

The weight and cost of blood.

1Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; 2and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.

3Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!" 5And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself. 6The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood." 7And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers. 8For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel; 10AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER'S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME."

Blaise Pascal, the french philosopher of the 17th century said; *All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.*

Jonathan Edwards, the great American theologian and pastor built on this idea in his treatise on the Freedom of the Will, that every intersection of the will, every decision from waking to sleep is based just here. He contended that if you analyze motives, every act you make is based in self happiness.

The person who gives in to sin and the person who restrains themselves and does not act outside of God's law both are seeking happiness. The

difference is wisdom.

The person who denies themselves some pleasure that God forbids in His book, does so in the belief that the pleasure of fellowship with God, or even fear of His displeasure and punishment, the benefit of obedience will bring greater satisfaction than the immediate pleasures of sin.

For centuries people have tried to analyze the motives of Judas Iscariot, the traitor. We marvel at the staggering privilege and wonder at the failure. How does it add up. Why did he do what he did.

People in mine and my mom's age group remember well a comedian named Flip Wilson. Geraldine, the church lady. The devil made me do it. The devil made me buy that dress.

The devil made us laugh at a man in drag mocking God. Even in 1970 all kinds of barriers were getting removed, little by little, but that's another sermon.

Did the devil make Judas Iscariot sell Jesus the messiah for 30 pieces of silver. And if so, is Judas just a helpless pawn in this. Does he bear the guilt, if Satan made him do it? How does that work?

I love the line in Holiday Inn. I'm really dating myself this morning. Flip Wilson was 45 years ago, but Holiday Inn was 75! Anyways when the **quiet on the set** light goes out and they can finally open the door, and Linda Mason is in an embrace with Bing Crosby, and Walter Abel says; " *How'd he get that far in five minutes?* and Fred Astaire says; "*The lady must have been willing.*"

We mustn't get our theology from Hollywood, but it gets your attention and there are parallels. The lady must have been willing. The same applies to Judas the traitor. There is a collaboration between Satan and Judas.

Paul tells us in Romans 6:16 *Do you not know that when you offer yourselves as obedient slaves, you are slaves to the one you obey, whether you are slaves to sin leading to death, or to obedience leading*

to righteousness?

And Peter, talking about false teachers very similarly says in 2Peter 2: 18 *With lofty but empty words, they appeal to the sensual passions of the flesh* (notice Pascal's law at work, they appeal to your pleasures) *and entice the ones who are just escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves to corruption. For a man is a slave to whatever has overcome him. 20 If indeed they have escaped the corruption of the world through their knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, only to be entangled and overcome by it again, their final condition is worse than it was at first....*

Almost as if he were describing Judas himself. Escaped this world's corruption for 3 years. Intimate with the very life and all of the teaching and miracles of Jesus. And ultimately overcome by his sensual desires and yes, Satan had a part in it.

Luke and John both speak of Satan "entering into" Judas Iscariot. But how? "The lady must have been willing". Our key to understand what happened comes from an old movie. Judas must have been willing.

Satan did not overpower Judas and force him to act against his will. The Bible is clear that will gives into the pleasures of sin and Satan then takes advantage. We become his slaves by our own will.

We can speculate all day long about Judas will. His desire for happiness. His driver. His motivation.

Some scholars say his surname, Iscariot comes from the name of a group of assassins who hated the Romans. The sicarii. That opens an interesting possibility. Was Judas main motive to overthrow Rome? He was on the inside of a movement with a viable King who the prophets said would restore Israel.

If that's the case, it's easy to see what may have driven Judas to flip from follower to traitor. In that final week, Jesus made no moves to overthrow Rome, in fact He was on the offensive against . . . Israel.

Did that tip Judas over? Did he suddenly have to come to grips with the fact that he had invested 3 years into a guy who did not turn out to be the person he thought he was following. King of the Jews. Messiah who restores sovereignty to Israel. Who overthrows the Roman yoke.

Those days in the temple, teaching, driving out the money changers, defying the rulers of Israel. Clearly, this man was not going to set up a Kingdom on Davids throne and crush the Romans.

Again, speculation, but it seems perhaps Judas motive is that this man Jesus is not who he hoped he was. If his motivation was to crush Rome and see Israel sovereign again at last, this man he's invested 3 years in is a fraud. It's not going to happen.

Did Judas leave in disgust then. What can I salvage after 3 years of following a man that is not going to help me realize my deepest desire? Did those thoughts cause him to despise this man Jesus. 3 wasted years. No closer to crushing Rome than when we began.

That's as good a guess as we're going to get. The witnesses did not tell us what the exact reason was for Judas change of heart. John does tell us, in the incident of the breaking of the vial of costly perfume that Judas objected because he would rather have had that money in the treasury, of which he was a petty thief.

Jn. 12: 5“Why wasn't this perfume sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” 6Judas did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. As keeper of the money bag, he used to take from what was put into it.

That window is given to us. Judas pretends to have pure motives. But his underlying motive here is self gain. He was a thief.

So we know that he is capable of living a parallel life. On the outside he's pretending to be motivated by all of the same drivers as the other disciples, but inwardly he is driven by evil motives. A fake.

My fear is that we see this, in the church, way more often than we ascribe it. Phony christians. They are in the church, pretending to be "believers" but their motivation is somewhere else. And the day comes when the cost of hanging out with the christians is not paying off, and for whatever reason, they're gone.

Let's take a look real quickly at Satan's role in this. We've talked about Judas motivation. Follow Jesus for self gain. The money. The political gain expected. Dashed hopes. Wasted time. What can I salvage? This guy is suicidal. He's going down. The jews will kill Him. He doesn't seem motivated to lead His people into an immediate kingdom. He isn't the guy I thought he was. I've wasted 3 years and these folks are going to kill him. What can I get.

Somewhere in there, you've offered yourself as a slave to a different master. From Luke 22 come these chilling words;

2 and the chief priests and scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death; for they feared the people. 3 Then Satan entered Judas Iscariot, who was one of the Twelve. 4 And Judas went to discuss with the chief priests and temple officers how he might betray Jesus to them....

Satan entered Judas Iscariot, who was one of the Twelve.

Satan requested to sift Peter like wheat. But Peter belonged to Jesus. And Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail.

Satan has requested to use Judas Iscariot to have Jesus condemned. Jesus does not own Judas. There is no faith to pray for that it wouldn't fail. Judas is a pretend disciple. And thus, in God's perfect time, *Satan entered Judas Iscariot, who was one of the Twelve.*

John in his account has similar chilling words. Root source analysis. Bottom line. From John 13;

1 It was now just before the Passover Feast, and Jesus knew that His hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the very end. 2

The evening meal was underway, and the devil had already put into the heart of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.

There is this collaboration. Judas for whatever the motive, is ready to make a break from Jesus. In his mind, it's over. And Satan puts it into his heart. Betray Jesus. Get what you can get. Salvage what you can. He's going down. Get out with whatever you can get.

Later on, during the passover meal, the last supper, Jesus reveals that one of the 12 will betray Him. And the disciples all ask Is it I? And then this scene, also in John 13 takes place;

...25 Leaning back against Jesus, he asked, "Lord, who is it?" 26 Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread after I have dipped it. Then He" dipped the piece of bread and gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. 27 After Judas took the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus said to Judas, "What you are about to do, do quickly."...

Three times we see that Satan is complicit in the betrayal of Jesus. Satan enters into Judas to accomplish the death of the Son of God.

The next time we see Judas is at the arrest in the garden. We looked at that 2 weeks ago and last week we paused to consider Peter and his actions. That brings us to Matthew's account this morning. Let's consider those verses quickly. I won't make you freeze to death twice.

1Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; 2and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.

During my research and study this week, one of the most interesting sites I found was a man trying to disprove Jesus by arguing that the accounts of His trials are too fantastically illegal for the Sanhedrin to have ever carried out.

Everything they did was illegal. The Sanhedrin, the council of 70 elders

plus one was a highly complex legal body governed by rules that we have copied to this day.

They could not conduct a trial at night. They could not use witnesses that were not reliable. 2 upstanding known reliable witnesses had to agree. Any capital offense trial must wait a full day before punishment is administered. They met in chambers that were in the temple complex. During the day.

All of that and more was ignored on this night. They hold court at Annas house, in his courtyard, not in the temple, not during the day.

In order to give it some shred of decency they wait until morning and arrive at their pre-arranged verdict.

Their biggest obstacle is that they are under the government of Rome. These men have no authority to carry out a capital punishment. Only Rome can make that call. So in order to give their sham trial some shred of legitimacy, and perhaps it's not a good idea to go pounding on the governors door in the middle of the night, this morning scene takes place.

Some scholars will say this is now the 3rd jewish trial phase. Once before Annas, then before Caiaphas, and now this early AM attempt at some legitimacy before the Sanhedrin. But the verdict was in before the first trial. Murder and nothing less. He must die.

So they bind Him and take Him to Pilate. But first, Matthew gives us this important parenthesis about the traitor, Judas.

3Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."

Finally, the first reliable witness. Judas himself.

The chief priests and elders have no interest in the truth. They could

have found hundreds of witnesses to say what Judas has just said. This man is innocent. But recall, they begin with the verdict and work backwards. Judas and anyone else witnessing of the innocence of the Son of God will not be heard in this illegal trial.

Does Judas have a change of heart? No. Not really. Lots of people have remorse over the consequences of their sin.

If Judas had really had a change of heart, he should have gone to Jesus, not these wicked men. Judas only has buyers remorse. This \$30 bucks has too much baggage. He tries to unscramble the egg, but to no avail.

But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!"

These are the spiritual overseers of Israel. The shepherds in charge of Israel's collective souls. The man is innocent. I don't want the money or the guilt. And they tell him; that's your problem. Not ours.

5And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.

We've come full circle back to Pascals quote. Even those who hang themselves. Judas is faced with a choice. Live with the guilt of selling a perfect life for \$30 bucks, or end your life. Which will make me happy? Where will I get relief. Happier to be dead. And he hangs himself.

We never hear the shrieks of Judas in hell. He was successful in one thing though. He's caused a problem for the murderers.

6The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood."

This seems to me to be one of the most bizarre statements in all of the Bible. Did they not here just declare themselves purveyors of blood? The money originated with them. They just admitted it is blood money. Can they not connect the dots. It's a simple triangle. Not much skill required.

Such is the blindness of their hatred, as we will see next week when they tell Pilate, his blood be upon us and our children.

They're in Pascal's equation also. What will make everything OK again? Dead Jesus. At any cost. That's what has to happen. Then we will have peace in our souls. It's a high cost, but they are willing.

Meanwhile, back at the temple, there is decorum not to be broken. Proper protocol. This money can't go into the treasury. It's stained with blood. This money is purchased by murder. My oh my. What to do.

7And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers. 8For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

Matthews account is probably within 30 - 35 years of the event, and he tells us, that field, bought with that money, is to this day, called Field of Blood.

9Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel; 10AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER'S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME."

The words are from Zechariah 11 vs 12 and 13. And the Holy Spirit has arranged them here to give evidence that Judas or no Judas, wicked Sanhedrin or no wicked Sanhedrin, what we have here is the plan of God unfolding just as it was pre-told in history.

Judas carries out his part. The wicked rulers carry out their part. God wrote down the details centuries before it happened.

There is a problem here for interpreters. Why does Matthew say the words are from Jeremiah the prophet and yet we find them in Zechariah's prophecy?

The best explanation I read is the simplest. From my friend, John MacArthur.

He tells us, the Jews, Jesus included, referred to the writings in 3 categories. Moses, which was the Pentateuch, the Law, The Prophets, and the Psalms.

What we forget, 25 centuries removed from their culture is that when they said the Psalms, it means all of those books in the middle. Job, Ruth, Esther, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. The books of wisdom.

Likewise, says MacArthur, the first Jewish book of the section called the prophets is Jeremiah. And it was common to refer to all of prophecy by the name on the scroll that contained the prophets. That would be Jeremiah. So it became interchangeable with all of the combined books of the prophets.

So don't be concerned that Matthew got it wrong here. And the logical conclusion, what else did he get wrong, and once that barn door is open, who else got stuff wrong. It's simply a matter of distance from a cultural norm of 2500 years ago that is lost to us.

Finally, what is the answer to Pascal's riddle. Judas followed his desire for peace and happiness into perdition. The rulers followed their desire for peace and happiness into the bloody murder of a perfect life.

Both instances turn away from God as a source and follow Satan. A dead end street. Satan holds up a big sign, Happiness - This way, and you go down that road and it ends in despair. Guilt. Sorrow. Self murder.

The happiness Satan promises apart from God's will and word never materializes. Perdition. Destruction. Sorrow. Those are the biblical warnings associated with following a way not of this book.

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Says the Proverbs.

How do we find peace. How do we find happiness. How do we follow our souls desire for contentment to the right place. There are so many sirens directing it to all the wrong places. How do we learn from the mistakes of Judas and the Sanhedrin.

Listen carefully to the words of Jesus. Act on them. Judas heard them too, and still failed.

Mt. 11:28 - 30 “Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30“For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Jn. 7:37 - 38 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. 38 “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”