

SERIES: The Good News, as Reported by Matthew

SERMON: **Deadly Remorse**

SCRIPTURE: Matt 27:1-10

SPEAKER: Michael P. Andrus

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Centuries ago in Italy, an artist set out to paint a mural of the life of Christ in one of the great cathedrals. When he got to the scene of Jesus at age twelve debating the teachers of the Law in the Temple, he searched for just right person to serve as his model, choosing a handsome young man with a wholesome and intelligent appearance. Years later as the artist approached the final scenes of Jesus' life, he faced the task of painting the face of Judas. He searched through the criminal quarters of the city and among the baser elements of the population.

At length in one of the jails he found a desperate, wicked man sentenced to death for his crimes against mankind. He chose this evil, sinister face as his model for Judas Iscariot. Day after day he went down to the prison and sketched the face of this criminal. Working on the painting in his studio one day, he saw something about the face that puzzled him. Day after day he pondered the matter, and at last the truth flashed upon him—it was the same face he had painted long ago as the young Jesus. The handsome young man had grown up to be a despicable criminal.

This true story gives us some remarkable insight into the spiritual sojourn of the man Judas Iscariot. Never did a man have a more auspicious beginning or greater potential. He enjoyed a privilege shared by only eleven others in history—i.e. he was personally mentored, taught, and trained by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Yet no one has ever fallen to such depths of wickedness.

Of this Apostle, this chosen one, Jesus said the most terrible thing that could be said of any human being: “It would be better for him if he had not been born.” (Matt. 26:24). I want us to examine Judas this morning in respect to his character, his conduct, and the consequences that befell him.

The character of Judas

After examining every passage in the NT that speaks of Judas I have found that he, like nearly everyone else, had both character assets and character liabilities. Among his assets was the fact that

His assets

1. He was a Judaeen. (John 13:26) When Judas is first introduced in the New Testament he is identified as Judas Iscariot to distinguish him from another Judas among the Twelve, who is also called Thaddeus. Iscariot means “a man of Kerioth,” a town near Jerusalem. This means Judas was a Judaeen—the only one of the Twelve who was not a Galilean. Judaeans generally looked down upon Galileans as being uncouth and uneducated, which, in general, they were. Though we cannot be certain, it is likely that Judas was the most cultured of the Apostles, perhaps also the most educated.

2. He was a disciple of Jesus. (Matthew 10:1, 4) A disciple is a learner and a follower, at least outwardly. We don't know the circumstances under which Judas became a disciple, but perhaps he

was one of those who responded to the preaching of John the Baptist. We like to think that at this stage Judas was not a conscious and deliberate hypocrite, but it is fairly obvious that he had political ambition. It was, perhaps, the prospect of being someone important in the coming Kingdom which induced him to follow Jesus.

3. He was an Apostle. (Matthew 10:1-8) There were many disciples who did not become Apostles. The Apostolate was a select group of Twelve whom Jesus called to become His special envoys to spread the news of the Gospel and to uphold and maintain pure doctrine in the early church. In Acts 1:17, when the early church leaders met in Jerusalem to choose someone to take Judas' place after his death, Peter said of him, undoubtedly with deep regret in his voice, “he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.” It seems to me we are forced to the conclusion that Judas not only was one of their number, but also that he shared the apostolic gifts, training, and ministry with the likes of Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Matthew. I suspect he performed miracles and cast out demons.

Now why would someone like Judas ever be allowed to join such a sacred group as the Twelve Apostles? Interestingly, the New Testament makes the point several times that it was no accident—that Jesus Himself chose those He wanted to be His Apostles. If that is true, why did He choose Judas? Was He fooled? Of course not. In fact, John 6:64 explicitly states, “For Jesus had known *from the beginning* who would betray him.”

Could it be, then, that Jesus chose Judas to be an actor in a morality play, a mere puppet? This was the message of “Jesus Christ Superstar,” the immensely popular musical nearly forty years ago which turned Judas into a kind of tragic hero. Superstar puts these words into Judas’ mouth: *“Christ, I know you can't hear me. But I only did what you wanted me to. My mind is darkness now. My God, I am sick, I've been used and you knew all the time. God, I'll never ever know why you chose me for your crime, for your foul bloody crime. You have murdered me! You have murdered me!”*

And with one stroke of the playwright's pen, the sovereignty-free will controversy is solved by exonerating Judas and making God the murderer!¹

Of course, there is no hint of this in Scripture. For Jesus to know something in advance in no way makes Him responsible for it, anymore than God is responsible for sin just because He is omniscient.

4. He was the Treasurer of the Twelve Apostles. (John 13:29) John 13:29 tells us that “Judas had charge of the money,” and John 12:6 adds that “he was keeper of the money bag.” This is especially surprising, because Matthew the tax collector was also one of the Twelve. Wouldn't you think that a former IRS agent might be the most logical choice to be Treasurer? But no, Judas won the job, probably because of the fifth character asset we want to mention:

5. He had an impeccable reputation. (John 13:22-28) Tax collectors were suspect, perhaps even converted ones, but Judas was not suspected by anyone. You recall that at the Last Supper Jesus told

His disciples the unvarnished truth: “I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.” But the “disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant” (John 13:22). Eventually one of them quietly asked Jesus, “Lord, who is it?” And He answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then he gave it to Judas.

Jesus clearly identifies Judas as the betrayer but his reputation is so squeaky clean that the other disciples simply can't accept that Jesus means what He has said. Furthermore, we learn from the other Gospels that the disciples begin to ask Jesus, “Is it I, Lord, is it I? So said them *all*.” Imagine that! Each of the Apostles suspects himself to be the betrayer before any of them suspect Judas, even after Jesus identifies him.

We have seen some of Judas' significant assets. What about his character liabilities? I will mention just three of them.

His liabilities:

1. He was a man of greed. (John 12:6) We saw this clearly a few weeks ago in the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany. Judas immediately objected, “Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.” Judas wanted this money to go into the Treasury, not because he was frugal or because he cared for the poor, but because he was pilfering from the Treasury, and he saw this as a lucrative new source to satisfy his personal greed.

2. He was a devil. (John 6:70) This is the only time in Scripture a human being is called a devil (though Jesus did once refer to Peter as “Satan”). In John 6:70-71 Jesus says to His disciples, “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him).” This is especially surprising when we consider that there is only one devil, though there are many demons. I think the key in understanding this reference is to observe the progression of Satanic influence in Judas' life. In John 13:2 it says, “the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.” And in verse 27 it adds that “As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.” Judas didn't sell out in a moment of time; he progressively allowed Satan to overtake him, first being prompted, eventually being possessed. He was so controlled by Satan that Jesus could call him a devil.

If we have a hard time understanding how someone so close to Jesus could be so influenced by the Evil One, we probably haven't come to grips with the teaching of 2 Corinthians 11:13-14. After discussing the problem of false teachers in the church Paul concludes,

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.”

This passage teaches us that Satan does not operate as a red dude with horns and pitchfork, nor does he always make bad people worse. In fact, it is probably more common for him to make good people better, but without Christ. So, to find Satan at work we need to look beyond Skid Row. We may more likely find him among the “angels of light”—deacons, elders, clergy, even apostles.

3. He was the Son of Perdition. (John 17:12) This term is used elsewhere only of the Anti-Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:3), that violent usurper of spiritual authority who wears down the people of God and tries to stamp out all vestiges of Christian faith during the Great Tribulation. Judas is a precursor of that arch-deceiver. The spirit that indwells and motivates Judas is the same spirit that will indwell and motivate the Anti-Christ, namely the spirit of Satan.

Having considered the character of Judas, it is time to give attention to his conduct.

The conduct of Judas

Judas' dastardly deed that earned him the disdain of good people everywhere was both predicted and premeditated.

His betrayal was predicted. (Matt 10, 26, John 13) There is an old saying that to be forewarned is to be forearmed. If so, Judas had the least excuse of any man, for if anyone ever had sufficient warning to prevent him from committing an awful sin, it was Judas. In fact, he was warned at least six times of the awful path he was on. We have already seen that Jesus predicted that one of the Twelve was a devil. He also told the disciples, "You are clean, though not every one of you." (John 13:10,11). Later He said, "He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me" (John 13:18). Still later He predicted, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." (Matthew 26:21). And finally He said at the Last Supper, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me." (Matthew 26:23). And when Judas responds, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus answers, "Yes, it is you." (Matthew 26:25).

His crime was premeditated. (Luke 22:6) Judas' sin was not one of passion or insanity. He coolly calculated for the convenient time to do his dastardly deed. In Luke 22:6 we read, "Judas watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present." Even sadder, he chose the sacred paths of Gethsemane as the place, for as John 18:2 says, "Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples." And, according to John 13:30, he waited for the cover of darkness. His crime was premeditated.

He carried it out in the most sinister fashion. (Matthew 26:49) Judas came to the grove of olive trees in Gethsemane, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. It was prearranged that he would identify Jesus by kissing him, since it was late at night and the soldiers might have trouble distinguishing Jesus from one of His disciples. A kiss has always been a token of love and friendship, but Judas chose that as his method of betrayal. And it was so unnecessary, for according to John 18:5-8 Jesus identified Himself three times as the one whom they were seeking. Perhaps Jesus was trying to spare Judas the ultimate sin of offering the traitor's kiss, but he would not be spared.

There is a passage in Psalm 55 that speaks eloquently of the pain Jesus must have experienced when this one who was so close to Him chose the traitor's route. Psalm 55:12-14:

If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could

hide from him.

*But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend,
with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God.*

For a paltry sum of 30 pieces of silver, the price that had to be paid if a person's ox gored another's slave to death (Ex. 21:32), Judas betrayed Christ and watched as they hauled Him off to a kangaroo court. It was a kiss of death—for Jesus only temporarily; for Judas, eternally.

The consequences for Judas

It's time to read our principal text this morning, Matthew 27:1-10:

Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. 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.

"I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."

So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. 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." So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 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, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

He gained a tortured conscience. (Matt. 27:3) Matthew 27:3 in the KJV tells us that Judas repented. But there are two Greek words for repent, one meaning to “feel remorse” and the other meaning to “turn around and go the opposite direction.” The term used here of Judas is the former. It is correctly translated in the NIV as “seized with remorse.” There is a huge difference between remorse and repentance, and in a few moments I'm going to come back to this issue.

Due to his tortured conscience Judas attempts to make restitution. The blood money burns in his pocket. He discovers that the pleasures of sin are a mere mirage on the desert of life. But when he comes to those with whom he had conspired against Jesus, the chief priests and elders taunt him by saying of his remorse, “What is that to us? That's your responsibility.” They twist the knife that is stabbing his heart, and he feels compelled to throw the money into the sanctuary. Judas learns that the world has no concern for a loser once it has used him.

He experienced a tragic death. (Matthew 27:3-5, Acts 1:18-19) Judas commits suicide. Matthew simply states it as a fact. But a gory description of his death is given in Acts 1:18-19, and it isn't nearly as neat as the one we saw in the video:

“With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called

that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.”

By the way, some have concluded that suicide is an unforgivable sin because it is how Judas died. Suicide is always tragic, but the reason Judas remained unforgiven is not that he took his own life. Rather he took his own life because he knew he was unforgiven, and he was unforgiven because he never repented.

If Judas thought death would end the misery of his tortured conscience, he was terribly mistaken. For the unbeliever, physical death only speeds up the finality of spiritual death for all of eternity. Dante, in his Vision of Hell, placed Judas in the lowest circle of the damned, as the sole sharer with Satan himself of the very worst punishment. I think he was probably right.

He earned a tarnished name. (Matthew 27:3) Some names have been terribly sullied by the despicable behavior of one who bore that name. I think of the names, Jezebel or Brutus or Benedict or Adolph. Unfortunately, every once in a while you hear of a deranged parent using one of these names for his child. On January 15 Fox News reported that a 3-year-old boy named Adolf Hitler Campbell and his two younger sisters, also with Nazi names, were removed from their New Jersey home and placed in state custody by the state's Division of Youth and Family Services.

But there is one name which has not just been sullied—it has been ruined. No parent would *ever* give his or her child the name Judas. In fact, I can't imagine that anyone would even call a dog by that name. Judas' name will always live in infamy as a byword for betrayal and treachery.

The difference between repentance and remorse (2 Corinthians 7:10-11)

Listen to 2 Corinthians 7:10: “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

The results of godly sorrow:

1. It produces repentance. What is repentance? Repentance is a change of direction produced by a change of heart or mind. It's not enough just to feel regret; it's not enough to cry; it's not enough to be so depressed that suicide seems the only way out. The change of heart must produce a change of direction. Godly sorrow *always* produces a change of direction.

2. It leads to salvation. “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation.” I believe true repentance must necessarily accompany salvation. This is a controversial topic among some evangelical theologians. Some who are so enamored with the doctrine of “grace alone” that they deny the necessity of repentance. One popular Study Bible lists repentance as “a false addition to faith.”ⁱⁱⁱ And a well-known theologian wrote that there is an “overwhelming mass of irrefutable evidence [making it] clear that the New Testament does *not* impose repentance upon the unsaved as a condition of salvation.” (Well, I have examined the mass of evidence and remain unconvinced).

If we are saved by grace, those who hold this view tell us, then there is nothing we can possibly

contribute to the process. In fact, they offer the following syllogism:
 The Bible says we are dead in our trespasses and sins.
 Dead people can't do anything.
 Therefore, dead people can't even repent until God regenerates them.

I admire the desire of these Bible teachers to protect the grace of God (although I'm not sure He needs our protection). Their motive is good—to eliminate the notion that man can save himself; clearly he cannot. But by calling repentance a necessity for salvation are we really suggesting that man can save himself? I don't think so. It is God, after all, who convicts the heart in the first placeⁱⁱⁱ; it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to see that we have violated the character and the commandments of God; and it is Jesus who paid the penalty of our sin allowing us to be declared “not guilty.”

So clearly God starts the process, enables the process, and completes the process. But it is also true that God asks, even demands a response from us. He calls upon us to recognize and repudiate our sin (which is repentance) and to receive the Savior (which is faith). Does that mean these are “works” that contribute to our salvation? I don't think so; they are merely the necessary response of a convicted heart.

3. It leaves no regret. “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.” This is an interesting statement. What does it mean? Does it imply that when a person has felt godly sorrow, repented, and experienced God's forgiveness, he no longer cares about what he's done? Is his slate clear and clean as the wind-driven snow? Well, in one sense, yes, at least before God's eternal bar of justice, because God promises to justify him, i.e. to treat him as “not guilty,” even righteous!

But on another level it continues to matter a great deal what he has done; the consequences remain and the regret often remains. In King David's case did godly sorrow mean he no longer regretted the death of Uriah or the death of his infant son? Of course not! What about Karla Faye Tucker, who brutally murdered several individuals with a pickaxe. She experienced godly sorrow, she repented, and her repentance led, I believe, to salvation. But she undoubtedly lived with regret for a wasted life until her last day when the state of Texas executed her.

I think when Paul says that godly sorrow starts a process that leaves “no regret,” he's not referring to regret about our sin or its consequences; rather he is saying there is no regret for having turned to God! The one who experiences godly sorrow will never regret his repentance! Instead, he is eternally grateful for the experience of God's grace and mercy in his life.

Well, if the results of godly sorrow are that it produces repentance, leads to salvation, and leaves no regret, what is the result of remorse (worldly sorrow)? Paul offers just one comment:

The result of worldly sorrow: It brings death. (10) “Worldly sorrow brings death.” The sorrow of the world (or remorse) is that it produces guilt, shame, resentment, anguish, despair, depression, hopelessness, and even death. If it doesn't lead to actual suicide, it leads to emotional,

psychological, or spiritual suicide. This is what we see in the case of Judas. He experienced deep remorse over what he had done in betraying an innocent man, a friend no less. But he could find no way out; for some reason he didn't believe such a heinous sin was forgivable (as clearly it was, for Peter who betrayed Christ, was forgiven). His only way out of his misery was self-destruction.^{iv}

Lessons to learn and live:

1. Self-confidence leads to spiritual complacency. I have a strong suspicion that if we could read Judas' mind prior to Passion Week we would find a man confident that he was in control of his own destiny. As a follower of Jesus he was in the middle of the action. The crowds were getting larger, and he had seen enough miracles to believe Jesus might actually pull off a coup against Rome. If so, Judas was in the right place to capitalize on Jesus' popularity.

Judas was satisfied that he had an acquaintance with Jesus, but he seemed unconcerned that his motives and commitment were so different from the other Apostles. After all, he rationalized, they weren't spiritual giants either. In fact, if an objective observer were to rate him against buffoons like Peter, James, and John, he would surely come out smelling like an olive blossom. So I suspect he became spiritually complacent.

There are many today who have an acquaintance with Jesus, more or less. They may even like to associate with other Christians, because they recognize that spiritually that's where the action is. If they play their cards right they expect to end up on the winning side. But there's no point getting too serious about this religion thing—there's a lot of life to live. So they become spiritually complacent.

2. Self-pity leads to spiritual catastrophe. At the end of his life Judas was seized not only with remorse but also with self-pity. “I have sinned,” he says. “I have betrayed innocent blood.” Though on the surface these may sound like the words of a repentant heart, they are in fact words of self-pity. He feels terrible about the cards life has dealt him. Even at this late date he is unwilling to acknowledge his sin before God, the One whose holiness he has violated; he only acknowledges his sin before the chief priests and elders.

In Hebrews 12:15-17 we read these poignant words:

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. See that no one is like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.”

In fact, Genesis 27:34 says “he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, ‘Bless me—me too, my father!’” On the surface, it sounds from Hebrews 12:17 like Esau was trying to get his father Isaac to change *his* mind, but the original language implies otherwise. The New English Bible seems to have the translation right when it says, “He found no way open for second thoughts.” He just couldn't bring himself to repent.

I have known believers who have allowed a root of bitterness to spring up in their lives . Perhaps

their feelings got hurt somewhere along the line, perhaps they experienced severe trials in their personal life and didn't receive the support they feel they deserve; perhaps they're just angry at God for what He has allowed in their lives. Instead of dealing with the source of their anger, their lives become a walking spiritual catastrophe. The only antidote is forgiveness—accepting God's forgiveness; or perhaps forgiving others.

3. Self-examination leads to spiritual vitality. While we shrink in horror from the treacheries of Judas, perhaps what we should be doing is what the other Apostles did at the Last Supper, and that is to ask, "Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I?" I am not suggesting that a Christian must doubt the genuineness of his faith. I don't believe that. At the same time, it is healthy for us from time to time to examine ourselves to make sure we are not playing games with our eternal destiny. 2 Cor. 13:5 reads, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves."

Conclusion: Though this story has no beautiful ending for Judas, it could have one for you. For the Betrayed One died in your place and rose again for your justification. He offers satisfaction instead of suicide, reward instead of remorse.

i. Well, why *did* Jesus choose Judas? I think at least three reasons can be enumerated.

1. First, to warn us that salvation is not by osmosis. Association with the godly, even with Christ Himself, does not guarantee spiritual vitality.

2. To provide a lesson for time immemorial of the awful destructiveness of the love of money and power, for both of these sinister temptations seized Judas.

3. To complete His qualifications as our High Priest. Hebrews 2 describes the priesthood of Jesus in these terms: "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." And in chapter 4 we read,

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Many of us, perhaps all of us, will at some time suffer betrayal by someone close to us. Jesus understands that and therefore can provide the comfort we need when it happens to us.

ii. Ryrie Study Bible, 1950.

iii. In fact, there are at least two passages that indicate that God Himself *grants* repentance. See Acts 11:18 and 2 Tim. 2:25. Of course, repentance is much more often commanded or required than given. This is true of faith, too; it is often required, commanded, even demanded, but an occasional passage indicates it is "given" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Perhaps the ultimate conclusion is that we are required to repent and to believe, but if we think we can do either on our own, without divine help,

we are mistaken. If they are gifts (and they are), they are not gifts we can receive passively but rather must receive actively.