

MBC - 10/28/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
"The Suicide of Judas"
Matthew 27:1-10

Jesus has appeared before Annas, Caiaphas, and now He appears before the gathered Sanhedrin the next morning. According to Jewish Law, trials couldn't be held at night, so for the sake of appearance, they convened this third phony council to officially approve Jesus' execution—

- Matthew 27:1-10 ¹When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. ²And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor. ³Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." ⁵And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. ⁶But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." ⁷So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. ⁸Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

Right in the middle of this story of Jesus' arrest and the 6 trials leading to His crucifixion, Matthew stops to insert two vignettes of Peter - and Judas. He wants to compare and contrast what these men did: Peter denied Jesus 3 times. Judas betrayed our Lord with a kiss. But he also wants to compare how they *reacted* to what they did. We sympathize with Peter because we all see ourselves in him. But—

How should we feel about Judas?

A couple years ago, the Bishop in Leeds, England preached a sermon and said that "he felt a bit sorry for Judas." I read some commentators who said that we shouldn't judge Judas. He was tricked by the Jewish leaders into doing what he did. He wasn't really a bad man, just misguided. He just made a wrong choice. And several commentators said they were certain that Jesus forgave Judas.

Which proves that you can be an intelligent, educated Bible scholar - and be really stupid. And I say that because if these people would just read the Bible they would see how Judas is portrayed—

- John 6:70 ⁷⁰Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil."

Jn13:2 says that Satan himself put it into Judas' heart to betray Jesus, and v.27 says that Satan actually entered Judas.

- 17:12 ¹²While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. (Son of destruction, or son of damnation - if hell has a poster boy, it's Judas.)

- In Acts 1:25 Peter is explaining why Judas needs to be replaced by another Apostle. He says ²⁵to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to *his own place*.” His own place is hell.

And if you still have any doubts about what Jesus thought of Judas or where he is now, listen to Jesus again—

- Mark 14:21 ²¹For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe (damnation) to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”

Better, if Judas had never been born! Why? Because *non-existence* would be better than what he is suffering right now in hell, and that’s exactly where Judas is, where he has been for 2,000 years, and where he will be forever.

- And think about this: There are multitudes of people in hell right now, people who have lived and died still in their sins. But the only person, *the only person we know, according to Scripture*, who is in hell, right now - is Judas Iscariot.

And that makes my blood run cold. I’ll tell you how we should feel about Judas. In a word, we should *tremble*. We don’t need to feel sorry for him, or pity him, and we don’t even need to hate him. But we should tremble to think of a man whom our merciful, compassionate Lord said, *“It would have been better for that man if he had never even existed.”*

The Holy Spirit put this passage in our Bibles so that we would avoid Judas’ fate. So let’s get started.

I. Bound and delivered to the Romans. vv.1-2

These first two verses sum up ch.27: The religious leaders of Israel will deliver Jesus to the Romans to be put to death—

- ¹When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. ²And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

Israel lost the power to execute in A.D. 6 when it became a province of Rome. John tells us in Jn.18:31 that the Jewish leaders even told Pilate: *“It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.”* And of course, their charge against Him - *blasphemy* - would have been a joke to the Romans. They couldn’t care less about a Jewish blasphemy law, but these leaders wanted Jesus dead, by hook or by crook, so they sent Him to Pilate, the local Roman governor to get *him* to put Jesus to death. And they will come up with a charge that will force Pilate to execute Jesus.

- But there’s another reason why they wanted the Romans to murder Jesus: By their own law, the Jews would have stoned Jesus to death for blasphemy, but they wanted Him murdered the Roman way - *crucified* - why? Now get this: They wanted Jesus humiliated and dis-credited in the eyes of the people, and they all knew Dt.21.23, *“Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”*

They wanted to show the people: “See your great spiritual leader now? This prophet from Nazareth hanging on a tree? Look at His end. This is what God thinks of this Jesus! He is accursed of God!”

- But as we've seen over and over, they were fulfilling the Scriptures in every detail. There is no other form of death that would have fulfilled all the prophecies of Jesus' death, including His own predictions - only crucifixion.

So Jesus was bound and delivered over to Pilate - who is clueless that he too will be an instrument in God's sovereign hands to bring about the death of Jesus that will bring salvation to multitudes! Matthew uses that word "delivered" 14 times in his passion account - given up, given over - but we have to keep in mind that it's ultimately God the Father who is giving His Son over to be crucified.

- And there's something else here: it's no accident that the Scriptures tell us that Jesus was *bound* and delivered over to Annas, that Annas sent Jesus *bound* to Caiaphas, and now the Sanhedrin sends Jesus *bound* to Pilate—

The Jewish leaders wanted their people to see Jesus as a common criminal, a threat to their peace and order. He has to be tied up and restrained - such a violent Man! But once again, they are fulfilling the Scriptures: this was pictured 2,000 years earlier when Abraham took his only son, Isaac—

- Genesis 22:9 and *bound* Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

God spared Abraham's only Son and provided a ram for the sacrifice instead - and all of this prefigured God *binding* His only Son to the wood of the cross to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of His people.

II. Judas' remorse and suicide. vv.3-5

- Matthew 27:3-5 ³Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned . . .

Stop there. Matthew says, Judas *saw* that Jesus was condemned. Maybe he was following at a distance like Peter. He certainly was interested in what was going to happen to Jesus. Somehow, he was close enough to *see* the way Jesus was treated: how He was falsely accused, how He stood silently in the face of those lies; how no one could find any sin in Him, but He was still found guilty of blasphemy - claiming to be God - but Judas knew that Jesus never denied that He was the Son of God, and the Messiah, the son of David.

He *saw* and *heard* as Jesus was punched, and mocked, and spat upon. And then it says "he *changed his mind*." That's a very specific word in the Gk., and we'll come back to it. But after all he saw, it finally dawned on Judas what he had done - and Who it was that he had betrayed! He hadn't thought through what the outcome might be - that Jesus would actually be killed. Maybe he thought that they wouldn't be able to convict an innocent Man, and it would be a win-win: Jesus would go free and he would still have his money.

- He had never seen anyone be able to lay a hand on Jesus up to this point. Maybe he thought Jesus would just pass through the crowds like He had done before. But this time, He wasn't getting away. And Judas would be responsible for the death of this innocent man.

A. *The enormity of his sin.*

There is a principal throughout Scripture that God judges people based upon the amount of light they have been given, and by that standard, no one ever sinned against so much light

and so much privilege, as Judas. No one here could ever sin against so much light: he had intimate, face-to-face fellowship with Jesus for over 3 years - 24/7! He was in the inner circle of the 12 most privileged people who ever lived; men who witnessed Jesus' miracles, saw His boundless compassion and love; heard Him teach as no man ever taught; and never, *ever* saw Him sin.

In terms of experience, whatever you can say about Peter, James, John, and the other Apostles, you can say about Judas. Everywhere they went, he went, everything they saw and heard, he saw and heard - he was always right there, by the side of Jesus. And he was so trusted by the others, that they put him in charge of the money! He was seen as the most trustworthy of the bunch!

- Remember, when each of them were asking Jesus, one-by-one, "Lord, am I the one who will betray You?" - each of them could sooner think it was him than Judas!

He wasn't a fringe Disciple, he was one of them in every way.

- And not only that, but Jesus had conferred His authority on His men so that they were able to duplicate His miracles - they cast out demons, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind - and Judas did these same miracles by the delegated authority of Jesus!

But he squandered the privilege of friendship and fellowship with God Incarnate, for a few bucks.

If we compare Judas with Charles Manson, or Hitler, or Stalin, he might not seem so bad. His outward life was extremely moral - he convinced the other 11 men. But if we are judged by the amount of light we've been given, then no one who ever breathed was as evil as Judas—

Because no one ever sinned against so much light and privilege - and against so much love!

- Somehow in his materialism and greed, and preoccupation with his own selfish desires, Judas had managed to harden his heart and sear his conscience beyond repair. Day after day, he refused to let Jesus' love and Jesus' words penetrate his heart and mind. If you ever think to yourself, "Oh, well, if I had been able to walk with Jesus, and see His miracles with my own eyes, I would be a super Christian!" Just remember Judas. And you don't need to send your DNA off to "23 and Me" to find out - you and I are related to Judas! We share the same DNA and the same sinful nature that Judas had. He stands as an eternal warning to every church-going, Bible reading person: Don't, *don't* squander your spiritual privileges! Never take them for granted.

B. His statement of Jesus' innocence.

No one ever sinned against so much light, *and* - no one ever betrayed so *innocent* a victim. The one positive thing to come out of this story of Judas is that he confessed Jesus' *innocence*.

- Think about that: And if anyone living could have given evidence of sin in Jesus - it would have been Judas! Right? He had lived with Him 24 hours a day. But he couldn't. And if one sin *could* have been charged against Jesus, he would have at least felt better, but he couldn't. And to acknowledge Jesus' sinlessness only heaped more guilt and shame on this traitor. But he knew as sure as he knew anything, that Jesus was sinless. Throughout this trial, no one, not even Jesus' worst *enemies* could find any fault in Him - and neither could Judas, who had supposedly been one of His closest *friends*.

And my friends, this is a Gospel truth. Jesus' sinlessness is necessary to our salvation. He had to be a spotless Lamb, without blemish for the sacrifice He made for sinners. And he was!
Even Judas said so!

Well, after he saw what happened to Jesus, he was drowning in his guilt. So Judas offered up restitution - he tried to give the money back. But the religious leaders didn't want his dirty money. And they couldn't care less about his tortured conscience.

And notice that Judas even offered a confession: "*I have sinned by betraying innocent blood!*" He said two things that were absolutely true: he had sinned, and Jesus was innocent - better than a many of our confessions! But look at their response in v.4—

- They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."

"What do we care? That's your problem! Get lost." What miserable shepherds they were! Here comes one of their own, seeking absolution for his sin, and they say, "You're on your own. Handle it yourself." That had no solution for guilt - false religions never do. Only the Gospel offers a solution to guilt - but Judas had rejected that.

- And notice also - this is important - in v.4, that they also didn't care that they had condemned an innocent man! Their minds were made up. Truth didn't matter.

"Not our problem, handle it yourself." And that's exactly what he did—

- ⁵And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

He couldn't rid himself of his guilt, so in a final act of total despair, he got a rope and hanged himself. But over in Acts 1, Peter gives a different account—

- Acts 1:18 ¹⁸Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.

I remember as a brand new Christian in my senior year in high school, reading through the NT for the first time, I read the account of Judas' suicide in Matthew, then I got to Acts, and said to myself, "Oh no, I've found a contradiction in the Bible! No one has ever seen this before, but I have. I need to resolve this contradiction!" So I asked some other Christians - they had no answer. But there is no contradiction: Apparently, Judas hanged himself on the weak limb of a tree over a cliff, and at some point, the limb broke and his dead body burst open on the rocks below. Horrible way to end.

But this story brings up a question—

***So what about suicide?** Is it an unforgivable sin? Is it a "mortal sin" as the RC says; and because it's the last sin, and no penance can be offered, it can't be forgiven?

- The answer is no. Any sin can be forgiven, even suicide. Janice and I were at Grace Community Church almost 40 years ago when the church was sued for "Clergy Malpractice" over the suicide of Ken Nally - a college-age man we both knew - who we believed and John MacArthur believed, was a genuine Christian. But he was so depressed over his sins that he took a shotgun and killed himself. At his funeral, all his friends grieved over his death, but rejoiced that, as far as we knew, he was in heaven.

All sin, and any sin can be forgiven, even self-murder. But Judas didn't just kill himself, he was responsible for killing the Son of God. Could that sin be forgiven? We'll come back to that. But let's look at the response of the religious leaders—

III. The religious leaders fulfill prophecy.

- Matthew 27:6-10 ⁶But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." ⁷So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. ⁸Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

This is amazing. Throughout this sham trial, the religious leaders put on a show of obeying God's law - while they are conspiring to murder the Son of God! Oh, they can't take Judas' blood money! No, that would be unlawful. They were probably thinking of—

- Deuteronomy 27:25 ²⁵"Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

But they gave Judas the money in the first place! That was blood money to shed innocent blood. What hypocrites. They wanted to look righteous before the people while murdering their Messiah. So they do a good deed: they buy a place where poor people can be buried - how compassionate. A potter's field would have had plenty of holes they could turn into quick burial plots. So they kept their hands clean, and did a good deed as well! I'll say it again: Their consciences were so seared that they really believed they were righteous men doing God's work. At least Judas felt guilty about what he did - there is no record of these men every regretting Jesus' murder.

But what Matthew wants to point out is that these false shepherds were ultimately - once again - carrying out God's will!

God had pre-written what these men would do, hundreds of years before it happened. One quick note: Matthew attributes this quote from Jeremiah, but actually Matthew was combining words from Jeremiah and Zechariah, but he attributes them to Jeremiah as the Major prophet. There are other places where NT writers do the same thing.

The point is that this isn't just happening to Jesus - it was all part of God's eternal plan to save sinners. They were following God's script.

IV. Remorse vs. repentance - Judas and Peter.

I said that Matthew intentionally compares and contrasts Peter and Judas. They both sinned against Jesus. Peter denied that he even knew Jesus, his friend, and Lord - maybe he even cursed Him. Judas turned traitor on Jesus. And they were both deeply sorry over their sin: Peter wept bitterly, and Judas hanged himself - you can't get more sorry than that.

But Judas is in hell, and Peter is in heaven. So what makes the difference?

The difference is between remorse and repentance. Look with me again at—

- Matthew 27:3 ³Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he *changed his mind* and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders,

Now that sounds like the right reaction, doesn't it? He changed his mind, he went on to confess his sin, he tried to make restitution, and he mourned over his sin, enough to hang himself.

But the word Matthew uses here is a word that means *remorse*, not repentance. Remorse is sorrow - it can be very deep sorrow, but repentance is changing *direction*. Remorse is sorrow over the consequences of your sin - repentance is sorrow over the God you have sinned against.

And one leads to heaven, the other leads to hell, look with me at what Paul said in—

- 2 Corinthians 7:10 ¹⁰For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

Repentance is a godly grief that receives the mercy and forgiveness of Christ, but "*worldly grief*" produces death because it stays in its sorrow and never turns to Christ. That's the *remorse* that Judas had. He turned to his tears, then to the religious leaders, then finally to a noose - but he never turned back to Jesus. Paul calls it *worldly grief*.

Repentance is godly sorrow, that leads to salvation, because it turns *back* to Christ.

Repentance isn't penance. Penance is paying for your own sins. That's what Judas tried to do. It's what you do if you are a Roman Catholic - you confess to a priest and he says, "You can have forgiveness, but here is your part. You get Christ's sacrifice if you make some sacrifices of your own." But all unbelief and false religion does this: You mess up, do a good deed, now you're even with God. Do you ever think that way?

Or, you can punish yourself to even the score. I'll never forget years ago, a trip some of us men took to Mexico City where we saw peasants crawling for yards on bloody knees to come to a statue of Mary - they were doing penance for their sins!

- But if you do something good to make up for your sins, you are rejecting Christ's goodness and obedience on your behalf. And if you hurt yourself to make up for your sins, you are rejecting His suffering on your behalf? Please listen: You can't punish yourself for your sins and also accept Christ's punishment for your sins. It's one or the other.

What did the religious leaders tell Judas? "Handle it yourself! Deal with your own guilty conscience!" And that's just what he did! He *knew* that Jesus was a Savior for sinners. He heard Him claim to forgive sins as only God can forgive sins. He had seen countless men and women walk away from Jesus, clean and forgiven. He knew where to turn to cleanse his soul, but he turned away. He dealt with it himself - and just like Paul said, his worldly grief produced death.

Remorse walks away from Jesus. Repentance walks back to Jesus.

The heart of repentance is turning to Jesus. Now you have to turn *from* your sins to turn to Jesus, right? And repentance does both. When you sin, you turn from believing Jesus. When you repent, you turn back to believing Jesus. And that means *receiving* and *accepting* all that Jesus did to atone for our sins as *sufficient* - enough! Nothing more is required of us, no

penance, just receiving in humble, adoring faith, Christ! Heb.10.18 says, "Where there is forgiveness. . . there is no longer any offering for sin!" Because Jesus paid it all!

- Last week Malachi explained imputation to us: The good news of the Gospel is that when you trust in Christ, all of your sins are accounted to Christ, and they were judged and removed at the cross. And all of His righteousness is accounted to you, and it is yours. Do you believe that?

But do you still believe it when you wipe out and fall into some repulsive sin? Do you still believe that your sins are all on Christ, and you bear them no more? Do you run to Jesus naked and shivering to be clothed again with His righteousness? Listen, these are the words of a repentant heart—

No list of sins I have not done,
No list of virtues I pursue,
No list of those I am not like
Can earn myself a place with You.
O God, be merciful to me—
I am a sinner through and through!
My only hope of righteousness
Is not in me, but only You.

VERSE 2

No humble dress, no fervent prayer,
No lifted hands, no tearful song,
No recitation of the truth
Can justify a single wrong.
My righteousness is Jesus' life,
My debt was paid by Jesus' death,
My weary load was borne by Him
And He alone can give me rest.

No separation from the world,
No work I do, no gift I give
Can cleanse my conscience, cleanse my hands;
I cannot cause my soul to live.
But Jesus died and rose again—
The power of death is overthrown!
My God is merciful to me
And merciful in Christ alone.

Peter and Judas both walked away from Jesus, but Peter walked *back* to Jesus - and Judas never did. Both men were broken over their sins - maybe more than any of us will ever experience. But Judas stayed in his grief. Peter turned back to Jesus. True repentance always, always, turns back to Jesus. 7 times 70, and Jesus is there to forgive and restore - 7 times 70.

- Years ago a person very close to our family was exposed for being a serial adulterer. He was going through all the outward steps of repentance, but nothing seemed to really change. I went to meet him at a McDonalds one morning, sat down, and I said, "Talk." He said, "Oh Doug, I'm such a wretch, what I've done is so terrible. God can't forgive me for what I've done I'm going to hell for what I've done!" I said, "Who do you think you are to say that God can't forgive you? You're right. I think you're going to hell." And I left.

He had a Judas heart. And he never did repent. He became an alcoholic and was hit by a train while trying to pick up a bottle of whiskey on some railroad tracks.

- But then I remember a gal who was saved out of addiction to prescription drugs. She loved the doctrines of grace she heard here because she knew that only a sovereign, merciful God would save a person like her. But she missed a few Sundays, and then showed up at my office one day - she had fallen back into her addiction. She was weeping over her sins. And I said, "Now I know you are probably questioning your salvation now." She stopped crying and said, "Oh no! If God chose me and Christ died for me, then I'm saved!"

Right answer - that's a heart like Peter's.

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Judas was *not* forgiven, we know that on the basis of Jesus' own words, but he *could* have been. . . *Judas could have been forgiven*. And we know that on the basis of Jesus' own words: "Any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven - *any!*" He meant that. No one who turns to Jesus, repentant, seeking mercy, will be turned away. One of Jesus' last cries from the cross was a prayer for those who had just hammered the nails through His wrists and feet. What was it? "Father, please forgive, them!" Hallelujah! What a Savior!

And any sins you have committed can be forgiven if you turn to Jesus. If you have walked away from Him, come back. Come back! I don't want you to leave here this morning depressed over a traitor; I want you to leave here rejoicing over a Savior!