



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 27:1-10

Topic

The chief priests and elders of Israel refuse to help Judas while themselves betraying Jesus to His death

Title

"Judas Priests"

Introduction

Could you give a comprehensive summary of the Gospel in seven words or less?

Christian Century magazine issued a challenge for theologians to do just that back in 2012.

I have to say, their summaries were less than inspiring. In fact, they were weird. Here are a few; and, yes, these are real - I'm not making them up.

- "Everybody gets to grow and change."

1 of 17

Matthew 27:1-10

"Judas Priests"

- "In Christ, God's "Yes" defeats our "No."
- "We are the church of infinite chances."

I think you get the idea. Or, should I say, you **don't** get the idea, not really, of what the Gospel is from any of those sentences.

A reporter once asked theologian Karl Barth if he could summarize what he believed. Barth thought for a moment and then said: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

That's better. But let's quit trying to be clever. How did the first proclaimers of the Gospel summarize their message?

In the very first message of the church age, on the Day of Pentecost, when asked by the crowd what they must do, Peter said, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).

In Acts chapter three, after healing the lame man, Peter addressed the crowd that gathered, and he said, "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away..." (v19).

After taking the Gospel to the household of Cornelius, Peter said, "God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18).

Did you notice the one word Peter repeated, and emphasized? It was "repent." It's a key word in any Gospel summary.

- John the Baptist called Israel to "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand... Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matthew 3:1&8).

- Matthew 9:13 says that Jesus Christ came to call sinners to repentance.
- In Luke 24:47, the Great Commission Jesus gave is that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all peoples.
- In Acts 17 verse 30 the Bible says, "God commands all men everywhere to repent."
- Second Peter 3:9, "God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."
- Luke 15:7 and 10 indicates that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner brought to repentance.

Repentance is not just for nonbelievers. There are calls in the New Testament for saints to repent - most notably in Jesus' letter to the church in Ephesus where He urged them to "remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent" (The Revelation 2:5).

Our text in Matthew gives us opportunity to discuss repentance from a negative example. Two negative examples, actually: Both Judas and the religious leaders of Israel betrayed Jesus and failed to repent. In their bad examples we will see two things repentance is not.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Need Repentance, Not Religion, and #2 You Need Repentance, Not Self-righteousness.

#1 You Need Repentance, Not Religion

(v1-5)

I'm taking the approach that Judas could have repented and been restored.

What he did, he did of his own free will. God's providence saw to it Jesus was betrayed, according to prophecy. But Judas was not a person predestined to damnation against his own will.

Jesus' tender warning at the beginning of their final supper testifies to His love for Judas, and His reaching-out to save him.

When Judas had come to betray the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus called him, "Friend," extending to him forgiveness and restoration.

Now Judas will see Jesus for the final time.

Mat 27:1 When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death.

Mat 27:2 And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

Altogether, Jesus had six trials: three in front of the Jews, and three in front of the Romans.

Matthew doesn't record Jesus having been first taken to the house of Annas *before* going to Caiphas' house. Now that it was daybreak, the Sanhedrin met again, in the Temple, in a more 'legal' way, to ratify what they had illegally decided.

Judea was occupied and under Roman rule, meaning the Jews could sentence someone, but had no power to execute anyone. For that, they'd need the co-operation of Roman governor.

A charge of religious blasphemy would not mandate capital punishment from Rome. So they "plotted" how to portray Jesus as a revolutionary, dangerous to Rome.

Judas had a final encounter with Jesus. J. Vernon McGee writes, "the Lord Jesus was there when Judas came. As the chief priests and elders were leading Him through that hall to take Him to Pilate, here comes Judas."

Mat 27:3 Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

Mat 27:4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!"

Judas was "remorseful," and his feelings were powerful enough to lead him to commit suicide.

He genuinely regretted what he had done. He knew it was wrong - even saying "I have sinned."

It seems like he was ready to repent and be restored.

But notice. Instead of addressing Jesus, he addressed the Sanhedrin. He looked to them to confess his sin, and to be restored.

They wouldn't help him... And they couldn't help him - even if they wanted to. They had neither the authority, nor the power, to forgive sins.

Maybe you think it would have been impossible for Judas to approach Jesus as He was being led away. How impossible would it have been to shout out to the Lord, "Forgive me!"?

Judas was looking to the religion of his people, to Judaism, and to the Law of Moses, to provide him with forgiveness and salvation.

To that end, he tried to give-back the money he had been paid to betray Jesus.

Sin doesn't work that way. You can't indulge yourself in sin, then realize what it has done to you and to others, and simply act like nothing ever happened.

I'm not talking about making restitution for wrongs you've done. Restitution is a good thing, and often those who repent and are saved feel compelled to make right certain wrongs.

I'm talking about giving back the thirty pieces of silver, as if nothing ever happened, and letting bygones be bygones.

It was too late for that. The damage - in this case, the condemnation to death of an innocent man - had been done.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "sinner, you may sell Heaven for a few carnal pleasures, but you cannot buy Heaven by merely giving them up."

Sin is damaging. Maybe not at first. But as you continue in it, it destroys. Not just you, either. It affects all those around you - in your home, in your church, at work; everywhere.

We should hear James when he warns, "each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (1:14-15).

Remember the old *Brylcreem* hair product commercials? Their jingle was, "a little dab'll do ya."

We like to think that we're only dabbling with sin; it seems so little, so harmless. Why can't we learn from the fall of so many others before us that it brings forth death?

[Mat 27:5](#) Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.

Judas threw the money, literally, into, or as close to, the Holy of Holies in the Temple as he could get. It was as close to God Himself Judas thought he could get.

Having failed to find any spiritual relief from the religious leaders, throwing the coins towards the Holy of Holies was a kind of appeal directly to God.

Yet he had been with Jesus for over three years - God in human flesh.

Again, I'm saying he was genuinely remorseful. But he was going through religious motions, throwing the coins to where he was taught God dwelt, when all he had to do was throw himself on the mercy of the omnipresent God.

It prompted one commentator to note that perhaps Judas' greatest betrayal was that of refusing God's mercy.

We get a little more information about Judas' suicide in the Book of Acts. While choosing Matthias as Judas' replacement, according to the Scripture, this is said:

Acts 1:18 (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out.

Acts 1:19 And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)

A couple of things:

- Judas threw the money in the Temple, and the religious leaders will use it to buy a field. When it says here, "this man purchased a field," it simply means it was his money that they used to purchase it.
- Apparently Judas hung himself then, as he was hanging, fell on sharp rocks below, slicing him open. In fact there is a tradition that says he hung himself off a tree branch, and it broke, causing him to fall.
- The text doesn't say he committed suicide in the field they bought. In fact, had he died there, the field would have been rendered unclean and unusable.

- It was called "Field of Blood" either because it became a burial ground, or because it was purchased with Judas' blood money.

Let's talk about suicide for a moment. **Suicide is not an unpardonable sin.** I can say that, with authority, because there is only one unpardonable sin; only one blasphemy of the Holy Spirit; and that is a final rejection of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Yes, suicide is self-murder, and the Bible says, "Thou shalt do no murder." So, ask yourself: Are all murderers unpardonable?

But, you say, a Christian would never kill himself, or herself. Well, they should not; but they do.

Life is tragic; it can be crushing. You **are** sometimes given more than you, as a person, on your own, can handle.

You CAN do all things, however, through Jesus Christ, Who strengthens you.

Some people in Scripture felt deep despair in life:

- Solomon, in his pursuit of pleasure, reached the point where he "hated life" (Ecclesiastes 2:17).
- Elijah was fearful and depressed and yearned for death (First Kings 19:4).
- Jonah was so angry at God that he wished to die (Jonah 4:8).
- Even the apostle Paul and his missionary companions at one point "were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself" (Second Corinthians 1:8).

However, none of these men committed suicide:

- Solomon learned to “fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).
- Elijah was comforted by an angel, allowed to rest, and given a new commission.
- Jonah received admonition and rebuke from God.
- Paul learned that, although the pressure he faced was beyond his ability to endure, the Lord can bear all things: “This happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (Second Corinthians 1:9).

Don't kill yourself. If you're thinking about it, or ever do, talk to someone. Get help. Jesus died so you might live - now and forever. He has good works that He has ordained for you to discover and perform, for His sake. Your life belongs to Him - not to you.

We know that Judas is in Hades, awaiting an eternity in the Lake of Fire. Peter tells us, in Acts 1:25, "he went to his own place," referring to his eternal damnation. He is elsewhere called, "the son of perdition," which means *doomed to destruction* (John 17:12).

Judas isn't lost because he committed suicide, but because he willfully rejected salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Religion had nothing to offer Judas in his hour of greatest need. All of the world's religions are bankrupt; and they are an offense to the Cross of Christ, because they offer some substitute for His death.

Men, and women, who themselves do not know Jesus, cannot lead you to Him; and in Him alone is the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Judas needed only to repent. The apostle Paul explained it best when he told the Christians in Corinth, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (Second Corinthians 7:10).

Repentance, not religion, is what Judas needed. Instead of repenting, he became the poster-boy for the kind of worldly sorrow that falls far short of repentance.

#2 You Need Repentance, Not Self-righteousness

(v6-10)

There is an important use of words that we can easily miss in our English translations of the Bible.

In verse two, the word translated "delivered" is the same word in verse three translated "betrayed."

Judas betrayed Jesus, but so did the religious leaders representing Israel. They were **all** Judas'.

These guys, and the nation, needed to repent, but they weren't even thinking about doing so. They were trusting in what they had always trusted in - their adherence to the Law of Moses in order to be righteous before God.

I can't right now think of another passage of Scripture that shows the absolute stupidity of thinking that self-righteously keeping certain laws and traditions will save you.

At the very moment these guys were knowingly sending an innocent man, and their Messiah, to His death, they were meticulously keeping the laws about the proper handling of the blood money **they** had paid to have Jesus betrayed.

It's insane... And so always is a dependance upon self-righteousness.

What's the difference, you ask, between religion and self-righteousness? In this context, religion is what Judas looked to to provide him with forgiveness and restoration *after* he had sinned. In their self-righteousness, the Jewish leaders thought that they had not sinned at all.

Self-righteousness is the poison fruit of religion, keeping you from repentance.

Mat 27:6 But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood."

Why can't they see it? If blood money was so bad, how could their paying it to Judas, in the first place, be any good?

All I can say is that we have an amazing capacity to lie to ourselves, and to others, about things God calls sin.

Judas' attempt to return the coins ought to have pricked their consciences. It did not. It shows us how incredibly hard a self-righteous heart can be.

Mat 27:7 And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.

Mat 27:8 Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

The "potters field," in this case, was not a field in which the ruined, broken pieces of pottery would be discarded. This potters field was more like what we'd call a quarry where clay to make the pottery was gathered. Once the layer of clay had been depleted, the field was no longer useful to potters, and could be sold for other uses.

In this case the chief priests bought it as a public cemetery in which they could bury "strangers." It's probably a reference to Gentiles who, while visiting Jerusalem, died, and needed to be buried; but they had no relatives in Jerusalem, and could not lawfully be buried alongside Jews.

Purchasing this field, for this use, was a very generous act. If they had plaques in those days, I'm sure they'd mention themselves on it, pointing to their big-hearted generosity.

Mind you, the money had been used, initially, to capture an innocent Jew they planned to murder. Yet they saw no contradiction.

I mentioned earlier that these guys were no help to Judas. He came seeking spiritual help from them, and they basically said, "You're on your own."

Self-righteous leaders can be a little more subtle than that. A self-righteous Christian won't usually turn you away and tell you that you're on your own. Instead they will talk about everything you ought to be doing to be right with God, implying that they are doing all that, and more.

They give you a laundry list of spiritual activities and leave you with the impression that, in doing them, you will be made right, and remain right, with God.

They reduce your relationship with Jesus to something mechanical rather than intimate and romantic.

When you need spiritual help, seek out those who will tell you *who* and *what* you **are** - not what you must **do**. You are in Jesus Christ, in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit. Your sins - past, present, and future - have been forgiven at the Cross. He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it. He is simultaneously building you, in Heaven, a mansion, and He is hoping to reward you when you make your glorious entrance home.

Religion could not save Judas. Self-righteousness could not save the Judas'. Purchasing a field with blood money could not cancel-out paying blood money in the first place.

Only a Savior can cancel-out sin. From the very beginning, God had promised to send a Savior. It was a matter of prophesy.

Mat 27:8 Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

Mat 27:9 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE VALUE OF HIM WHO WAS PRICED, whom they of the children of Israel priced,

Mat 27:10 AND GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER'S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME."

Scholars spend a lot of time in these three verses; but that's why they are so scholarly, I guess.

You see, the actual quote seems to come from Zechariah, even though Matthew attributes it to Jeremiah.

The quick answer is that the Jews divided-up their Scriptures into three parts: the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. The first five books were the Law - even though some of the books, like Genesis, really didn't contain the Law.

Likewise there were books in the Psalms division that were not psalms.

Since Jeremiah was the first prophetic book in the section called the Prophets, often that whole section would be called Jeremiah.

It's one of several possible explanations. Another is that, since Jeremiah and Zechariah both mentioned the potter and his field, this was a blending of the two, giving Jeremiah priority since he was considered the major prophet.

We're not ignoring it, but it's not really a problem, and it's certainly not Matthew's point.

His point: Everything that was happening to Jesus had been carefully prophesied centuries before.

Jesus was going to the Cross, according to the plan of God, so that mankind might be commanded to "Repent!" and believe on Him for salvation. By dying on the Cross, all men can be drawn to Him by the Holy Spirit. He is the Savior of all men - especially those who believe.

I'm not even going to try to summarize the Gospel in seven words. But, if I did, or if you do, try, get the word "repent" in there prominently.

Normally we think of nonbelievers, like Judas and the Judas' of Israel, needing to repent, but we've seen that believers, too, are called upon to continue to repent.

What does that look like?

When Jesus urged the believers in Ephesus to repent, it wasn't a call for them to start doing good works to get back in to His good favor. *They were already doing all the good works they could possibly be doing.*

Good works will follow genuine repentance, as a consequence, not a cause.

Jesus pointed out they had left their first love. It was because they had settled into a works-based relationship that they needed to repent. Their repentance was a matter of realization that intimacy with Jesus had been abandoned. The solve was to return to the passion of that first love and to do their "works" from love, not law.

If you are not a believer, you are among the Judas'. **You can be saved.**

For us believers - let's call sin what it really is, and confess it.

And let's be certain our love for Jesus is the first, passionate love of our engagement, and never something based on our works.

