

Seller's Remorse 5-28-06

Matthew 27:1-10 (NIV)

¹ Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. ² They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. ³ When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴ "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." ⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. ⁶ The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." ⁷ So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. ⁸ That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹ Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, ¹⁰ and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

The Sanhedrin had their illegal midnight kangaroo court. Judas did not show up to testify, so they hired false witnesses to lie about what Jesus had said. (Matthew 26:59-60) The high priest, Caiaphas, demanded Jesus to tell them if He was the Messiah. Jesus told them, "I am!" (Mark 14:62) and He warned them that they would see Him return on the clouds of heaven. (Matthew 26:64) Without giving Him the opportunity to defend His Scriptural quotations, they declared Him guilty of blasphemy, of making Himself equal to God. Certainly He was guilty of that, but was it true? They did not care. They wanted Him out of the way. It is out of ignorance that people today claim that Jesus never said He was God. That was the basis of this trial.

¹ Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. The chief priests and elders met in the early morning to make their decision official. It was a way around their breaking their own law against meeting in the middle of the night. They were experts at legal loopholes. They were accomplished deceivers. They had forgotten the warning of the prophet Micah. *Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it.* Micah 2:1 (NIV)

Little children are such bad liars. You can usually tell right away, but soon they get skilled at it. At first I got rid of my vegetables by hiding them in the bottom of my glass of milk. Then you realize that whoever does the dishes is going to find out. Feeding them to the dog hides the evidence. Most people mature beyond the outright lie, and graduate to distortion. We redefine words. "I finished my vegetables." I did not say how I finished them but they were finished when the dog ate them. You know that famous line, "It depends on what the meaning of "is" is. We start to acquire the skills that many politicians are noted for, you know, not really saying what you mean or meaning what you say. The Sanhedrin broke every rule in the book, but by meeting in the morning, they were able to give their actions a legitimate spin.

Commented [notes1]: 59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.

60 But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward
Matthew 26:59-60 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 62 "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."
Mark 14:62 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."
Matthew 26:64 (NIV)

We can shake our finger at the Sanhedrin, but we play the same games. We need laws because man is sinful. Avoiding the laws of the land is our sinful nature's way around that restraint. (Romans 13:1) The money hungry nature of the Sanhedrin manipulated their laws to rid themselves of this Man who threatened to eliminate their lucrative temple business. (Matthew 21:12-13) If we are tempted to avoid the law, we should ask ourselves what the motivating factor in our heart really is.

² They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. The Jews could not legally put a man to death. They had to ask Rome to carry out a capital sentence. They had tried to trap Jesus before with the question of taxation, in the hopes of using Rome to do their dirty work. (Luke 20:20) Now they would do just as Jesus had predicted by handing Him over to the Gentiles. (Mark 10:33) Jesus knew He would be crucified. I do not know if He realized that because of Psalm 22, or because the Holy Spirit revealed it to Him, but He knew. It was no surprise to Him that they were taking Him to Pilate. (Psalm 22:16)

Skeptics once claimed that Pilate was a fictional character. He was not found in any Roman records that remained from that time. Quite by accident, archeologists uncovered a stone in Caesarea that dedicated the amphitheater there to him. His existence and role in Israel is no longer questioned. The persistence with which people try to disprove the Bible is evidence to me of its powerful claim on the lives of mankind. The last century of archeology has only served to verify the Bible's accuracy in regards to people and places.

³ When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. Though Judas did not appear to testify at the trial, he must have witnessed the outcome from some hidden location. Did Judas think that Jesus was going to use supernatural power to establish the kingdom of David? Or did He think Jesus would miraculously escape as He had in the past? The money issue surely clouded Judas' thinking. The enticement of money has clouded many decisions. Remember it was Judas who asked, "What will you give me if I hand Him over to you?" (Matthew 26:15) The money was a motivating factor, but just like the religious leaders, Judas was probably justifying his actions in his own mind. It is in our old nature to do so.

This pattern goes right back to the Garden. God asked Adam why he disobeyed and he pointed to the woman. God asked the woman and she pointed to the serpent. (Genesis 3:12-13) The light of conviction shines in our conscience and we grab a mirror of justification and reflect it onto someone else. Surely it cannot be our fault. In doing so we are declaring that we are righteous and God is not. Listen to Adam's wording. "The woman YOU put here with me..." Then next time you attempt to escape the conviction of the Holy Spirit, look at your justification. It often points back to God in some round about way. We would never say we are righteous and God is not, but our old nature believes it. Forget about the old, "Devil made me do it!" excuse. The depraved nature says, "God made me do it."

I think it was a real shock to Judas when Jesus was condemned. I think he thought that Jesus would act like an Old Testament prophet and strike the counsel with

Commented [notes4]: Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.
Romans 13:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.
13 "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" Matthew 21:12-13 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 20 Keeping a close watch on him, they sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand him over to the power and authority of the governor.
Luke 20:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 33 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles,
Mark 10:33 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 16 Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.
Psalms 22:16 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins.
Matthew 26:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: 12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."
13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."
Genesis 3:12-13 (NIV)

blindness, or transfigure Himself, or call on those legions of angels. Judas and Peter were in the same boat here, trying to remain hidden, hoping that at any moment the miraculous would turn it all around, just as they had seen so many times in the last three years. For Judas, that would justify his greed. That would make the money a side issue, and hey, maybe he could give some of it to the poor. But when Jesus was condemned, the money became blood money. It was bounty for the Man that had loved and trusted him for the last three years.

Peter, brokenhearted, wept bitter tears of repentance. (Matthew 26:75) But Judas tried to un-do his evil deed by throwing the money back to the religious leaders. One had godly sorry for the weakness of his own nature. The other was sorry things were not going according to his plan. The ugliness of his heart was there in the open for all to see. What would he do about it?

⁴ "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." The voice of conviction said, "I have sinned." It is one thing to confess you have sinned, and another to repent of it. The priests are supposed to be the ones who intercede to God for us. They are the go-betweens. In this passage they declare just how far they are from their role. "What is that to us." "We could care less. "That is your responsibility." In other words, "We enticed you to sin. You sinned. Deal with it."

⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. How do we know Judas did not repent? God revives the heart of the repentant. (Isaiah 57:15) Judas dealt with his remorse just as he dealt with his greed. He gave in to his evil heart. When we decide to punish ourselves, we are in that same role of playing God. Just like when we justify our self, punishing our self is declaring that we determine and administer justice. That is God's role.

Suicide is never the answer! It is playing God. It is denying that God is merciful and forgiving. It is saying that there is no hope in Him. (Numbers 11:23) It is saying that God has not numbered your days (Job 14:5); you have! Some of God's prophets fell into this trap of self-pity and contemplated ending their life. (Jonah 4:3) (1 Kings 19:4) God always encouraged them to get their eyes off themselves and see what He was doing in the world.

That is one reason I emphasize the goodness of God. The world is full of evil. Bad things do happen to good people. So what are you going to do about it? Throw your life back in God's face, or be a part of the solution instead of the problem. In spite of all the evil in the world, God is good and all He does is good. (Psalm 119:68) He tells us to focus on what is good, lovely, and praiseworthy. (Philippians 4:8)

Be careful how much news you watch. Newscasts focus on problems and tragedy. When was the last time you saw a newscast in which only good things were reported? It is helpful to keep up with world events, but do not wallow in all the evil. Revel in the good. (Romans 12:21) And do not wallow in your failures. (Romans 8:1) Turn from them and depend more than ever on the life of Christ in you.

Commented [notes11]: 75 Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.
Matthew 26:75 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 15 For this is what the high and lofty One says-- he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite."
Isaiah 57:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 23 The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you."
Numbers 11:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.
Job 14:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes15]: 3 Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."
Jonah 4:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 4 while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."
1 Kings 19:4 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 68 You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees.
Psalms 119:68 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.
Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
Romans 12:21 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,
Romans 8:1 (NIV)

There is an important contrast here. Peter is sorry for betraying Christ. Judas is sorry too. One weeps and determines not to trust himself again. The other tries to deal with it himself by un-doing his action and committing suicide. The rest is history, and it is history that we ought to learn from. Jesus was on His way to the cross to deal with the sins of the world. If Judas had hung around a few more days, he may have discovered that wonderful truth, but instead he dealt with it himself. I never met a person who failed in their suicide attempt that was not later glad they failed.

⁶ *The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money."* I am amazed at the blindness of man. They just broke about every law in their book on judicial procedure. They have handed over their Creator to a Roman Governor that they hate so they can kill Jesus. They are doing all this so they can keep abusing the outer court of the temple for financial gain. "But God forbid that we should put this money back in the treasury, for we used it as bounty on this miracle working prophet's head. Let us not ever be guilty of breaking one of these wonderful laws that have been handed down to us by our rabbi!" Are you getting the picture of how deceitful our own hearts can be? (Jeremiah 17:9) This has to be one of the clearest pictures in all of history of how we, as humans, justify our actions and think ourselves righteous.

By calling it blood money, they were testifying to the knowledge of their guilt. *By definition, the price of blood* (blood money in NIV) *referred to money illegitimately paid and received to falsely convict a man of a crime that led to his execution.* — MacArthur New Testament Commentary- Perhaps they did not fully understand that they were killing God incarnate, but they knew they were killing an innocent man.

⁷ *So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners.* ⁸ *That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day.* I can hear those great religious leaders saying, "There now. It is all good. The end justifies the means, right? Now we have a place to bury foreigners. We would not want their Gentile bodies corrupting our Jewish graveyards. Aren't we the most generous, goodhearted people that ever lived? By the way, is that the pounding the nails I hear?"

⁹ *Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel,"¹⁰ and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.* How amazing that such details were foretold. It is even more amazing that the participants constantly studied these prophecies and yet did not see their part in it all. (John 5:39)

The quote is from Zechariah. So why did Matthew say in the book of Jeremiah. The Jews divided their sacred Scripture into three books, the Law, the writings, and the prophets. The first book in the prophets was Jeremiah, and therefore the whole writings of the prophets was at times referred to as the book of Jeremiah. Here is the actual quote from Zechariah. ¹² *I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it."* *So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.* ¹³ *And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"--the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter.* Zechariah 11:12-13 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: 9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: 39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, John 5:39 (NIV)

This is incredibly detailed. Jesus was betrayed for the price of a slave, thirty pieces of silver. The LORD said it was the handsome price at which they priced me! Sounds like irony to me; God, our Creator, handsomely priced at thirty pieces of silver. Many would like to buy God off. We do it with promises of obedience. "Lord, if You will get me out this, I'll go to church every Sunday." Have you ever tried to buy God like that? If God never answered one of our prayers, we would still owe Him our obedience.

Then watch what happens to the money in this prophecy. It is thrown into the house of the LORD, to the potter. It is not handed over, but thrown. Judas, filled with remorse threw it back to them. Notice in verse 6 they picked it up. Now what to do with this blood money? They just happen to buy a field where potters found their clay. Probably depleted of useful clay, it could be purchased at a low price. In Zechariah we have the price placed on JHWH as 30 pieces of silver, the money thrown into the house of the LORD, but going to a potter. Zechariah says he heard the voice of JHWH tell him this. God, who lives outside of time, whispered to Zechariah these details.

In this passage, I have focused on man's amazing blindness to his real condition. The passage speaks to us of Judas' and the religious leaders' spiritual blindness. It is a warning to us of the deceitfulness of our own hearts. We can believe we are the only ones that are really getting it right while we are being instruments of evil in the world. How could they have known? How can we know? The motivation of our heart is not always as clear as we would like to think. When we find ourselves dancing around with justifications, trying to figure out how to make an action look honorable, we can be sure we are only fooling ourselves. Notice that field they purchased was called the Field of Blood when Matthew wrote his gospel. The public found out the truth. Their cover up was a failure, just as ours usually are. (Numbers 32:23)

We never need to manipulate things to see that God's will is done. He can bring it about in His own way and time. A life at peace with God trusts in His sovereignty over all. We never need to distort justice or truth. We do not need to stretch the law. Nor do we need to punish ourselves.

There is always hope because God is who He is. He is merciful and good. He can restore you no matter how far you have fallen. He forgives and forgets, but even more than that, He makes us whole. (Psalm 103:8, 12) All the wounds from man and this fallen world, He is able to heal. If He could reign even through the betrayal of a close friend and the conspiracy of the religious establishment, don't you think He can reign over your life and bring good from it? In Him, we do not need to walk around fearful and cowering, hoping no one sees our insufficiency, for our sufficiency is of Him. (2 Corinthians 3:5) He gives us His own wholeness as we let Him heal the scars of the past. Peter, Judas, chief priests, are just people like us. We can let these experiences lead to death or to life. Will you focus on the evil in the world, or the goodness of God? Mere remorse is very different from genuine repentance. Will you justify your actions or yield your will to your Creator? Peter's path of facing his failure and being broken over it led to life and usefulness. May the same be true of us.

Commented [notes23]: 23 "But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out. Numbers 32:23 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. Psalms 103:8 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. Psalms 103:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; 2 Corinthians 3:5 (KJV)