

**Evergreen Presbyterian Church**

**Beaverton, Oregon**

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**9/22/24**

**Sermon Title:** Judas

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 27:3-10

**Matt. 27:3** ¶ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders,

**Matt. 27:4** saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.”

**Matt. 27:5** And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

**Matt. 27:6** But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.”

**Matt. 27:7** So they took counsel and bought with them the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers.

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

**Matt. 27:9** Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel,

**Matt. 27:10** and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.”

**Main Point:** True repentance is about more than feeling guilt and trying to make your own amends – it is about also seeing God’s grace and placing your hope in the Savior who laid his life down for sinners.

**Outline:**

1. False Repentance
2. False Saviors
3. False Atonement

**Introduction**

So we’ve spoken about Judas before. If you’ll remember, in Matthew 26, we saw the moment where Judas went to the religious leaders and asked, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And then the text tells us that Judas was paid 30 pieces of silver.

And then over the past few Sundays we’ve moved through what that betrayal looks like, as Judas comes to the garden, with armed men to arrest Jesus. And then we saw Jesus condemned before the high council. But today we’re given probably as close a glimpse as the Scriptures ever give us of Judas’ response to what happened and of his inner state.

Here is how the scriptures present Judas: it see him as a human being, not a monster. It sees him as a man ruled by his passions, beset by sins, overcome with a love of the world, and blinded to the beauty of Jesus Christ.

So I don’t hate Judas. And I don’t think Jesus did. Not does Jesus want us to. If anything when Jesus says, “It would be better for him that he had never been born” he is making a statement of genuine pity for his own betrayer.

Here’s what I want to say: the more I studied this passage, the more it blew me away. There are things here that I’m going to share with you today that you may have seen before, but I never did. And I was greatly blessed by looking at this passage. You may not see it at first, but the riches of Jesus are everywhere in this passage. So hopefully I can share some of what I saw with you today.

What I'd like to do is follow our three points: first, false repentance. Judas is remorseful and tries to make amends. But *why* isn't it repentance? Second, false Saviors. We need to appreciate the way that Judas looks everywhere but to Jesus. Then third, false atonement. In more than one way, people in this passage try to wash away sin, but not at the cross.

## 1. False Repentance

First, we see false repentance in Judas' life here.

In verse 3, Matthew uses this interesting phrase. It says, "[Judas] changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders."

Judas seems to perform a *type* of repentance here. It says he "changed his mind," which is usually the rough translation of the Greek word for "repentance" here. However, from the context we know it wasn't biblical repentance. There are some parts of repentance in Judas' behavior. For starters, he clearly states what he has done. But repentance is more than seeing our sin, it is also about seeing the grace of Christ, and casting ourselves upon it.

Judas' words "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood" seem to be some kind of plea for forgiveness... for absolution. "I sinned. I did something wrong." Now, you might think I'm just reading into it that Judas is coming to them in order to wash himself or remove his sin. But I don't think so. Look at the response he receives: "What is that to us?" His statement is actually a plea for help. And their answer is a rejection of him. I think at this time, Judas' sin is clear to him. He knows he has done wrong. Some might think this is enough.

And I think perhaps you understand this impulse... we may have the tendency to say, "Well there it is. Mission accomplished. He says that he sinned. God's grace must have been at work."

But when Jesus came preaching the gospel, do you remember what he said? He didn't say, "Confess and be baptized." He didn't say, "Be broken hearted over your sin and be baptized." He said, "Repent and be baptized." "Repent." And that is really the key to understanding the outstanding issue with Judas. He feels sorry, but he hasn't repented. He seems to even confess here... but he hasn't repented.

Here's the important question: what is real repentance, and how can we tell it from false repentance?

Thomas Watson, in his classic work on repentance, speaks of what false repentance is. He says, first of all that instead of being broken hearted that we have separated ourselves from God by our sin, false repentance is occupied with the fear of consequences.

False repentance is focused on the fact that we're guilty, but isn't willing to turn to *Christ* with that guilt. It wallows in the "sweet misery" but can go nowhere with it. Now, at this point Watson is very clear:

"Ahab and Judas had some trouble of mind. It is one thing to be a terrified sinner and another to be a repenting sinner...There can be terror with no change of heart."

He says, with false repentance, we can even resolve to *stop* sinning. We might do this because sin is causing pain in our lives. We see that it's ruining our lives or hurting our families, and so we resolve to stop doing it. Or we might resolve to stop sinning because we're afraid of future suffering. We're pragmatic and want to live a good life, and don't want to turn our life into a chaotic tempest.

But Watson says,

"Do not trust a passionate resolution; it is made in a storm and may die in a calm."

Here's what False repentance does: it bargains with the Creator to try to get something from him: "I'll give this up, if you'll give me the desire of my heart." I heard Rosaria Butterfield say a few months ago when she was at a luncheon during the PCA General Assembly,

"A thief who stops stealing is really just a thief on vacation."

If you reduce repentance only to *stopping* the act but don't really repent, it's still false repentance.

Watson also says *this* about false repentance: He says that false repentance is focused on giving up sin or changing our ways. Listen to Watson here again: "It is

possible to part with sin and yet not repent.” Repentance is more than changing our ways.

My point here is not that if you’ve ever felt guilty, then you’ve experienced false repentance. And I’m not even saying that if you’ve given up sin in your life and said no to sin that this is somehow false repentance.

What I’m actually saying is this: if that is all you think repentance is, then it’s false repentance. Repentance is more than changing your ways. It’s more than feeling bad for your sin. It’s more than wishing you could change your ways or even resolving that you’ll change. If you settle for those things only, then you do indeed deceive yourself as Judas seems to have done.

According to Scripture, true repentance does begin with a sight of our sin. What does Jesus say about the prodigal son? “He came to his senses” (Lk 15:17). He saw himself as a sinner. If we never see our sin, we cannot have repentance.

Repentance also involves *sorrow* for our sin. In Psalm 38:18 David says, “I admit my guilt.” Again, this is familiar with Judas here. He seems to have a type of sorrow. But biblical repentance involves a sorrow that runs deep. It’s not just a superficial performance. Psalm 51:17 says, “The sacrifices of God are...a broken and contrite heart.” Luke 18:13 mentions the penitent man beating his chest. The idea is that because our sin is so great, Christ becomes more precious in our eyes. So our sense of sin actually amplifies Christ. As Watson says,

“Until the heart is full of remorse, it is not ready for Christ. How welcome is a doctor to a man who is bleeding from his wounds!”

True repentance also includes a confession of sin. Watson reminds us that confession is meant to be sincere, from the heart, that it should be specific, but that it should also be confessed in order to be put away from our lives. James tells us to confess our sin to one another. Why? Part of the reason is that sin dies in the light. By keeping our sins secret, we allow it to grow, to feed, and to metastasize. David says, “When I kept silent about my sin, my bones wasted away.” By confessing our sin, as we take it to the cross, we really rob it in a practical way of the ability to grow in our hearts and for us to keep excusing it.

Judas actually does confess, of course. Or he seems to. He confesses one sin: betraying innocent blood. But he doesn't confess his greed. He doesn't confess putting other gods before Christ. He doesn't confess the sins that run to the very soul of him. He confesses this *one* sin.

But again, my reminder is that true repentance is always more than the sum of its parts. In one sense it's about a singular movement of the heart: we see Christ's righteousness, we see our sinfulness, and we see the grace in the cross and cast ourselves upon him. Watson is breaking it down and trying to help us get it, but really repentance is one thing: a whole life resting in the grace of what Jesus Christ has done.

I love this point that Thomas Watson makes – he says that true repentance confronts different people depending on what they might be holding back from God.

First, he says it admonishes those who hide their sins like Rachel hid her father's idols under her saddle. This is the most basic way that we try to deal with our own sin: just don't let anyone know about it. Keep quiet. Let it go away. But the call to repent says, "That won't address your sin."

Second, he says that the call for confession admonishes those who confess that they are sinners, but they hide *part* of it... Perhaps they only confess the part that is known. Thomas Watson says this:

"They confess the pennies but not the dollars. They confess vain thoughts or a faulty memory but not the sins they are most guilty of, such as rash anger, extortion, or uncleanness."

Third, he says the call for confession admonishes those who minimize and rationalize their sins. It's easy to confess, and in the same breath explain our sin. "Yes, I did sin. If only people understood me, then they would really understand what's going on." Think of Saul in 1 Samuel 15. He says, "I have sinned, for I have violated the command of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people." You see what Saul does here? He confesses, sort of, but immediately deflects – likely in the same sentence. "The sin is *really* the peoples' sin. They pushed me to this. They outnumber me. They

pressured me. If only I'd been more courageous in standing up to them." Saul almost confessed. And then he took it back.

Adam in the Garden: "This woman that you gave me, gave me the fruit." We have an old history of passing the buck when it comes to our own sin.

Confession is an essential piece of the repentance puzzle because it humbles the soul, gives glory to God, admits that He is good and right, and amplifies Christ to our souls. "If I say I am a sinner, how precious will Christ's blood be to me!"

And then we come to the crucial part of true repentance, and as we'll see in the next point, it is the fatal flaw in Judas repentance, which makes it false. Because all the other pieces are in place that this might be repentance, but then look here: True repentance has an eye to the grace of God in Christ. We confess our sin, and in our confession we stop thinking that somehow we can still find hope by looking within ourselves. Instead, in gospel repentance our eyes leave ourselves and we stop digging around in here and searching in here, hoping that we'll find peace. Instead we know that our hope has to be in Jesus alone. "All for sin could not atone/thou must save and thou alone."

Apart from Christ, we may feel sorrow for our sin. Without Christ we may feel guilty and even want that guilt lifted. Without Christ we might even go through the motions of saying we're sorry and go through the motions to cease sinning – to take a *vacation* from our sin. Right? But apart from Christ and his grace, *when* we finally confess our sin, we will have nowhere to go with it.

But finally true repentance also includes turning from sin. True repentance is like an acid that eats through the chains of sin and frees us to turn away from sin and idols. If Christ has really taken our sin, we will finally be free of our burdens. Jesus reminds us that "if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

We aren't set free *because* we turn from our sin, we are enabled to turn from our sin because in Christ we've been set free. And in just a moment we'll understand why Judas' repentance here is false. And it all comes down to where he turns for his hope, and how he tries to remove his sin from himself.

## 2. False Saviors

## Second, today's passage reveals Judas fleeing to false saviors.

I mentioned before that Judas knows he has sinned. Think about his reflexive response when he sins. What does he do? He does just what Israel has always done: he turns to the shadows of the sacrificial system. He turns to the leaders of Israel. I mean think of this: he confesses his sin. He specifies his sin.

Now, they give the coldest most uncaring response possible to this man.

Think of how outrageous the response of the chief priests and elders is: "What is that to us? See to it yourself." Do you know what I would have said if I had been Judas?

"What is that to us? What is that to *us*?' You are in the forgiveness business! This is all you do! Blood! Sacrifice! Piles of dead and burnt animals! All so that someone like me can be washed. 'What is it to you? It's everything to you!' What is the point of this whole stinkin' temple and all of these piles of pots and pans, and these worthless piles of burnt animals if I can't bring my guilt and find forgiveness and peace here!? Why do people even come here in the first place! You don't even give a rip or care about sinners! You don't care what happens to me or any of these people."

Judas doesn't say any of that. But he has come to the wrong Saviors.

These are *false* Saviors. They don't care about Judas. He was useful to them. That's it. They don't respect him. He's a traitor. They feel dirty just having Judas in their presence. They don't even want to touch this money that he was carrying.

Now I want you to think of the one Judas betrayed. The one Judas didn't go to with his sin.

When sinners come to Jesus with their sin, he will never say, "What is that to me? That sin is your problem. You fix it. You deal with it. You've got blood on your hands? Go wash and wash." No. Instead, he says, "Your sin... is *everything* to me. I will not sleep on this. I will not ignore this. I love you. I'll cover you. Come to me. Come to me. You can always come home to me. Always." No one cares more about your sin than Jesus. If you come to him with your guilty conscience, with your dirty hands, even your bloody hands, he will do the thing that Judas needed most of all: he'll wash you. He'll cleanse you. He'll forgive you. You'll have peace.



The false shepherds of Israel in Jeremiah 6:14 are condemned by God. Do you remember why? God says, “They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” He might as well be speaking about these men: “What is it to us? See to it yourself.” The supposed shepherds of Israel... and they hate the sheep.

But even if these priests *did* care about Judas, they couldn’t provide the help he needs. Hebrews reminds us that “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The sacrifices of the temple were only shadows pointing us to Christ. But at best, Judas is running to the shadow instead of the substance. Which leads us to the next point.

### **3. False Atonement (27:5-10)**

Because third today, we have a false atonement. In fact, we have multiple false atonements here in verses 5-10.

Atonement speaks of the removal of sin, and the restoration of the relationship between the offender and the offended party in any covenant. We need atonement if we want to be restored to our God.

We have Judas trying to atone for himself, though. Think about this: he doesn’t know where else to go with his sin. His first plan was to go to the religious leaders of Israel. He doesn’t seem to even consider turning to Jesus.

There are complicated reasons why anyone takes their own life. In fact, I would say there are few things more mysterious than the soul of Judas and his suicide here.

But one factor here may be a belief that if there is no animal life that can be given to atone for his sin, then he has to give his own life. Either way, he can’t go on living knowing what he has done.

All of this is because as much grace as he has intellectually learned about, he hasn’t actually hoped in it. He has been like the man who starves at the table of the dinner feast, never actually putting the food in his mouth.

As much grace as he has heard preached, he hasn’t reached out for it. Everything has always been about *him*. Not just the money, but even the way he seeks a

savior. And that isn't changed by present circumstances. Where is the hope he's looking for? He searches the possibilities: "It's not in Jesus. It's not in the temple. It's not in the leaders. I'm isolated. I'm alone. There is no Savior but me." In a sense Judas says to Jesus, "I would rather die for my own sins than let you die for mine."

This is what adds to the egregiousness of Judas' suicide: You might think his suicide is proof that Judas is truly sorry. But in fact, those who have experienced the suicide of a loved one will tell you, there is nothing triumphal or noble in suicide. It is among the most selfish, hateful, destructive acts a person can commit. It is the ultimate way of saying, "My life doesn't belong to God, or to my neighbor, or to my family, or to my church, or to anyone. It's mine. And what I say goes."

Suicide is a delicate topic, and it is complicated because people are complicated. But know this: there is no nobility in it. There is NO beauty in it. There is no life in it. It is pure death and self-love. In Judas' case here it is a refusal to let Jesus be his savior. "I would rather shed my own blood, thank you very much."

It's a false sacrifice. Judas' blood atones for nothing. He cannot set himself free.

But Judas isn't the only one offering a false atonement. The leaders themselves believe that this silver is covered in blood, and also want to remove any sense of guilt from themselves. By their twisted logic, they may have payed for the betrayal, and the money may have even come from them. But if they don't keep the money, then it's like they never did it. This is what happens when you just start making these things up as you go.

But look closer: they take the money and give it away. What are they doing? They're atoning, too. They're trying to wash away sin. They're trying to make the bad thing untrue. And so they come up with a scheme by which they can say that they have no guilt in the death of Jesus. We'll just give the money away. Like it never happened.

Let me state the obvious. They *are* guilty. And without a true sacrifice from a true Savior who is both God and man, they will always be guilty and never find peace with God. In their clearest moments their consciences will be stricken and their

hearts filled with anxiety whenever they remember their sin. Or even if their consciences are seared and they have no fear of God left in them at all, it is still a fact that on the last day, both the good and evil will be raised up – one to life, and one to death. And without the Savior's atoning work, there is no hope. No hope without true atonement. No hope without the blood of Jesus, who was and is both God and man. The true sacrifice that the law and the sacrifices were only shadows of. Only the God man can actually save us. Everything else is a false atonement.

### **Conclusion: The Truth About Repentance**

We've already discussed Judas previously. And we discussed the fact that Judas' betrayal was predicted, and as Jesus says, it would have been better for him that he had never been born. In one sense, these things are written and cannot be changed. But there is still a sense in which Judas had as much access to the grace of God as anyone did. He saw Jesus, he knew Jesus, he knew the gospel, he learned it well. He had seen the folly of those who tried to cover their own sin. He had seen the limitations of the sacrificial system and saw Jesus over and over again speak of true repentance. If there was anyone who knew the truth it was Judas. And yet Judas proves to us that knowledge is not the problem.

You see, the truth is, if you are really convinced that you must be in control, that you must be your own God, your own Savior, your own atonement, your own hope... then turning to Jesus and walking in his salvation simply will not be an option. Jesus actually makes it that the only requirement to come to him. "Repent and be baptized, for the kingdom of God is at hand."

*Let's pray.*