

Sermons on Matthew  
Useless Grief and Indifferent Priests  
*Matthew 27:1-10*

*With Study Questions*

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# Useless Grief and Indifferent Priests

*Matthew 27:1-10*

When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. <sup>2</sup> And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

<sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" <sup>5</sup> Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. <sup>6</sup> 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." <sup>7</sup> And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. <sup>8</sup> Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. <sup>9</sup> 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,* <sup>10</sup> *and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me.*" (Matthew 27:1-10)

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## Leading Jesus to Pilate

Israel existed within the political boundaries of the Roman Empire. They weren't free. They were a subjugated people. So they lacked certain freedoms. Having put Jesus through a ridiculous charade of a trial all night, they had no authority to actually put Jesus to death (John 18:31). This was a responsibility Pilate would have to shoulder. (We'll discuss that next time.)

Suffice it to say for now, God establishes institutions (whether church, state or family) for His own glory and the best interests and protection of people. When the foundation (who should always be Christ) of those institutions crumble, evil, tyranny and oppression surface. When David rhetorically asks: **“If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3)** The implied answer is ‘nothing’. (More on that in the weeks to come.) It appears that Matthew places this here merely to inform us of Judas’ response and interaction with the priests and elders. So let’s look there.

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## Devising Wicked Plans

It almost appears that Judas was surprised that Jesus was condemned. Perhaps he thought Christ would escape as He was able to make out of similar predicaments (John 7:44; 8:20; 10:39). There is much speculation as to what Judas was thinking and I don’t wish to engage in those theories here. But we do know some things:

Judas had his own plans. And they were plans that included a blatant lack of respect for the lordship of Christ. His plan included Jesus, but it wasn’t a plan that was humbly and prayerfully submitted to Jesus. The first question we must ask in any course of action is, “Is this an act of faithfulness?”

**Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, *which* they have prescribed (Isaiah 10:1).**

In the list of seven things which are especially abominable to the Lord we see **“a heart that devises wicked plans” (Proverbs 6:18)**. And a wicked plan can be very subtle. It is quite easy to deceive ourselves into thinking our plans are noble. One of the most insidious phrases that has morphed itself into church linguistics is “follow your heart.” The desires of

people's hearts have led them to some pretty dark places. Jeremiah instructs just the opposite, speaking of **"This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who follow the dictates of their hearts"** (Jeremiah 13:10).

Judas had a plan. It included greed, deception and betrayal. It was not a plan humbly submitted to Jesus. And now, like a bad meal, his evil plan would come back to him like indigestion.

## **The Indigestion of Sin**

Judas was remorseful. It would appear that even fallen man can feel bad about his behavior. Guilt, or conscience, or whatever you want to call it, isn't reserved for Christians.

Judas felt bad about what he did. So bad, in fact, that he brought the silver back – probably in an effort to assuage his guilty conscience. As excited as he was about getting the silver, now he was as anxious to lose it. And is this not the case with all sin – when it has run its course – when it's had its season (Hebrews 11:25)? **"The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment?"** (Job 20:5)

Whether it's a habit, a chemical, a plan, or a person – the very thing we found alluring is the thing we wish we could shed.

**Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. <sup>31</sup> Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, *when* it swirls around smoothly; <sup>32</sup> at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper (Proverbs 23:30-32).**

But it is not so easy to rid ourselves of the indigestion of sin. Certain foods burn in the mouth for a moment, others burn in the stomach for days.

**Though evil is sweet in his mouth, *and* he hides it under his tongue, <sup>13</sup> *though* he spares it and does not forsake it, but still keeps it in his mouth, <sup>14</sup> *yet* his food in his stomach turns sour; it becomes cobra venom within him (Job 20:12-14).**

Older people want younger people to know through their instruction what we have only learned through our mistakes. Bad decisions, bad

choices linger like an incurable disease. Judas sought to cure his own remorse by throwing down the silver. It apparently did not have the desired effect. So he confesses.

## A Confession of Sin

Judas confesses to the priests that he had sinned by betraying innocent blood. This speaks to me as a pastor/elder. How would we as a church have responded to Judas? Each Lord's Day we have a time of confession of sin. The congregation is not called to confess to the elders or pastors. We confess to and through our one true High Priest, Jesus (Hebrews 8:1).

Mistake number one is trying to atone for your own sin (in Judas' case by bringing back the silver – he should have brought it back, but he should not have thought he could undo the damage to his own soul). Mistake number two is confessing to human priests who have no power to forgive – especially these priests who were **“blind guides” (Matthew 23:16)**.

Rather than presenting Christ, through whom man finds forgiveness and entrance into the Kingdom of God, they had **“shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for (they) neither go in (themselves), nor do (they) allow those who are entering to go in” (Matthew 23:13)**. There may be nothing worse on this earth than clergy who profane their calling.

Rather than viewing Judas as a **“bruised reed (or) smoldering flax (who was not to be) quenched” (cf. Matthew 12:20)**, he is dismissed with a **“What is that to us? You see to it!”** They wouldn't sully their own hands by even taking back the silver. Judas finally had to just throw it down in the temple. If only Judas knew who they priests and what that temple was designed to foreshadow.

It is both dark and sad that men seek to comfort themselves with empty shadows. Guilt, whether felt or judicial, has only one solution – the cross of Christ. The clergy in this text didn't even entertain the idea that they were also complicit in this crime. **“What is that to us?”** may be the most damning statement in all of Scripture. Truly they were priests of the devil. They just didn't want to hear it!

But none of this alleviates the genuine guilt of Judas. He now follows the course of worldly sorrow to its logical conclusion.

## Ungodly Sorrow

The Apostle Paul writes of **“godly sorrow” (2 Corinthians 7:10)** which produces repentance. It is a good sorrow. It is productive. It is not morbid self-absorbed despair. It is not the sorrow of the world which **“produces death” (2 Corinthians 7:10)**. Instead of turning to Christ, Judas turns to a field and takes his own life.

What an affront to God! Not only did he sin, plot a wicked plan and reject the grace and forgiveness of God but now he sheds man’s blood. He becomes a murderer. That he murdered himself doesn’t alter the fact, for the offense in murder is that man kills one who is made **“in the image of God” (Genesis 9:6)**. That is what makes it a capital offense.

I find myself very conflicted when asked to do funerals of those who take their own lives. I can’t help feel sorrow and pity for their despair. Yet at the same time I find the act contemptible, selfish and a supreme insult to God who is life and the giver of life.

It’s been said that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. In a certain sense that may be true. But that is just something said to the living, that they may manage whatever dark period through which they may be suffering. But it is more likely a permanent curse to a problem that could have been solved had the person, instead of giving into melancholy, turned a compassionate and forgiving Savior.

Judas, like Cain, concluded that his sin was too great for God. He opted for the devil’s mercy rather than God’s. I pray none of us would ever be so foolish and dark.

We conclude this section by observing the ecclesiastical bureaucrats straining at gnats.

**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.”<sup>7</sup> And they consulted together and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in.<sup>8</sup> Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.<sup>9</sup> 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,<sup>10</sup> and gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.*” (Matthew 27:6-10)**

## Straining at Gnats

There is little doubt that this silver came from the treasury. But now it is too unholy to put back in the treasury (Deuteronomy 23:18). At some point, you wonder, somebody has to notice that the emperor isn't wearing any clothes! Do they not realize that it was their own actions that made it unholy?

So they have a meeting. Let's do a good deed! Let's buy a field in which to bury strangers. How practical! How functional! How many meetings are in the church where Jesus is asked to stand outside the door? Let us do our good deeds. We will be honored by men. The issue of Jesus is inconvenient and expendable.

But they could not hide what they did with the **"wages of iniquity"**. Peter later teaches that **"it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called... Field of Blood"** (Acts 1:19).

May God protect us, as a church, from straining at gnats. May the church in general always embrace its chief end to bring glory to God and placard a forgiving Savior to sinners. Let us never seek redemption elsewhere for it's simply not to be found except in Jesus, His death and resurrection.

### Questions for Study

1. What are some of the institutions God has created and what is their purpose (pages 2, 3)?
2. Judas had plans. What were they and what was wrong with them (pages 3, 4)?
3. How can sin be like indigestion (pages 4, 5)?
4. When is a confession of sin good and valuable? When is it meaningless (pages 5, 6)?
5. Discuss the different kinds of sorrows (page 6).
6. How were these priests straining at gnats (page 7)?