

THE WAY OF JUDAS OR THE WAY OF JESUS

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

In our history textbooks, children learn about a man named Benedict Arnold who switched sides during the American Revolutionary War. He was considered by many to be among the greatest generals in the colonial army.

Becoming bitter over some political issues that affected his personal life, Arnold decided to switch sides and become a British loyalist. Barely escaping the sword of General George Washington, Arnold sailed to London and there he lived the remainder of his life.

Children may not recall all the facts surrounding Benedict Arnold's life or the circumstances surrounding his military career. They may not recall the dates he lived. But, we can be sure of one thing: They'll remember that Benedict Arnold was a traitor to his country.

The story of Judas is the darkest story in human history. Judas Iscariot betrayed the only One who ever lived without sin, who mistreated no one, and who only did others good. As we follow the trail Judas left by his betrayal, we'll keep in mind the outline below:

- I. **The Results of Judas' Deed (vv. 1-31)**
- II. **The Reality of Jesus' Death (vv. 32-61)**

I. The Results of Judas' Deed (vv. 1-31)

Eternity itself is required to fathom the dastardly deed of Judas Iscariot. His life and subsequent death marks a warning to every church member. Judas, after all, was "one of the twelve," and thus was close to Jesus for three-plus years. Many admired him and probably some envied his status with the Savior. He was treasurer, keeping track of the moneybag for the disciples. People thought Judas was sold out to Jesus and for a time Judas even thought himself to be a faithful disciple. Yet circumstance proved it all a farce. Judas never believed in Jesus and as the Bible makes clear, Judas was not to be envied.

As we follow these verses, let us key in with the context (vv. 1-2). The morning session of the Sanhedrin was more formal than the night before, though Jesus' sentence was already passed. He was convicted of blasphemy, a crime punishable by death. Yet, their tribunal was only religious by nature. Thus the Sanhedrin could not put Jesus to death. Instead, they would present Jesus as a political criminal, attempting to usurp Rome's authority (cp. John 18:31). They made plans to send Him to Pilate to gain from him the sentence they desired.

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Now that we see the context for Judas' deed, let us observe the characteristics of the deed's result. *First, Judas experienced deep regret: "when he saw that he was condemned,"* (v. 3). The possibility exists that Judas thought Jesus would escape from the trap. Judas then could pocket the money and move on peacefully. Yet we know that did not take place. Jesus was condemned. Often we make choices that we do not think through wisely, not realizing that bad can come from them. Judas is our example we must consider.

Matthew recorded that Judas "repented himself." This sounds spiritual. It is not. Judas only regretted the results of his deed. It was not that he was sorry for his sin against God, against Jesus, and against his fellow disciples. Rather, Judas is sorry he didn't get by with his deed! We don't see him return to Jesus to beg forgiveness. Instead, we see him run to the religious thugs to see if somehow he could undo his deed.

Some have compared Peter's denial of Jesus (cp. Matthew 26:69-75) to Judas' betrayal, believing that he did precisely the same thing. Yet there is a big difference between Peter and Judas. Peter's sorrow drove



Reflection Connection

How would you define true repentance? What characteristics of repentance are in stark contrast to emotional regret? How can a person determine whether they possess godly sorrow and a repentant heart? Name specific places in scripture where these two responses to sin, repentance and regret, are fleshed out.

him to Jesus; Judas' sorrow drove him to the Pharisees. That in itself proves Peter was repentant while Judas was only regretful. But there's more. Repentance led Peter to the Savior, regret led Judas to suicide. The Savior forgave Peter; suicide finished Judas. Thus Peter received hope; sadly Judas received hell.

Second, not only did Judas experience deep regret (v. 3), he also was awakened to a definite reality (v. 4). The full impact of what he did struck him like a Mack truck. He openly conceded to the council what he'd done: "I have sinned." What an awful difference in the way sin looks before we do it and afterwards. This marks the beginning stages of sin's torment.

Judas also began to see just how serious was his deed for he said he "betrayed innocent blood." Once again, we must emphasize that just because sorrow exists—even deep sorrow—over the seriousness of one's deeds, that does not mean one has truly repented of that act (cp. 2 Corinthians 7:10). Note where Judas was; he was with the very ones who conspired with him to commit murder! He was not on his knees before God.

Judas must surely have known the solid case he'd given to the Sanhedrin. He was the eyewitness whom the high priest failed to summon. Judas lived with Jesus, ate with him, prayed with him, and even carried Jesus' money for him. If anyone knew the personal habits of Jesus, it was Judas.

Third, once the reality was found, Judas would soon face his own ruin (v. 5). None of the sorrow Judas expressed softened Jesus' tormentors. They weren't about to let Jesus go now: "And they said [to Judas], what is that to us? See thou to that" (v. 4). They had no more concern for Judas now that they had for Jesus. What a hard lesson to learn: those who collaborate with you in your sin have no respect for you. Your sinful companions won't be there to help you in that dark and tormenting hour, when what you've done stares back at you. Indeed, they cannot help you, because they are as guilty as you are.

Hearing the painful words, "what is that to us?" sealed Judas in to an airtight reality: he was all alone, abandoned to the deed he now must face. It was too much. Taking the money pouch from his side, he flung the money down for the buzzards to scavenge. They collected the coins and purchased a field where strangers would be buried, perhaps their way of coping with their own brand of suppressed guilt (vv. 6-7). Meanwhile,

Judas was so distraught over his deceitful deed that, securing a rope, he found a suitable place and dove head first over a cliff, perishing without a trace of hope (v. 5; cp. Acts 1:16-18, 25). The severe contrast between Peter and Judas continues. Peter humbled himself and was saved to eternity with Jesus; Judas hanged himself and was sentenced to eternity without Jesus. The shed blood of Jesus redeemed Peter. The sinful betrayal of Jesus ruined Judas.

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Reflection Connection

The ugliness of sin is so obvious, as we read the account of Judas' betrayal of our Lord. Oftentimes, we are unable to see sin so honestly in our own lives. Unbelief, jealousy, envy, selfishness, and pride are among Judas' sins. How have these sins ever led you to make a decision or take a certain action? As you reflect, humbly ask the Lord Jesus to give you fresh eyes to see the ugliness of sin.

Fourth, Judas' deed finalized the ruling against Jesus (vv. 11-31). Judas' death could not stop the repercussions of his crime. Jesus was brought once again to trial and this time the judge had the power to do what the Sanhedrin wanted to do but had no power to accomplish: to put Jesus to death.

Phase one of Jesus' trial has already happened (26:57-8). While the first phase was religious, the second phase is secular. Jesus now "stood before the governor" (v. 11). Pontius Pilate, commander of the Roman troops, a relative to Caesar by marriage was cold, hard, and hated by the Jewish people. As this trial unfolds, though from a strictly human standpoint, Pilate holds four of a kind. Matthew makes sure we know who has the Royal Flush when all is said and done, like Judas before him, it is Pilate that is on trial, not Jesus.

As we consider the proceedings of the court, let's focus on three points about Pilate's conduct (vv. 11-14). Pilate began his query with a series of questions to Jesus (v. 11). Of course he knew the charges to be false. Also, the charges had been changed to treason, which if Jesus were convicted, gave Rome the authority to put Him to death because treason was a capital crime.

Jesus answered briefly but clearly: "Thou sayest." Taking Pilate by complete surprise, Jesus' positive answer produced a first arm of protest from the leaders (vv. 12-14). In fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7, Jesus "answered him to never a word" (v. 14).

Second, observe Pilate's confrontation with the Jews (vv. 15-23). There was something about this peaceful Galilean that Pilate could not accept. Frankly, he was very uneasy around Jesus. The injustice that was taking place was unavoidable. Pilate's effort at self-denial made it very uncomfortable to be in His presence. Isn't that how we always are?

Pilate attempted to look for a loop hole. He knew Jesus was innocent. He even knew why Jesus stood before him: "For he knew that for envy they had delivered him" (v. 18).

After thinking on it awhile, he recalled a custom and reasoned it was a way to get him out of this mess. The governor had ample precedent to release a prisoner during the festival (v. 15). The only obstacle would be setting it up carefully so the people would choose freely to let Jesus go. His plan was to put two prisoners before them one of whom they were sure to refuse. He chose the notable prisoner Barabbas, an insurrectionist, murderer (Luke 23:19) and robber (John 18:40). Surely no one would want such a man on the streets. Thus, it was Barabbas or Jesus.

As Pilate thought about these things, an interruption came by way of a messenger from his wife (vv. 19-20). She apparently had a startling dream warning of Jesus' innocence (v. 19). This only served to make Pilate even more uneasy. He thought by offering the mob a choice between Jesus and a known outlaw, who had terrorized their streets, they would choose Jesus. We can never underestimate the sheer irrationality of unbelieving hearts. Sin will lead you in directions you never intended to go.

The Jews demanded their man—Barabbas! (vv. 21-23). Have you ever stopped to reflect how shocked Barabbas must have been when he heard the crowd call for his release rather than Jesus'? The question of the ages was then asked by the



Roman ruler: “What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ?” (v. 22). No inquiry has ever been uttered more applicable to the human life than this. It is not a question that allows neutrality. Only you can answer it, and you must answer it.

Third, notice Pilate’s capitulation (vv. 24-31). His plan collapses before his eyes. He thought he had it all figured out. His weakness predictably won out and he gave in to the mob’s misguided mentality: he emancipated Barabbas, and executed Jesus (vv. 21-22).

Upon seeing it was useless to resist any longer, and in an obvious display designed to relieve him of any guilt, Pilate washed his hands publicly, declaring himself innocent of the entire fiasco (v. 24). Nevertheless, all the water in the world cannot wash away his guilt. No bowl is big enough, or ocean wide enough, to clean his blood-stained hands.

The same is true of us. We cannot write our own rules for the way God forgives sin. Neither is it possible to dismiss our own sin. The only way sin can be gone is by turning to Jesus. This is the hope God offers! Jesus died for our sin. Through Him we may live. All other ways, we die.

The brutality that follows Pilate’s cowardly capitulation is indicative of sinful human beings at their worst (vv. 26-31). The soldiers took Him, stripped Him, and placed upon Him a robe of mockery (v. 28). They pushed the thorns into His forehead, resembling the crown of a fake king. A graphic attempt in humiliating Him, they stripped Him again and scourged Him. Scourging was a form of torture in itself, leaving its victims either crazy or unconscious. Many died. Jesus survived the scourge. They then led Him away to be crucified (v. 31).

II. The Reality of Jesus’ Death (vv. 32-61)

We move now to the most sacred site on the planet. Matthew calls it “*Golgotha*,” a Hebrew word (recall Matthew’s Gospel was written primarily to a Jewish audience). The Latin word is “*Calvary*,” meaning primarily the “*place of a skull*.” Jesus did not just die here. Rather, He died “the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). As we think on the cross, and the reality of it, there are three things on which to focus. *First, focus on the crowds at the cross* (vv. 32-44). Matthew gives us brief sketches of those who milled around Golgotha and each offer a lesson to learn.

What started as an offensive act of service became an opportunity to be saved.

The first one who captures our attention is Simon, who was compelled to carry Jesus’ cross (v. 32). Usually the victim sentenced to crucifixion carried his own cross. We’re told Jesus carried His for a ways (John 19:16-17). Yet from all He suffered beforehand, Jesus collapsed under sheer exhaustion, indicating His genuine humanity. Simon, an African from the city of Cyrene, was passing by when the soldiers “compelled” him to pick up Jesus’ cross and proceed to Calvary. Amazingly, what started as an offensive act of service became an opportunity to be saved!



Second, notice among the crowds the soldiers, calloused toward the torture (vv. 33-36). Coming to the place where the cross would be assembled in an upright position, the soldiers offered Jesus a mixture of vinegar and gall (v. 34). This mix was, in effect, a narcotic which would minimize the pain only by stupefying the victim. The goal was not so much merciful toward the victim as it was a measure to keep him conscious. They did not want the criminal passing out. Their party would be over much too quickly. Even so, Jesus refused the drink.

Interestingly, the gospel writers leave out the gory details of what happened to a person during an execution by crucifixion. Every facet of the crucifixion was designed for maximum pain, while prolonging expiration sometimes for several days. No human language can capture the cruel death Jesus underwent. The callous souls of the soldiers were on full display as Jesus hangs while they play games to claim His clothing (v. 35; cp. Psalm 22:18).

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As the crowds gathered from all over the city, the soldiers prepared a plaque and placed it over Jesus' head (v. 37). Written in three major languages of that era—Hebrew, Greek and Latin—it served as a sure reminder, unknown to the callous soldiers and the crowd, that Jesus really was Messiah to all people.

The Jews could not resist an opportunity to taunt Jesus. Thus, they mocked Him, insisting that if He would “come down” from the cross, they would “believe him” (v. 42). Yet even such a feat would not change their hardened hearts. Why would it? Lazarus was raised from the dead only a few miles from where they stood. If they would not believe that miracle, why would they believe even if Jesus came down from the cross? Besides, the temptation to come down was nothing more than the Devil himself trying once more to spoil God's plans about the way Messiah would be revealed to the people (cp. 4:3, 6).

Finally, let us observe the thieves who were condemned (vv. 37-44). The thieves were also dying. The big difference was they deserved death for their capital crime but Jesus did not. Luke informs us that while both started out taunting Jesus along with the Jews—undoubtedly a self-serving strategy to keep the focus off of them—one of the thieves repented of his sin (Luke 23:39-43).

Now that we have looked at the crowds around the cross, let us focus our attention on listening to the cries from the cross (vv. 45-53). For three hours, Jesus had been hanging in the hot sun. His mouth was parched, His tongue was swollen, and the soldiers had done their work. The crowds had grown silent. Darkness settled over the land beginning around noon and lasting for the next three hours (v. 45).

It was then that Jesus spoke a mysterious word, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (v. 46). No human heart can grasp what Jesus experienced in that hour. This is God's response to human sin. The words Jesus spoke pierce the heart.



Earlier Jesus confessed that He was not alone for the Father was present with Him (John 16:32). Even in Gethsemane when the pressure upon Him squeezed blood from His skin (Luke 22:44), He knew the Father was there (26:39). His pitiful cry was answered by total silence. There is a reason God forsook His Son to save you and me. He became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21; cp. Isaiah 53:4-6).

This one scene answers the problem that has plagued humanity through the ages. The problem of suffering and the mystery of sin meet at Calvary! The salvation God offers through the sacrifice Jesus brings is pictured clearly at Golgotha.

Jesus sounded to the onlookers as if He were calling for help (v. 47). One even ran and got a beverage for Jesus, while others offered opinions about what He was saying (vv. 48-49). No one, however, possessed a clue that the Son of God was dying for his or her sin.

Reflection Connection

Jesus took our place! Even more personally, God's Son took your place. The execution was your penalty. A verse many know so well, Romans 3:23, "For the wages of sin is death." Why did you need Christ to die for you? Explain the importance of why a believer needs to remember newly the sacrifice of Jesus Christ daily.

While what Jesus uttered was mysterious, it was followed by that which was victorious (vv. 50-53). After yelling in a "loud voice," He yielded up his spirit (v. 50). Afterwards the temple veil split, the earth shook, and the dead were raised (v. 51-52)!

Here we have three miracles. The temple curtain took three hundred men to carry. Its thickness required a team of oxen to rip it apart. God was doing away with the old and establishing the new. No longer would rituals be required. Nor would there be a need for priests (Hebrews 10:9-10). The earthquake showed the significance of Jesus' death for all creation. Finally, the tombs opening and the saints arising after Christ's resurrection is clearly a picture of our own guarantee of resurrection.

Finally, our focus shifts to loving the Christ on the cross (vv. 54-61). Standing at the foot of the cross are three kinds of people. First, there are those who affirm Jesus (v. 54). The centurion was in charge of a hundred men. He stood and watched the entire crucifixion of our Savior. His confession is stunning, "Truly this was the Son of God." While the religious crowd assailed Jesus, a pagan affirmed Him.

Second, there were those who attended Jesus (vv. 55-56). Of those there were "many women." Matthew tells us that they "ministered" to Him (v. 55). How the church would suffer, were it not for the many women who serve Jesus in the church.

Third, there were those there who assisted Jesus (vv. 57-61). The law stated that the body could not stay through the night (Deuteronomy 21:23). Usually, the bodies of common criminals were thrown in mass gravesites. Yet, here we find a very rich man—Joseph—who we are told was a secret disciple (v. 57; cp. John 19:38). On this side of the cross it's difficult to understand how one can secretly follow Jesus. After all He's done, how can we be silent? Joseph's bold move inspired another to act—Nicodemus (John 19:39-40). Together they took Jesus' body, prepared it for burial, and laid it in Joseph's tomb.

Golden Greek Nugget

In verse 51, Matthew records the "veil" in the temple was "rent in twain" from top to bottom. There are two Greek words in the New Testament for "veil" one of which is exclusively used of the inner curtain between the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. It is that word—*katapetasma*—that Matthew uses here, indicating it was the inner curtain that was torn apart. Through Jesus' death, all can come equally into the presence of God.

Wrap Up

The women are left sitting at the tomb (v. 61). How telling that they were the last at the cross when Jesus died and the first at the tomb where Jesus was buried. We find later that they were also first to the tomb when Jesus arose from the dead (28:1). Their love for Christ was strong. Is yours? Why not focus on Him today, turning to Him for new life?

