



The Demise of Judas

Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Matthew 27:1-10

September 1, 2013

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This text that we are looking at this morning is one of the most disturbing in the gospels. It is filled with injustice, with callous indifference, with religious posturing and, of course, with the demise of Judas, the betrayer of the Christ. It is a difficult text to preach, not because it is hard to understand or difficult to interpret, but because of its content and its intended audience. This text is not written primarily for the unbeliever, not for the open rejecter of Christ, but for the professing Christian, for the church going, bible study attending, knowledgeable, baptized, fellowship attending, professing Christian. It is meant for me and for you. Listen, this text is uncomfortable. It's upsetting. It is not a feel good text. It is meant to be really be considered and deeply felt. It is a text that is meant to stir us deep in our souls, to make us examine ourselves, to determine if we are truly repenters, truly recipients of grace, real trusters in Christ alone or if we are remorsers only or heading in that direction.

Before we get into this text, I want to read to you words from Psalm 109, a psalm that the repentant and restored Peter applied to Judas, his fellow disciple, the one numbered among the brothers, who had a share in the ministry of the 12, and who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. Listen to these words: "Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he (the accuser) is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin! May his days be few; may another take his office! May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow! May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit! May the creditor seize all that he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil! Let there be none to extend kindness to him, nor any to pity his fatherless children! May his posterity be cut off; may his name be blotted out in the second generation! May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out! Let them be before the LORD continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth! For he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and needy and the brokenhearted, to put them to death. He loved to curse; let curses come upon him! He did not delight in blessing; may it be far from him! He clothed himself with cursing as his coat; may it

soak into his body like water, like oil into his bones! May it be like a garment that he wraps around him, like a belt that he puts on every day!” (Psalm 109:6–19, ESV) This is the lot of Judas. This is legacy of his life.

When we think of Judas, he often appears to be the ultimate mystery in the NT – disciple of Jesus Christ, yet called by Him a devil; chosen by our Lord after he had prayed all night and the instrument of Satan for the betrayal of the Son of God. He seems a mystery, but in many ways, he is the counterbalance to the story of Peter who denied Christ yet found repentance and restoration. The difference between repentance and mere remorse is the centerpiece of this text. So let’s look at this text this morning with contemplative and thoughtful hearts and let’s start with the verdict of

The Kangaroo Court (v. 1-2) If you have never heard that expression “kangaroo court,” let me tell you what that means. Kangaroo courts are sham legal proceedings which are set-up in order to give the impression of a fair legal process. In fact, they offer no impartial justice as the verdict, truth is unimportant, only the condemnation of the accused. It’s the perfect term for what the Sanhedrin did with Jesus. Matthew records: “When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.” (Matthew 27:1–2, ESV)

In order to give an air of decency and propriety to their legal proceedings against Jesus, the Sanhedrin waited until morning, until daybreak, in order to announce their formal declaration that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy and was deserving of death. Now they knew that the Roman government wouldn’t care in the least that they had found Jesus guilty of religious charges. For that reason, the Sanhedrin would tell Pilate that Jesus was guilty of sedition and of fomenting rebellion against Rome – we will talk more about that next week.

But this verdict of death for Christ begs and important question: Why didn’t they have Him stoned to death? Now I know that Christ must die on the cross. Scripture demands it. God the Father demands it. The redemption of our souls demands that He face the cup of God’s wrath on the cross, that His blood be poured out for the forgiveness of sins, that He endure the curse in our place on the tree. That is not the question. The question is why did the Sanhedrin desire

that Jesus be killed on a cross by the Romans? Why not simply stone Him? They had no problem when Stephen was killed in that manner in the book of Acts, so why not do that with Jesus?

I'll tell you why. It was because they wanted Jesus discredited. They knew the Word of God in Deuteronomy 21: "“And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God.” (Deuteronomy 21:22–23, ESV) They applied that to the cross and so they wanted Jesus to be crucified so that the people would see Him dying in that manner and conclude that He could not be sent from God because He was accursed.

And yet, these men in turning Christ over to the Romans to be killed on the tree, out of malice and envy, were actually used by God to ensure His loving purpose -- that Christ would redeem His people from the curse of the Law. Is that not what Paul said in the book of Galatians: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” (Galatians 3:13–14, ESV) We were all under the curse of the law because we had failed to keep it – we were liars, sexually immoral, rebels, haters of God, disobedient, thieves, greedy, drunkards, revilers, proud, arrogant, idolaters. We had brought upon ourselves the judgment that breaking God’s holy law deserves – the curse of hell and God’s wrath, but Jesus became a curse for His people on the tree in order to redeem us from the hell we deserve so that we might be saved.

On the cross, Christ became a curse for us. Blessing and cursing is OT language. The OT speaks of the blessing of God: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:24–26, ESV) It is the blessing of God that the redeemed of the Lord have been graced to receive but only because, only because, Christ suffered the exact opposite. In our place, Christ suffered the exact opposite, the ultimate malediction that all rejecters of God deserve because of their sin: "May the Lord curse you and abandon you. May the Lord keep you in darkness and give you only judgment without grace. May the Lord turn His back upon you and remove His peace from you forever." He was cursed so we could be blessed. God’s wrath fell upon his entire person on the cross. He suffered in body and soul. And in so doing,

the Lord Jesus received the curse we deserved. Christ became a curse for us so that we one day can see the face of God. God turned His face away from Christ so that the light of His countenance could fall upon us.

Oh beloved, if Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us. Can we even begin to imagine the horrible weight of our sin before God? Can we even start to fathom the severity of God's wrath that we deserve as sinners? Can we even begin to understand the absolute holiness of God that stands in eternal contrast to our sinfulness? And can we even begin to consider the wondrous bounty of grace that God has shown to us in Jesus Christ? Redemption could only happen if He were condemned to death on a cross and that is exactly what the Sanhedrin were after. They meant it of evil but God meant it for eternal good.

How ironic that these men would scheme together to put the only innocent man who had ever lived to a humiliating death. These men who were filled with vast knowledge, who could articulate the points of their theology with the best of them, who were supposed to be the shepherds of Israel, in utter spiritual darkness conspired to put to death the True Shepherd of Israel, hoping against hope that they could extinguish His light forever. They could not and would not but their sentencing of Christ would have a profound effect on Judas and leads to the central message and theme of this text – remorse is not repentance.

Remorse is not Repentance (v. 3-5) The sentencing of Jesus finished and Christ being led away in chains to face Pilate, Matthew now turns to the case of Judas the betrayer. Look in verse 3: “Then 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,” (Matthew 27:3, ESV) Judas, who must have been near to the proceedings against Jesus sees that Jesus had been condemned and was being taken off to the Romans, when immediately his conscience is pricked, accusing him of his wrongdoing. I am not sure what provokes this attack of conscience. Perhaps up until this point he believed that Jesus would act, using His mighty power to defend Himself, perhaps taking to Himself the role of Messiah that Judas had envisioned, a conqueror who would oust the Romans, who would cleanse what Jesus had called the dead religion of Israel, that Christ would set up His kingdom now and elevate the disciples to important places in the kingdom and somehow he might be received back into their midst. Maybe he thought that the council would not actually condemn Jesus. Who knows? It is impossible to unravel the twisted and wicked mind of Judas. One thing is certain, if all that he desired was to get all that he could out of what he considered to be wasted years of discipleship, he saw now that the cost

of what he had done was all out of proportion to what small gain he thought he had achieved. The enormity of his treachery is looming before his eyes. It was more than his greedy, seared conscience, or his filthy soul could take.

Matthew says, he changed his mind. A far better translation of the Greek word that is used here is that he felt remorse. He felt deep remorse, regret, felt sorry for what he had done – that is the sense of the word *metamelomai* that is used here. This is not the word for repentance, *metaneo*. Matthew deliberately does not use this word. He wants us to understand that Judas felt guilty. He was pierced in his conscience. He was distressed in his mind. He hated what he had done. He feared what would be the consequences. He regretted his mistake but all of this is not, IS NOT, true repentance. It is an emotional response, wish that he had never done this but it stops short of the real transformation of the will and of the heart that is repentance. We know this not simply from the linguistics of the verse but from what Judas does.

Judas knows he has done wrong and seeks to relieve his guilt by going to the chief priests and elders and returning to them the money that he had been given to betray Christ, as if that will exonerate him of his crime. In his mind, he can make atonement for what he has done by returning the blood money that he has been paid. But he cannot. He is going to the wrong people. He is trying to deliver himself. The only one that can help him is Jesus. He could have gone to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation, which the Lord had so often offered, but instead he goes to men who couldn't care less for the state of his soul. You see, it is not that he wanted Christ or loved Christ, he just didn't want to feel guilty anymore. It does not go well for Judas.

Matthew writes that he went to members of the Sanhedrin: "saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.'" They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself.'" (Matthew 27:4, ESV) Judas goes and makes a confession but again it is to the wrong people. It is not given to the Lord Jesus Christ; it is not given to Father God. He does not fall down on his knees and beg for mercy from the Father, acknowledging that Jesus is Lord, acknowledging and owning his horrific sin against the Son of God, confessing that Jesus is the Christ. The proof that his sorrow is ungodly, selfish and fleshly is the fact that he did nothing to vindicate Jesus, nothing to rescue Him but only to alleviate his own condemning conscience.

No, instead he goes to the Sanhedrin and the most that he can say is that he has sinned by betraying an innocent man and yet, although his confession is incomplete, it is important. Think about it – if there was any living witness that could have brought a charge of sin against Jesus, it would have been Judas. He had been with Him night and day, seen Him in public and in private, would have known if there was anything, anything even remotely sinful about Him. And there was nothing, nothing he could say, and nothing with which he could mollify and appease his conscience, nothing! He knew Christ was holy, blameless, true, and innocent. One theologian has put it like this: “The power of Satan is not sufficient to prevent his own servant from confessing the moral glory of the Son of God; I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” Judas knows that bloodguilt is upon his own head.

The Sanhedrin, the false shepherds of Israel care nothing for his plight. They care nothing for his soul. They have no mercy, no grace, nothing to offer him. Judas has blood guilt on his mind. He knows the law which said: “ ‘Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.’” (Deuteronomy 27:25, ESV) Judas knows he is under that curse. With utter scorn and loathing, the members of the Sanhedrin to whom he went callously tell him: “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” They dismiss him completely. How lost is Judas! He had sold Christ out, thrown his lot in with these men and they held him in utter contempt. He had lost all and gained nothing. Let this be a lesson to us. Sin is the hardest and the worst of masters. It offers all sorts of false promises but ends in sorrow, remorse, guilt and all too often death. Those who sow to the flesh do indeed reap corruption. He learned firsthand: “Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit...” (Proverbs 10:2, ESV)

Filled with hopelessness and despair, unwilling to bow before God and confess His sin, Matthew tells us: “And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.” (Matthew 27:5, ESV) Judas threw the money in the temple and went and took his own life in some anguished and misguided attempt to try to atone for his own sin. But he could not do so for the simple fact that it was beyond his power to do so. Taking his own life did not relieve his guilt; it only made it permanent and immutable. Only one person in the entire universe is capable of making atonement for sins or removing the very real curse that Judas was under and that is the One person before whom He refused to humble himself. His is a tragic, extreme case of man-made religion, a desperate effort to save himself, to do something to atone for his sin. While his response is extreme, it is characteristic of those who will not humble themselves before God and confess and forsake their sins. How many try to atone for their own sins and their guilt?

The pornographer may smash his computer screen. The adulterer may try to comfort his guilt by buying things for his wife; the thief by giving to the poor and needy; the ungodly father by pledging to be a better grandfather; the gossip by community service; the drunkard by going to church, some go into the ministry; some will volunteer for the worst jobs, some will devote themselves to learning the Scriptures inside and out, doing some big thing for God, doing all sorts of religious duties, volunteering for ministry, giving large amounts of money, living austere, punish themselves with some certain penance, flogging themselves literally or figuratively...the list is endless. Judas tried to do the same but the one thing that he did not do is the one thing that could deliver him from his guilt of sin – humbling himself before God and looking to Christ. He dies a horrible death – a former disciple, a former preacher of the gospel, a contemporary and companion of Peter commits suicide and rushes headlong into eternity, his sins still upon his head.

Beloved, mark this down. Remorse is not repentance. Contrition is not repentance. Confession is not repentance. Self-hatred and sorrow over the consequences of sin is not repentance. If what Judas did is not repentance, than what is? Paul captures one of the most vivid descriptions in the Scriptures of genuine repentance in 2 Cor. 7:9-11. Turn there with me. “As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.” (2 Corinthians 7:9–11, ESV)

Listen, in order to truly repent, we must hate our sin. We have to see sin as what it is -- as deep-rooted, thankless rebellion against God and an unwillingness to find our greatest satisfaction in Jesus Christ, who is God’s greatest and best gift of His grace. We need to call sin what it is. Call a spade a spade — call it “sexual immorality,” not “I’m struggling a little”; call it “impurity,” not “I’m struggling with my thought life”; call it “idolatry,” not “problem with my priorities.” Call it lying, not “shading the truth.” Call sin what Scripture calls it. How powerfully this unmask self-deceit — and helps us to unmask sin lurking in the hidden corners of our hearts! The power of sin is in its disguising and redefining of itself. Call it what God calls it. Drag it out into the light of God and expose it to God’s truth. That’s where repentance must begin.

In worldly grief, the sinner feels bad for himself – his pain, his shame, his damaged reputation or relationships. The regrets that he got caught but inwardly they would still commit the same sin if they could do it and avoid the consequences. But in godly sorrow, the sinner feels the weight of his sin against the holy God and wants to see justice done and wants to restore relationships, first with God and then with his fellow man. The truly repentant man or woman grieves that he has offended God. He or she hates the sin that he has committed. They turn from their heinous sin – in mind, heart, and hands – to a gracious God. They know that God is merciful. They come to Christ and own their sins, seeking His mercy, seeking His grace, seeking to be free from the pull of sin and knowing that Christ will receive them. And they seek to put sin to death. By God’s grace and the work of the God’s Spirit, they change.. They change and forsake their sin. Look at the words that Paul uses to describe the nature of Godly mourning and repentance that comes from it.

Earnestness – indifference and complacency, the allowance or overlooking or excusing of sin comes to an end. Eagerness to clear yourselves – a desire to clear the name of the stigma of sin., a desire to put that sin away once and for all. Indignation – that is anger over sin and what it does to the name of God in the world, how it brings reproach upon His name and His glory. Fear – reverence toward God, awe toward the God who demands payment for sin and offers it Himself in the blood of Christ. Longing – desire of the sinner to restore the fellowship with God that has been broken – to find comfort and joy in his presence. Zeal – passion for God and for God’s kingdom and His fame and His name based on the great forgiveness He has given and the comfort and fellowship He offers. Punishment – this is better translated as “avenging of wrong.” It is the desire of justice to be done. Innocence – It is the desire for purity and holiness. Look beloved, if you are not fighting, if you are not pursuing Christ, abiding in Christ, resisting temptation to sin even unto blood, if you are not throwing yourself on the mercy and grace of God, you are not repenting.

Judas did not truly repent of his sin. He felt remorse and heaviness, guilt to be sure, but it never lead to true repentance. Instead he sought for ways to assuage his own guilt and he met with eternal doom. But Judas was not alone in his sin. As this troubling scene draws to a close, we see

The Glaring Hypocrisy of the Sanhedrin (v. 6-9) In trying to eliminate his guilt, Judas had cast the money that the Sanhedrin had paid him at their feet and the chief priests are immediately shown to be themselves guilty of innocent blood and their response is strangely similar to that of Judas. “But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.”” (Matthew 27:6, ESV) See the incredible irony and hypocrisy in this. They did not feel any sense of guilt in arresting Christ or falsely accusing Him of blasphemy, no guilt in seeking his death, nor in taking money from the temple treasury to

pay Judas to betray him into their hands. But now, with the money cast back at their feet, they have a sudden attack of conscience. They know it is blood money and while it was, in their minds proper to take it from the temple treasury to facilitate this evil deed, they cannot put this money back. They feel guilty about receiving this money back. It would be wrong for them to do so. What can they do?

Matthew tells us: “So they took counsel and bought with them the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.” (Matthew 27:7–8, ESV) What self-righteous, religious thing could they do to quiet their guilt? With the money they had first used to purchase the innocent blood of Jesus Christ, they would purchase a burial place for strangers – an act of benevolence. It’s sad and disgusting, really. Despite the fact that it may have soothed the consciences of the Sanhedrin for the moment, no one was fooled. The name by which the field came to be known among the people says it all – “Field of Blood.”

Yet, even in this, Matthew emphasizes the sovereignty of God over all that was taking place by quoting loosely from both Jeremiah and Zechariah, attributing the quote to the major prophet, saying: “Then 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, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.”” (Matthew 27:9–10, ESV) Matthew quotes from Zechariah 11 and takes his cue from Jeremiah 19, passages that point to the prophetic warnings of Israel rejecting the Lord in favor of ruling their own lives, and in consequence, the Lord assures them of judgment and the withdrawal of His favor.

This entire scene is disturbing and profound and the question that must be asked then is this:

What is our response to this text? As I said at the outset, this text is meant to stir us deep in our souls, to make us examine ourselves, to contemplate these words, to determine if we are truly repenters, truly recipients of grace, real trusters in Christ alone or if we are remorseful only or heading in that direction. Are we dealing with sin by throwing ourselves upon God’s grace in Christ, forsaking reputation, confessing our sins, seeking the empowerment of the holy Spirit to lay them aside, asking God to change our hearts, change our desires, change our longings and then walking in obedience to His word? That is the picture of true repentance.

That is a hard question to face but Matthew included this account of Judas’ remorse and demise, so that we would be brought to a place of earnest examination of our own hearts, of our practice as it regards sin, of the reality or unreality of our repentance. Listen to these words of JC Ryle: And now what is the state of our hearts? Are we ever tempted to rest on our knowledge and profession of religion? Let us remember Judas and beware. Are we disposed to

cling to the world, and give money a prominent place in our minds? Again, let us remember Judas, and beware. Are we trifling with any one sin, and flattering ourselves we may repent by and by? Once more, let us remember Judas and beware. He is set up before us as a beacon. Let us look well at him, and not make shipwreck.

There is only one way to truly deal with guilt. And that is for the root of it, your sins, to be taken away by the One Judas betrayed and the council condemned-Jesus Christ. God has made a way for us so that we do not have to resort to self-destruction or self-deceit when dealing with guilt. We go to the cross and find it empty, Jesus Christ having already taken away our guilt and risen from the dead, so that guilty sinners might have hope now and forever. We go to the cross and repent and rise changed by the Spirit of God to strive for holiness and faithfulness. There is grace, abundant grace, for all of us at the foot of the cross. So come. If you fear that you are a remorseful, that repentance has not laid hold of your heart, that you cannot change, fearful that your heart may be too hard, your situation too difficult, I promise you there is grace enough for you. Just come to Christ. Do the one thing that Judas would not do. Come to Christ.

Be confident that God is for you. He gave His Son to deliver you from the penalty and power of sin. He has given you His Holy Spirit to train you in righteousness. Bring your sin and failures before Him and know with confidence that He will not turn you away, that He really will transform you. That he really can remove your guilt as far as the east is from the west and that He will give you the power to forsake sin and pursue righteousness. "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16, ESV) Come to Christ.

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