Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Traitor's Suicide
Scripture: Matthew 27:1-10
Code: 2392

Let's open our Bibles to the twenty-seventh chapter of Matthew...Matthew chapter 27. I read this week that each year twice as many Americans kill themselves as kill each other. Suicide ranks among the top ten killers in the United States and we're way way down the list of nations in terms of frequency of suicide per population. We don't really report suicides always very well and so we may estimate as high as twice the number of reported suicides would be the actual number.

I found myself asking the inevitable question: why do people do that? Why do people murder themselves? And I began to look a little bit into some research to try to find out and basically most of those who analyze human behavior come up with five reasons which may be interwoven and overlapping somewhat but they basically are the categories in which suicides fall.

First of all, some people kill themselves for what we could call retaliation...retaliation. They want to get back at someone. They're angry and they want to hurt someone and they think the best way to hurt someone is to kill themselves. And very often they are right. They will inflict a hurt on someone from which that person can never recover.

A second reason that people kill themselves is what we could call reunion. This particularly is common among those who kill themselves of older age. They have lost their life partner, someone very dear to them, someone on whom they have a great amount of dependence. And rather than try to live alone, they take their life in order to join that person wherever they may believe that person is.

Thirdly, some people take their lives out of what we could call rebirth. In other words, they're tired of the way it is in this life and they'd like to get another shot at it. They believe maybe in reincarnation, they believe maybe there's another world somewhere and it would be better than the one here and they'd like to try all over again and hope for a better fate.

And then there is a very distorted and unusual reason for suicide that is somewhat common and that is what psychologists have called "retroflex." And that is to say that someone is very angry and very mad at someone else but they can't kill someone else so they kill themselves out of frustration. Like the man who killed himself committing his own suicide because there was one Nazi war criminal he knew was alive and wasn't yet discovered. And so, in a strange and bizarre quirk and twist of his own thinking, he took his own life.

But far and away the most dominant reason is what we could call retribution. People take their lives to inflict upon themselves a severe punishment which they believe they should receive. They have sinned, they imagine their guilt to be irremedial. There's no remedy for it. They imagine that there's no way they can come out from under the anxiety and the pressure of their own conscience. And because they feel themselves so guilty and so wrong and they lose all sense of self-value and self-worth, their self-image is devastated, they are total failures overwhelmed by guilt, they kill themselves as a ultimate punishment, seeing death self-inflicted as a way to deal with their own guilt. A guilt-ridden conscience then probably is a dominant factor in many many suicides. It may not be the only factor but it is a dominant factor in many suicides. The guilt that a person feels may be real guilt as a result of real sin and real wrong and real evil, or it may be artificial. It may be unreal. It may be inflicted upon them by unrealistic standards established on them by their parents, or peers or even by their own desires.

You have two classic suicides in the Scripture that are illustrations of this. One in the Old Testament and one in the New. In fact, they're really the only suicides in Scripture. It is true that two others we know killed themselves, Saul and his armor bearer, but that was a little bit different. They were in the middle of a battle, they were being defeated, Saul didn't want himself captured by his enemy, he didn't want the enemy to have the privilege of dismembering him, or doing some atrocity against him and so he took his own life, in a sense, as a self- inflicted wound in the midst of a battle to prevent his enemy from gaining his ends and his armor bearer died with him.

But in the classic definition of suicide, there are two in Scripture...one in the Old and one in the New. The Old Testament suicide is Ahithophel who betrayed David. The New Testament one is Judas who betrayed Jesus Christ. In both cases, they took their lives out of the guilt of betraying an innocent person, their plans going array, everything falling apart. And unable to deal with the anxiety that came about as a result of it all, they took their own lives. You can read about Ahithophel in 2 Samuel 17. We'll read about the suicide of Judas in Matthew 27 this morning.

We come then to this portion of Scripture that treats the suicide of Judas Iscariot. The man with the most promise, the man in the greatest place of potential blessing, the man who becomes because of his great privilege the greatest human tragedy who ever lived and died. And here in this passage it tells us that he killed himself. In verse 5 at the end it says he hanged himself.

Now Scripture obviously would infer in the case of Judas and in the case of Ahithophel, of course, that suicide was an act of an evil and deranged mind and is not a viable solution. It is a crime against God. It is a crime against self. Suicide is unacceptable. It is to rebelliously usurp sovereignty. It is to take a prerogative on oneself that belongs only to God who gives life and takes life. It is an act of sin. It is an act of unbelief. It is an act of lack of trust...lack of trust in the wisdom and purpose and plan of God. Even though it is a sin and a violation of the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not murder," and

even thou it is a violation of the sovereignty of God and a rebellious act against Him and an evidence of a lack of faith and trust, frankly in the case of Judas it seems to me to have been inevitable. It does seem to have been inevitable.

If suicide can be and often is the result of unrelieved guilt, then we can understand the suicide of Judas because his guilt was so monstrous. If guilt less than his can bring about suicide, then guilt at the level of his could surely do it. For he committed the most enormous crime that any man ever committed, for he betrayed the most innocent man, the only perfect man that ever lived. And he really only had two choices. Either he could go to Jesus Christ whom he had betrayed and seek to make it right, or he could eliminate himself. There were only two ways to deal with his guilt. It either had to be forgiveness or self- destruction. And he opted for self-destruction.

So, in our passage today, Matthew takes us away from the trial of Christ for a moment to follow the story of Judas to its very tragic end. And may I suggest to you Matthew had a purpose? His primary purpose in giving us the story of Judas was not to just tell us the story of Judas. It was to demonstrate the innocence, the purity and the perfection and majesty of Jesus Christ, as always Matthew is presenting Christ. He is presenting the King. And even in this scene that we'll see today, Jesus Christ is exalted against the evil backdrop of the horrible death of Judas.

Now Matthew does this in a series of contrasts, the first of which we've already looked at but we are reminded of it in verses 1 and 2. It is a contrast that he has been making between the unjust leaders and the sinless Lord. As we have been following the first two phases of the Jewish trial of Christ, we have been made very much aware of the illegality, the injustice and the immorality of the trial. There has been no legitimate accusation against Jesus. He has been permitted no defense. There were false witnesses called and bribed to give false testimony. Judas was bribed to be a traitor. The trial was held in the middle of the night which was forbidden in the house of Caiaphas which was forbidden, it was to be in the daytime in the judgment hall. Every single statute which accommodated their justice system was violated. And in the midst of it all, the silent majestic Christ stands innocent. They can come up with absolutely nothing. Try as they will, bribe as they will, they cannot come up with an accusation. With all the means that they have as evil men who are energized by Satan and his demon hosts, the combination of evil men, leaders, Satan and the demons cannot come up with one viable testimony to Jesus Christ that could bring against Him an accusation of evil. And that is to say that when all the worst that earth and hell can do has been done, Jesus still stands without rebuke. A tremendous testimony to the sinlessness of Jesus Christ. Hell would want the world to believe Him to be sinful. The world of evil men themselves would want to convince the world of His sin, but neither can accomplish that.

And so, we see the unjust leaders using all their means illegally and immorally to convict Christ. And yet in the midst is the sinless Lord. Finally they decide to kill Him for blasphemy and what is His blasphemy? That He said He was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that wasn't blasphemy, that was

the truth. So He will be executed for the truth, for being who He really is. He stands as the sinless Messiah, the Son of God as over against the unjust leaders who have tried to accuse Him. And the contrast between the two paints the majesty of Jesus so beautifully and clearly.

We come back to that in verse 1 for a moment. Already phase one and two of the Jewish trial have occurred between 1 and 3 in the morning. Since that time, Jesus has been a bound prisoner in the house of Caiaphas. He's been waiting there until the dawn. They want to have another trial at the dawn, just a few minutes long, so they can put a veneer of legality over their illegal trial. They know the law requires it be held in the daytime. And they know it requires it be held in the judgment hall. So they wait till dawn to have a very quick trial in the judgment hall right at sunrise so that they can make the thing appear to be legal and still get it over with before the people arise and get involved because the people were attracted to Jesus Christ and might become a problem.

So, verse 1 says, "When the morning was come," Friday morning, sunrise, their verdict already rendered before the trial, phase one and phase two already held between 1 and 3 in the morning. Now the veneer of legality, it says, "All the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel." They all came together. Mark says the whole Sanhedrin. Luke says they led Him into their counsel. And it might be best to sense that that is what...what Luke is saying there is that this time they had it in their counsel, into their counsel He went, that is in the proper place, the judgment hall. So they were trying to legalize the thing by having it in the right place at the right time, though the verdict was already decided.

It says they took counsel, it actually means they passed a resolution. They took a vote, a formal vote so it would appear to be a legal trial to put Jesus to death. Their vote was against Him. We know that the vote was unanimous or near unanimous. We know that this was the consensus by far. There was one member, Joseph of Arimathaea who consented not to the death of Christ, whether he was there or not consenting, or whether he was absent, we don't know. But apart from him we know of no other dissent. So it was their desire to kill Jesus, thanatoo, to put Him to death, to kill Him.

The problem was they had no right to murder because they were under Roman occupation, only the Romans had the right of execution. John 18:31 says they said it is not lawful for us to put anyone to death. So by their own admission they had no right to do what they now decided must be done, therefore they had to take Jesus to the Roman authorities. And verse 2 says, "When they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate, the governor."

Pontius Pilate had been assigned to rule that region. His headquarters was down at the seashore at Caesarea. He was in Jerusalem now because it was the Passover and they increased the ranks of troops and there was always the potential of a problem. So he was on top of that, staying in Fort Antonious which was very near the temple ground, and no doubt near the house of Caiaphas and just at the east of the city by the Mount of Olives. So Pilate was there. He had his place there. And they

bound Jesus after they had made their final verdict and led Him away to deliver Him to Pontius Pilate. He was governor of that area from 26 A.D. to about 36, right through the ministry and death of Christ. And he is going to play a large picture, we'll look more closely at him later on. We're not going to spend time with him right now.

The Jewish trial then is over. And as you come to verse 2 you begin the Roman trial. The religious ecclesiastical trial is over, now comes the Roman secular trial. They've got to decide whether it's in fact legitimate for them to execute this man whom the Jews want dead.

Now what is a marvelous thing about this Jewish trial that has just ended is that after all that they could do, all night long and all the resources at their disposal, they came up with no accusation that was legitimate against Christ. And therefore He shines in all His glory and all His beauty and they are the ugly ones, they are the liars and they are the bribers and they are the murderers who kill the innocent Son of God to preserve their own sin.

Now you will remember that I mentioned to you some weeks ago that Jewish law required that when a verdict of death was put upon a person, it couldn't come about until the third day...the day of the decision, a day in between and the third day they could be executed. From the time of the decision until the actual execution, the Sanhedrin or council was required to stay seated in session and they remained in session so that at any time someone with new evidence, with new information could come back to them and bring that new information to them, tell them they knew now something that needed to be brought into the case. They were obligated then to bring the prisoner back, retry the case based on new evidence. That was a protection against the hasty execution of someone who might be innocent.

We also know and we learned in the past that the ones who were found to be false witnesses, who sought a person's death through their false testimony were to pay with their own death, right? Deuteronomy 16:16 to 19, the false witness who seeks a certain punishment for a person receives the punishment he falsely seeks. So the unjust leaders should have been in session but instead they are all involved in this rabble mob leading Jesus to Pilate. They have left their place. So they continue their injustice, they continue the illegal function, the whole thing is illegal from start to finish. And the contrast is obvious between the unjust leaders and the sinless Lord.

Now that brings us to verse 3 and another contrast between the guilty Judas and the innocent Jesus...the guilty Judas and the innocent Jesus. And this is a powerful, powerful and dramatic scene. And frankly it is a fascinating thing to watch the Holy Spirit take the guilt of Judas and this whole ugly scene and use it to portray the innocence of Jesus Christ. It is just masterful as we would expect from the infinite mind of the Spirit of God.

Verse 3, "Then," that is then when they had bound Him and led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate, verse 2, the then in verse 3 could be translated "at that time." That's its implication. At the very time Jesus was being led to Pilate, "Then Judas the betrayer," that becomes his title, the one who betrayed him, it is a participle, "Judas the betrayer when he saw that He," that is Jesus, "was condemned." Very strong word, katakrino, condemned to judgment.

Now here's the scene. Judas saw...the Greek word means to see, araro(??), with the eye. Judas must have been lingering around. Now when he was leading the parade of soldiers and priests into the garden to kiss Jesus and take Him captive, he probably followed with that crowd right out of that garden, down the Mount of Olives, up into the region of the high priest's house. We don't know whether he went all the way inside like John did and Peter did, or whether he was left outside. We have no knowledge. We don't know whether he went in to be a witness against Christ. We don't know anything about that. We just see him here as Jesus is transported from the Jewish trial to the place of Pilate. And in process, Judas who betrayed Him saw Jesus was condemned.

He had a visual experience of Jesus tied up, bound, being taken to Pilate. Whether he saw Him leaving the judgment hall in transit or having arrived at the place of Pilate in Fort Antonious, we don't know. But there he is. And just as when Peter saw Jesus and Jesus saw Peter, he was literally devastated in the sight of Jesus and overcome with his own sinfulness, so Judas has the same reaction. Seeing Jesus condemned tears Judas to the very core. And it says, "When he saw He was condemned, he...and the Greek word should be...regretted, or he felt sad, or he felt remorse." He felt pain.

You see, the whole scene is more than his sorted soul can handle. It is more than his crippled conscience, his money- hungry mind can deal with. He is feeling the pain of guilt and the pain is agonizing and excruciating and paralyzing because he knows that what he has done is evil. You say, "Why did he feel bad? Was it the fear of men?" No, it wasn't the fear of men. What did he have to fear from men? They would have patted him on the back. They would have congratulated him. He was doing for them what they wanted done. It wasn't the fear of man.

You say, "Well, maybe it was the fear of God." I don't think it was the fear of God either. If he was feeling the fear of God, he would have gone to God to try to resolve it.

Basically what he felt was simply the essential wrongness of what he did. It is to say that built into every human soul, no matter how sinful and how depraved and how vile and how unconscientable in a sense they are, there is still built into them a sense of wrongness, an innate understanding of the essential evil of a certain deed.

Now we look at a man like Judas and we say no man could be more evil than that man. I mean, how evil must a man be to spend three years with Jesus Christ and then wind up betraying Him? I mean,

denying the reality of all the miracles as to their logical conclusion in his mind, rejecting the deity of Jesus Christ, rejecting His love, rejecting His mercy, grace, kindness, compassion, rejecting His power, totally unbelieving, totally secular, no faith in Christ as the Son of God, no faith in Him as the Savior and that after three intimate years with Him, a man who not only showed the depth of his sin by his continual rejection of the presence of Christ, but whose sin is even intensified by the fact that it was said of him, "One of you is a devil," and the Lord had him in mind. And Jesus said about him what He never said about anyone else in Scripture, "Satan having entered into Judas." Scripture says that. He was Satan- possessed. He is called a devil. He showed the kind of sinfulness that cannot even be broken by the intimate presence of the Son of God Himself over three years. This is a wretched sinful man. This is a man deeply trapped in the darkness and blackness of his own evil soul.

And yet, it is an amazing thing to note that though he is so profoundly evil, he cannot escape the divinely designed internal mechanisms of guilt that ring the bells that warn a man of impending hell. You understand that? He feels guilt. And I'm glad for that. God has built even into the worst of sinners the sense of wrong, the sense of evil that sets off the alarm system. That is God's gift to man to hold him back from evil and its ultimate end, eternal hell. Even the devil himself indwelling him, even the demons at the apex of their activity, even sin when its reached its highpoint can't cancel out God's warning system. And listen, you and I can be grateful for that warning system because if we're Christians, once it drove us to Christ.

Judas is hit by guilt. And the Authorized version says he repented. That's an unfortunate translation. Because that would indicate to us that it's the word metanoeowhich is used all through the Bible for salvation repentance, or genuine repentance from sin. It is not that word. It is the word metamelomai which means to feel sorry, to feel sad, to wish it hadn't happened. And that's as far as it goes.

There is a sorrow, 2 Corinthians 7:8 to 10 says, that leads to repentance. There is a metamelomai that leads to metanoeo, but this isn't it. There is a true repentance and a true sorrow. This is a psychological sorrow. This is an emotional sorrow. This is an attitude that wishes it hadn't happened. And the text really would read that he began to feel remorse...he began to feel regret.

How much regret did he feel? How much sorrow did he feel? Well, follow what happened. "He brought again the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders." The only thing he knew to do was undo what he had done. So he went to the chief priests. Now I don't know where they are but it's probably the best guess that he approached them right there in their transit, taking Jesus to the place where Pilate would rule on Him. He comes to them in the midst of the fever of his own guilt and he approaches them, wanting to undo what he did, he wants to give back the 30 pieces of silver. This is how he wants to relieve his psychological pain like someone who goes to a counselor because they're having so much guilt and wants the counselor to help them track back through all their experiences that created guilt and try to unwind all of that in retrospect, try to undo whatever caused

it.

There's no sense in seeking God. There's no sense of seeking the Lord. It's as if he sought not righteousness but relief. He sought not holiness but health. He sought not a Savior but a salve. He had feelings but there was no change in his heart about sin, there was no change in his mind about who Christ was, there was no desire for the truth, there was no belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior. He just wanted to get rid of his pain. He wanted to unload his guilt because he knew that he had betrayed an innocent man. And the essential wrongness of that went off in him like an explosion and created pain in every part of his being. And the blood money which he wanted so badly, the very same thing he longed for so greatly, when he finally got it burned holes in his hands like hot lead.

What does he say? By the way...sin is like that. What you think you want so bad when you get it gives you nothing but a guilt you can't deal with. That's just the way sin is. It looks good and then you take it and it stings with a poison that you may the rest of your life except for the grace of God never be relieved from. Verse 4, he says, and this is an incredible thing that he says, "I have sinned." And he uses the word for sin, the strong New Testament word for sin. "In that I have betrayed innocent blood." He doesn't say this is God, this is God's Son, this is the Savior, he just says I have sinned because I have betrayed innocent blood. This is a confession. Oh what a confession it is. I can't tell you what a confession this is. The watching world needs to understand this. This is Judas testifying to the perfection of Jesus Christ. This is His archenemy, humanly speaking. This is His traitor, His betrayer saying this is an innocent man. All the world try to accuse Jesus, the demons couldn't do it, Satan couldn't do it successfully. The Jewish leaders couldn't do it successfully. And Judas couldn't do it and now he comes back and says He's an innocent man, I betrayed innocent blood, I'm the one that sinned.

What is the meaning of this? The meaning of this is simple. Judas is following basic Jewish jurisprudence. Judas came back as a false witness to confess that he was a false witness. I believe in my heart that Judas wanted them to take his life. I believe he came back under such tremendous guilt that he wanted to have his life taken. He knew Deuteronomy 16, surely, that a false witness who witnesses against a person unto death pays with his own life. I think he wanted relief. And I know he wanted death because when they wouldn't take his life, he took his own life. I believe Judas would have wanted them to give him the punishment he was due, to inflict upon himself a payment for the guilt that he was feeling in his heart. And I doubt that any man who ever lived felt more guilt than Judas felt because no man ever committed a more enormous crime than he committed. And so he wanted that.

Furthermore, the Sanhedrin by Jewish law should have been sitting in session and when he came back and said this is an innocent man, that introduction of a new thought should have made them retry Christ, particularly when it was the very man who was the chief witness against Him to start with.

And it shows again how injust the trial was.

But listen carefully. You know and I know, and I thought about this for really the first time as I was mulling this over on Friday, you know and I know that a man who is this distressed who is under this much anxiety and guilt would try every way possible in his mind to come up with something Jesus did which would justify in his own thinking his act of betraying Christ. You understand that? He would have done anything to come up with a word or a deed or an act or something that Jesus did or said somewhere sometime that would show Him to be an evil man and therefore justify in Judas' own mind this act of betrayal. But the fact that he comes back and says this is an innocent man is indicative of the fact that even a desperate man wanting to salvage his own soul and his own life and deliver himself from the pain of guilt can't find one thing on which he can rationalize his own act...not one thing. So the testimony of the Jewish leaders against Jesus is they can't find an accusation. The testimony of Judas against Him, intimate for three years, he can't find an accusation.

So, you have those who are His avowed enemies agreeing on the fact that He is a perfect man. What a testimony. What a testimony. And though energized and controlled by Satan and demons, no accusation stands. You know what their response was when he came back? Look at verse 4, they said so what...what is that to us? What do we care? You see to it. What do we care?

Real shepherds, aren't they? Really concerned about Him. Jesus rightly characterized them in the twenty-third chapter, I think it's the fourth verse where He says they bind heavy burdens on men that are too much to be borne and they don't help them carry it. They don't care. They're indifferent to this man's sorrow, they're indifferent to his guilt, indifferent to his pain, his anxiety, his remorse. They are stone-cold hard- hearted, they have no concern for the pain of this man's soul. They won't hear it.

And I'm telling you something right now. When Matthew wrote this and it spread around, the Jews would read it as justification for impeaching the entire Sanhedrin. If your chief witness comes back and says he's a liar, you must hear that testimony. Their refusal to hear it and their statement, "What is that to us?...See to it yourself," is reason for impeachment. They should have all been impeached. They are the criminals based on the testimony of Judas.

And Deuteronomy 27:25 says, "Cursed is he that takes reward to slay an innocent person." Judas, I think, knew that he was cursed. I don't know that he understood all the theology of it, I know he understood the guilt of it. And the Sanhedrin should have taken his life. They should have been impeached for not taking his life, not rehearing the case, not exonerating Jesus Christ. The only guilty person in this whole thing is the enemy of Christ. But the world doesn't give the sinner anything. They don't give him sympathy. They can't give him forgiveness. They won't even take his life and give him relief. They won't give him anything. The world never does. And the testimony of Jesus is so powerful here.

So, what does he do then? What is Judas going to do? How's he doing to deal with this? How's he going to unload this terrific anxiety? Well, verse 5, "He then," it says, "cast down the pieces of silver in the temple and left."

He went to the temple and he threw it down. The word in the Greek is rhipto, it's a word that means to throw down in angry defiance, might be a good way to put it. It's a word of anger, a word of defiance.

And what is he doing here? Well, he went to the leaders and tried to give back the money. They wouldn't take it. Some people say, "Well, he went and threw it in the temple because he had a heart for charity." No...no, he didn't turn instantly into a philanthropist. He wasn't preoccupied with doing a wonderful deed for the folks in the city. He had another reason.

The word here, temple, would you notice it? It's very important, it's the key to understanding this whole thing. There are two words in the Greek language that are used in the gospels for temple. One is hieronand the other is naos. The first one means the temple total, the whole area, the courtyards, the walls, the whole thing...very broad. The other is the word naos, it refers to the holy place and the Holy of Holies, the sanctuary in the middle. When he went back, he didn't just throw the silver into the hieron, he didn't just throw it into the whole place, into the courtyard where anybody could pick it up and put it in the receptacles and use it for whatever they wanted. He didn't just throw it in there for poor people to put in their pockets. He threw it in the naos, he went right inside to the courtyard, right inside to the court of the women where the offerings were given, he went beyond that to the door of the holy place and the Holy of Holies and he took that money and he threw it inside the holy place, the naos. Every time that word is used in the gospels it has reference to the sanctuary itself, the inner place, the holy place.

He threw it in there...why? Charity? No. Spite. There was only group of people that could go in there. Who was it? Priests. And he was saying to them, "If you won't take it willingly and do something with it, I'll force you to take it and do something with it." And he threw it into a place where only the priests could go and therefore they had to deal with it. It was an act of spite.

And then he left. And it says, "And hanged himself." And hanged himself. There are only two classic suicides in the Bible. Both of those suicides, Ahithophel and Judas, were betrayers and killed themselves because of the guilt of betrayal, at least in part. And both of them, and they are the only two in Scripture, hanged themselves. Why? Why did he hang himself? Couldn't he have done something other than that? Of course. Why did he do that?

In Deuteronomy 21:23 there is a well-known Old Testament passage and it would have been known to Judas as well as to any other Jew. It is known to you because it is repeated in the New Testament

in Galatians. It says this, "Cursed is he that hangeth...what?...on a tree." I believe as in the case of Ahithophel, so in the case of Judas, it is again that retribution concept that recognizes the enormity of sin that wants to curse itself to punish itself. So Judas takes his life as an ultimate act of punishment and does it in a way that is ultimately cursed by God, inflicting upon himself what he feels he justly deserves because of the overpowering guilt that exists in his soul due to the sin that he commits. He went and hanged himself.

He went to the chief priests, only a few feet away was Jesus. He went to the wrong ones, didn't he? He could have gone to Jesus Christ. But he didn't. He didn't believe in Jesus Christ. He didn't believe He could forgive sin or he would have gone. He didn't believe He was the Son of God. He went, said Scripture, to his own place, the place where he belonged, where his heart was..to hell itself. And that didn't relieve him, by the way. No, death doesn't relieve guilt. Death doesn't relieve sin. Death doesn't relieve misery. And death doesn't relieve pain. It just makes it permanent and intensifies it beyond imagination. Whatever Judas suffered before he killed Jesus, he suffers this day, far more severely than he did then.

In Acts chapter 1 it says that he fell headlong, verse 18, on some rocks and his bowels gushed out when he burst open. People say, "Well how can you harmonize those two things?" Very easy, he hanged himself, the branch broke, the rope broke, the noose slipped, I don't know what happened...but the combination of both is very simple. He hanged himself as ineptly as he did everything else and fell, crushed on the rocks beneath...a sad tragic man.

Verse 6, the chief priests now have the money. What are they going to do with it? "They took it and they said, It is not lawful to put them in the treasury." Boy, it's pretty disgusting hypocrisy, isn't it? Now they're going to get real lawful. It is not lawful to put this in the treasury. Listen to this, "Because it is the price of blood." It is blood money.

Now, folks, you have something that's absolutely unbelievable. You now have not only the testimony of Judas to the innocence of Christ, but the testimony of the whole Sanhedrin. They finally said it. It is blood money. You know what blood money was? Money illegitimately paid to someone to get someone else killed. Here you have the testimony for all time and for all the world right out of the mouths of the chief priests themselves that the money they gave to Judas was blood money. They're so sanctimonious, they didn't mind taking it out of the treasury to be blood money, but they were too pious to put it back where it came from because it was blood money. They in their own mouths confirm the bloody deed they did in bribing Judas. It is the price of blood. They said it. Let history record it. It isn't the testimony of God only that it was blood money, it isn't the testimony of the Bible writer that it was blood money only, it is the testimony of the men who bribed the traitor that it was blood money.

And so they had a counsel in verse 7. And what are we going to do with it? We can't put it in the korbanas, the temple treasury. Blood money is unacceptable. So they had a meeting. Took another vote from a resolution. And they bought with the 30 pieces the potter's field. Now a potter's field is a place where you pick up clay. Potter needs clay. Potter's field would be a place that had been used by potters for a long time, all the clay had been scraped off. It was probably down to bare rock. There wasn't anything left. It was useless in a sense. It was just a field that was there. You could probably buy it fairly cheaply. And so they decided to buy the potter's field, no longer being used, or perhaps still being used, but for sale to bury alien people in, bury people who came to Jerusalem on pilgrimages and whatever to be there, probably Gentiles. They wanted a place to put Gentiles. So they would use sort of vile polluted money to buy a polluted field to bury polluted Gentiles in. That was their idea.

It was sort of a good will gesture toward Gentiles who came to Jerusalem and died. And maybe they were poor, indigent, didn't have enough money to pay for their own burial, they didn't know where they came from and they wanted to dispose of them in a nice way, so they thought they would do a charitable deed for the strangers that populated their city. And so they bought this field. Hmph!

Their testimony that this is blood money is demonstrated by the fact that they said they couldn't put it in the treasury and by the fact that they bought a field that could only be used to put Gentiles in. So by their own lips they confess to their deed.

That brings us to the last contrast...the hypocrisy of men and the prophecy of God. So they bought the field...the potter's field. Verse 8 says, "The field was called not the potter's field but...what?...the field of...what?...blood?" Who called it that? The people did. Thirty years after this when Matthew writes, it is called the "field of blood" to this day.

Now listen to this. Why did they call it a field of blood? It was a potter's field, it was a burial place...now it was the field of blood because it was bought with...what?...blood money. Now listen to me. Now you have the population of Jerusalem have nicknamed this field the field of blood, so their testimony is that that money which Judas received, gave back, which was used to buy the field was blood money, we attest to it, therefore you have the testimony of the population themselves that Jesus was executed by bribery...unlawfully.

The testimony of the Sanhedrin, they can't find anything against Him. The testimony of Judas, he can't find anything against Him. The testimony of Pilate, He is an innocent man. The testimony of the Sanhedrin, this is blood money, the whole thing is illegal. We've said it, we've admitted it. The testimony of the whole population of Jerusalem 30 years later, it is the field of blood, Jesus died because of bribery. The whole testimony comes together.

And you think that was men? The hypocrisy of men was nothing but fulfilling the prophecy of God. Verse 9, "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet saying, And they took the 30 pieces of silver, the price of Him that was valued whom they the children of Israel did value and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me."

Men thought they were doing their work, and all the time they were fulfilling God's plan. It was prophecy. Now listen carefully as we close, very carefully to what I say so you won't miss this. This act of buying that field to bury strangers in was a testimony of the whole...to the whole community, a living memorial to the bribery, to the blood money. Let me add a footnote. The place, Acts 1:18 and 19 says, where Judas fell and his bowels gushed out, that's about 43 days after this, the people also called the field of blood. Why? Because Judas was associated with the blood money. The place he died was a "field of blood," 43 days later. Thirty years later the field they bought was the "field of blood." The testimony of the populace then was anything that even related to Judas was a field of blood. And that was to say that innocent blood was shed. Which means the blood is on somebody's hands when innocent blood is shed.

Was that the plot of man? No, it was the plan of God. Yes, the plot of man in a sense, but really the plan of God. Because that's what the prophet said. Now I want you to notice verse 9, I'm going to mention something briefly. This prophecy comes from Zechariah chapter 11 verses 12 and 13. Now mark that. It comes from Zechariah chapter 11 verses 12 and 13. It is changed from the Hebrew. It is altered by the Holy Spirit to give its full meaning. In Zechariah it mentions the 30 pieces of silver. It mentions the potter's field. But if all you had was Zechariah, you wouldn't understand the fullness of the prophecy, so the Holy Spirit here alters the words a brief bit in order to make its meaning full. And that the Holy Spirit has a right to do. But it is a direct prophecy from Zechariah. You can't make it fit into Jeremiah. Some people try to see it alluded to in Jeremiah 18, others in Jeremiah 19, it isn't there.

You say, "Well then, is the Bible wrong? Why does it say Jeremiah." Let me tell you why. Very simple. When the Jews divided the Old Testament, they divided it into three sections: the law, the prophets and...what?...the writings. If you look, for example, in Luke 24:44 you will find that Jesus refers to the law, the prophets and the psalmos, the psalms. All the wisdom literature falls under the Psalms. You have the law, the prophets and the Psalms. It's the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes all the wisdom literature, Song of Solomon, but its heading is the Psalms. The category of the prophets in rabbinic tradition, in rabbinic manuscripts and in the Talmud is always headed by the book of Jeremiah. So to a Jew the three sections of the Old Testament would be the law, Jeremiah and the Psalms. So when the writer refers to Jeremiah, he is simply taking the name that was at the top of the prophetic roll which was Jeremiah because his prophecy was listed first, then came the major prophets and then the minor prophets. And it's no different than what Jesus did when He referred to a whole category of wisdom literature as the Psalms, because that is the heading on that scroll as well. So there's no contradiction. Prophecy was fulfilled.

Isn't it marvelous again? Here Jesus appears to be humiliated but the truth is He is exalted, He is exalted by the inability of the counsel to find any accusation against Him. He is exalted by the testimony of the chief witness and bribed traitor as to His innocence. He is exalted by the testimony of the Sanhedrin themselves that they have blood money in their hands. He is exalted by the testimony of the populace of Jerusalem who call everything related to this incident blood, a field of blood. And He is exalted by the very fact that all of this fulfills the prophecy of the Old Testament. And so, out of the ugliness of the scene comes the beauty of Jesus Christ. And He stands majestic and that is the writer's intention. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for this tremendous portrayal of Christ. We are in awe of the wonder of His person, as all the evil hostile world of His time amassed itself against Him and could do nothing but confirm His utter perfection, His sinless innocence. We bless Your name for this testimony to the perfection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who died for us, who rose again, who lives to intercede, who comes to gather us into His Kingdom. I pray, Lord, that there might not be anyone here who would reject this Christ but that all of us would see in Him the perfect Son of God without sin, the Savior of the world and our own Savior. We pray that every soul here would reach out to receive the gift of forgiveness and salvation that was even available to Judas if he would have come. May our repentance be the true repentance that seeks Thee and available forgiveness and not just the regret that ends in eternal disaster. All of us sin, all men sin and they make a choice to live with the pain of that guilt eternally or to be forgiven eternally. O God, by Your Holy Spirit, work the right choice in the heart of every person.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).