

Matt Henry
Matthew 26:47-56; 27:3-10
29 Mar 2018

“Blood Money”

Grace and peace...

Judas Iscariot is a sad and tragic figure. That’s why I had to laugh with John Wiemer, who has lined up the actors and monologues throughout Lent. John said a few weeks ago, “I have a James, but I still need a Judas!” None of us need a Judas. We know people who have betrayed us, and all too often, we have betrayed others. But to betray Jesus—not just sin against Him, but to give Him into the hands of captors and to do so *for money*—that’s low! And yet, Jesus chose Judas with full knowledge this would happen. Jesus said, “Did I not choose you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil” (John 6:70). Eventually, Satan will enter into him.

Judas Iscariot is the only disciple who did not come from Galilee or Israel in the north. He came from the south, from Judah. Along the way, I wonder what he made of Jesus’ comments about money, like, “You cannot serve both God and money.” Judas is a good example of what happens when the love of money prevails. He was a thief and scammer who helped himself to the group moneybag that he carried (John 12:6).

We learn this fact after that show of love and affection that Mary, the sister of Lazarus, gave Jesus. Remember how she poured out that precious ointment and perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair? Well, Judas Iscariot is right there to give us the financial analysis! That nard was worth 300 denarii! A denarius is a day's wage. Back then, if you take off the Sabbaths, the holy days and the 4th of July, 300 days is about what's left of the work calendar. So this nard represents an entire year's salary—and in one moment, it's spent! You don't have to a lover of money, to choke on that kind of devotion. It is grossly excessive and exorbitant. Judas says the nard could have been sold and the money given the poor, but he didn't care about giving to the poor. He cared about taking for himself. MacArthur observes, "Because of Jesus' willingness to receive such lavish worship, Judas missed a prime opportunity to embezzle funds" (p. 189). The whole perfume thing is a big stink to him!

This seems to have been the moment that turned Judas because it's after this event that he approaches the chief priests and asks what they would give him if he delivered Jesus into their hands. They counted out 30 pieces of silver. "And from that moment, he sought an opportunity to betray him" (Matt. 26:16). That's all it took. Thirty pieces. Well, how much is that worth? Some estimates say as much as half a year's wages. However much, for Judas, it was at least a way to

recoup some of the losses he incurred over these last 3 years of “ministry”. At least now he was thinking about his future and being financially secure!

Somebody had to because Jesus sure wasn’t making smart money decisions.

Let’s see if those thirty pieces of silver can gain your interest because they show up twice elsewhere in Scripture.

[One is Zechariah 11. Matthew mentions the connection, but he refers to the prophet as Jeremiah (Matt. 27:9), not Zechariah. What’s up with that? The Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, were divided into three sections—Law, Prophets, Writings. Sometimes each section took on the name of its chief book. For example, the “Writings” was sometimes called “Psalms” because the psalms were so long compared with the rest. Well, Jeremiah was the first and largest book of the prophets. The prophet section is sometimes referred to collectively as “Jeremiah” so it’s not a mistake on Matthew’s part to say Jeremiah even when the prophecy is contained to Zechariah. At any rate...]

Zechariah 11 is where the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep is tragically and dramatically broken. Zechariah is given the role of “a shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter” (Zech. 11:4). That “doomed” language reminded me of how Jesus describes Judas, “as the one doomed to destruction” (John 17:12, NIV). So what Zechariah does next is not good—but it is

at the Lord's direction because the people are wicked. Zechariah annuls the covenant and asks for his wages. He's done! The wicked and the sheep traders (those who are buying, selling and even slaughtering the sheep) give him thirty pieces of silver. They buy him off. The sheep without a shepherd are now even more vulnerable. Verse 13: "Then the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter—the lordly price at which I was priced by them.'" Did you hear that? *A lordly price!* "So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter" (Zech. 11:13). Just like Judas would throw that money into the temple treasury.

In this story, Zechariah also breaks two shepherd staffs. That second staff, it says in v. 14, "annulled the brotherhood between Judah and Israel." Remember where Judas is from? He's from Judah, the rest of the disciples are from Israel. The relationship of the Twelve is severed here too. Zechariah 11 ends with a curse and a woe of physical harm on the worthless shepherd. Judas' downfall is also physical as he hanged himself and his guts spewed forth. So it's not an easy chapter to read, but sometimes God paints with dark colors and that's what's going on here.

The second mention of thirty silver coins comes from Exodus 21, in the section that deals with laws about slaves. It's a little more obscure, but I think

there's something here too. This is God talking to Moses. Exodus 21:32, "If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner (of the ox) shall give to their (slave) master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned." How is this like Judas? Well, like Judas, the offending party ends up dead. The ox is stoned. The price paid to the owner of the slave is thirty shekels of silver. That's how much a slave was worth, that's the proper amount to cover the loss in that day. And I just wonder if it's this metric that the chief priests had in mind when they counted out thirty pieces of silver for the traitor. Granted the loss of a slave is accidental, and Judas' betrayal of God's slave was premeditated. But still, the chief priests had to have some standard and I don't see them choosing thirty pieces out of thin air—not for something like this. I don't see them choosing thirty pieces to knowingly fulfill Zechariah 11. But I could see them justifying it with Exodus 21. A price should be paid when a slave or a servant is killed. Hey, it's all about keeping the law, right? But it was still blood money.

It must have been a rough's night sleep for Judas because on Friday morning, Judas changes his mind. He confesses! He repents! He takes action! He goes back to the chief priests. He recognizes he has betrayed innocent blood. Deuteronomy 27:25, "Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood." He knows he is cursed. No amount of money was worth that! But the

chief priests won't take their money back. "What is that to us? See to it yourself!" (Matt. 27:4).

These chief priests are the worthless shepherds who have no regard for the sheep. The chief priests reveal in one moment how they do not deserve or fulfill the role of intercessor between God and man. Aren't the priests supposed to make atonement? Someone comes to them distraught and repentant, seeking restitution, and they say, "Not our business. You're on your own!" They are abdicating responsibility entirely by failing to recognize their part in plot and by failing to address the plea for grace from Judas.

Judas has made "a fatal mistake by returning to the temple to seek absolution through his co-conspirators when the temple is no longer the place of God's presence or the seat of forgiveness" (p. 255, Garland, D.E., 1993, *Reading Matthew: A literary and theological commentary on the first Gospel*, Crossroad, New York). He should have gone to the Good Shepherd, the Great High Priest, there he would have found forgiveness because it was still available to him. But Jesus is now condemned because of what Judas did.

Seeing no place to turn to, Judas Iscariot took matters into his own hands and exacted upon himself the curse he had acquired. Tragic ending, yet that very same night, Jesus, as the high priest, in what's called the high priestly prayer of

John 17, had prayed for disciples like a high priest should! “While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (John 17:12).

Judas’ actions are his own choices and yet the consequences are so great the final verdict on Judas’ life is that “it would have been better for that man if he had not been born” (Matt. 26:24). And all of this over 30 pieces of silver! The chief priests used that money to buy the potter’s field for strangers to be buried in (Matt. 27:7). It’s called Field of Blood because it was bought with blood money but also because it’s the place where Judas’ own blood is spilled out after He is hanged. This is no atonement. It is tragedy.

I have preached a whole sermon and I have not given you one bit of gospel because it’s Judas Iscariot. It’s blood money, it’s bad, it’s a curse. But we know there is a blood money that is good and a blessing. In the 2nd Article of the Creed, we confess, using Luther’s explanation, that Jesus Christ has “redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live

under Him in His kingdom and serve Him..." Jesus purchased us with His own blood. That was the lordly price for us and He paid it.

None of us needs a Judas. All of us need a Jesus. In a world of traitors, backstabbers and greed, Jesus offers up His innocence, faithfulness and selflessness. **There is always forgiveness.** Jesus saw to it Himself.

In Jesus' name, Amen.