superstar”. The album – which actually preceded the first stage production by a year -- focuses primarily on the interaction and conflict between Judas Iscariot and Jesus during the last week of Jesus’ life. It has been said that the opera portrays Judas as “...a conflicted, tragic figure who is not satisfied with what he views as Jesus’ lack of planning, and alarmed by his relatively recent claims of his divinity”. “Jesus Christ, Superstar” became a phenomenon, remaining popular through the 1970s, with a revival of interest beginning in the 1990s. On the original album...

- Jesus’ part sung by Ian Gillan – later lead singer for Deep Purple and Black Sabbath
- Judas’ part (as in the song “Superstar”) sung by Murray Head
- Lyrics often have Biblical characters using terms and concepts from 20th century
- The future Gary Glitter had a one-liner as a priest
- The hit "I Don't Know How to Love Him", was sung by Yvonne Elliman as Mary Magdalene pondering her relationship with Jesus. It reached #28 on the US charts, and became an even bigger hit by Helen Reddy in 1971

Controversy:

- Some Christian groups condemned the Broadway show and subsequent productions:
 - Lyricist quote: "The idea of the whole opera is to have Christ seen through the eyes of Judas, and Christ as a man, not as a God."
 - Omission of the resurrection was considered sacrilegious
 - Disliked Judas’ character as too sympathetic; as too critical of Jesus
- Some Jews also complained:
 - Alleged it bolstered claim that the Jews are responsible for Jesus’ death
 - Said it portrayed most villains as Jewish (Caiaphas and the other priests, Herod) and showed the crowd in Jerusalem clamoring for the crucifixion
- Many religious groups protested outside theater during first Broadway production

Other musicals and songs from Andrew Lloyd Webber include “Evita”, featuring “Don’t Cry For Me Argentina” and “Memory”, the popular theme song from “Cats”.

[Source for above background information: Wikipedia]

Now, let’s consider the lyrics of “Superstar” in light of what we do or do not know from the Scriptures. First, note that the song’s construction intermingles comments and questions of the character Judas Iscariot toward Jesus, with questions from a choir...

VOICE OF JUDAS

Every time I look at you I don't understand
Why you let the things you did get so out of hand.
You'd have managed better if you'd had it planned.
Why'd you choose such a backward time in such a strange land?
If you'd come today you could have reached a whole nation.
Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication.
Don't you get me wrong.
I only want to know.

- Purely fiction / speculation
- Apparent ignorance or disregard of God's perfect plan for salvation

- Jesus not only didn't have mass communication, the Jewish people expected the Messiah to come as an exalted King – not as a carpenter's son

CHOIR

Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ,
Who are you? What have you sacrificed?
Jesus Christ Superstar,
Do you think you're what they say you are?

- Critical question to every one of us!
- *Jesus... was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" – Matthew 16:13-15, NASV*

VOICE OF JUDAS

Tell me what you think about your friends at the top.
Who'd you think besides yourself's the pick of the crop?
Buddha, was he where it's at? Is he where you are?
Could Mohammed move a mountain, or was that just PR?
Did you mean to die like that? Was that a mistake, or
Did you know your messy death would be a record breaker?
Don't you get me wrong.
I only want to know.

- Mohammed lived 570-632 A.D.
- Buddha lived 4th or 5th century B.C.
- Both died; Jesus died, but lives!
- Jesus said, "...I am the way, the truth and the life..." – John 14:6

CHOIR -- (repeats refrain several times)

What do we really know of Judas Iscariot?

Side notes:

- Jesus had a brother named Judas (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55); you don't hear that name today!
- A Coptic "Gospel of Judas" manuscript was found in Egypt in the 1970s after "Superstar" was written

- He was one of the chosen 12 apostles who preached the good news, and confirmed Christ's message with signs and wonders (Mark 3:13-15; Luke 9:1-6, 10)
- He was a thief -- in charge of disciples' money and took it for personal use (John 12:6)
- Was remorseful for betraying Jesus ("innocent blood"), admitting to sin (Matthew 27:3)
- Tried to return the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests (Matthew 27:3-5)
- Died a terrible death – described as hanging self (Matthew 27:5) and falling headlong – disemboweling himself (Acts 1:18)
- Jesus referred to him as a devil (John 6:70)
- "...But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." – Mark 14:21b
- "While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled." – John 17:12

Final thoughts...

If nothing else, "Superstar" may have piqued the interest of non-believers to study the canonical Bible and learn the truth about Jesus. Thank God for His everlasting Word!