

Introduction

One of the verses that belongs in every Christians memory verse collection is Romans 8:28. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose." Nothing escapes the category of "all things." This verse instructs us that there is not anything that God does not use for the good of his people. We especially need to remember this fact when we experience affliction. God uses our afflictions for our good. We also need to remember this truth when we observe and experience wicked people doing evil things.

The classic biblical illustration is presented to us in the book of Genesis where Joseph is wickedly sold into slavery by his brothers. He languishes there for 13 years, most of which was spent in prison for a false accusation. But when reunited with his brothers, he demonstrated he understood the truth of Romans 8:28 long before it was even written. He said to them, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

This morning we continue our trek through Matthew's gospel. We are making our way through the last events of Jesus's earthly life and considering specifically the guilt of Judas when he realized the horror of what he had done. And we see another example of God's overruling the evil intentions of wicked people.

[Read Text and Pray]

This text is certainly one of the darker ones in the scripture as it paints a graphic picture of the anguish of guilt. And yet, by the time we are done this morning, you will see how it underscores Romans 8:28. The overall main idea that I want you to see is that God uses the guilt of the wicked for the good of his people. In the text we definitely see guilt. Judas is racked with guilt he cannot shake. The chief priests and elders also exhibit that they know down deep within what they did in condemning Jesus was not right. And yet we see how their guilt and the actions arising out of their guilt serve to do good for the people who are the called of God.

I. Judas's Contrition

Judas was an onlooker to the mock trial of Jesus overnight. Once morning came the chief priests and elders formally decreed the death penalty for Jesus. And they led him off to Pilate because they did not have the authority to do the deed. At this moment Judas woke up to the realization that he had just committed an abominable crime.

A. The ESV says that "when Judas . . . saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind." Here is a place where the ESV can be a little confusing. The NIV says that Judas was "seized with remorse." The NKJV says Judas was "remorseful." The NASB says Judas "felt remorse." There is a word in the original language that communicates REPENTANCE, a genuine change of mind and will, but Matthew did not use it. Instead, Matthew used the word that communicates regret or sorrow. It is an emotional change in the direction of remorse. Remorse is the anguish of a guilty conscience. Jesus had said it would have been better for this man if he had not been born, and the reality of that saying was breaking into the conscious awareness of Judas. An inescapable grip of anxious fear and shame took hold of him within. The longing to go back and relive that moment the night before and make the choice not to betray Jesus was upon him and the realization that he could not do so was crushing his pounding heart. His anxiety level went through the roof. His conscience was condemning him and hounding him at every turn.

Shame and guilt and remorse come with the knowledge of wrong-doing. They hound and condemn. They produce heart palpitations and sweaty palms. They won't let you sleep. But they do not necessarily result in repentance. Last week as we looked at Peter weeping bitterly after he denied the Lord, we saw a man whose heart was stricken with a deep sense of shame and guilt, but we also saw a man who was not without hope. We saw a man who was remorseful but he was also repentant. How do we know? Because his faith did not fail. He was engulfed in sorrow but not in despair. He wronged the Lord, but he did not abandon the Lord. He turned again, like Jesus said he would. And he was restored. He showed us you can fall very far, but if you repent, the Lord will restore you. Judas shows us, on the other hand, how strong can be the pain and shame of guilt but without repentance.

Remorse, as in the case of Judas, can be sorrow over being caught in wrongdoing or over its consequences. It can wish it had not done the wicked deed, but not because of its wickedness. Meanwhile, repentance is a change of heart and mind about sin itself. Repentance involves a turning of disposition against wrongs done and against a heart of resistance toward God. It involves godly sorrow and a full admission of sin along with a hatred of it and determination to stop doing it. When there is repentance there is confession to the Lord, and where there is that kind of confession, there is forgiveness based on the blood of Jesus.

The Bible urges human beings to repent. If you do not repent you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. The first word preached by Jesus and by John the Baptist was to repent. Jesus warned his audience to repent or they would perish. Remorse alone will take you to hell but only repentance with faith in Christ Jesus will see you into heaven. You can believe facts all day long, but faith in facts will not save. A faith that saves involves a repentant heart.

You may have been sorry you got caught. You may have prayed a prayer for salvation. You may have believed the fact that Jesus died and rose again. But if you have not repented you are still in your sins. You need to know this. In a world that winks at sin, in which there are many false conversions, you need to know that you must repent. Recalling the ministry that he had among the Ephesians, Paul asserted that his message was "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Remorse does not cut it. Deep as it was, Judas' contrition was no more than remorse.

B. Under the pressure of the remorse that seized his soul, Judas brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders and threw them into the temple. He took the money back somehow hoping, it would seem, that giving the money back would assuage his guilt and shame. Judas took his guilt to false prophets. He took his guilt to the mere shadow of the Savior. The temple was a physical building of worship and sacrifice which pointed to Jesus. Now that he had come, one must come to him to receive forgiveness. Judas forsook Jesus and went to men for a solution to a problem only Christ could solve. These rogue priests could not absolve him. Only Jesus could, but Judas did not seek the Lord.

When Paul and Silas were arrested for their evangelistic work in Philippi, they were thrown into the inner prison. After a midnight earthquake, the jailer was fearful that prisoners might have escaped. He drew his sword to commit suicide. Paul and Silas dissuaded him and he asked them what he must do to be saved. They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." He is the only hope there is for forgiveness of sin!

C. Notice what Judas said to the chief priests and elders. "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." Before this time, Judas was interested in the money. He was known to steal from the

disciples' treasury. And when he came to these men, he sought them as to how much they would give him to betray Jesus onto their hands. Now he is throwing the silver into the temple, saying he has sinned. Judas is a living, breathing testimony to the fact that sin NEVER delivers the satisfaction that it promises. Sin never delivers the satisfaction it promises. Here is the silver he was paid to betray, but he cannot enjoy holding it or spending it because the sin he committed to get it has ruined any satisfaction he hoped to receive.

What an important reminder for the moment of temptation! Remember Judas. See him throwing the silver coins as though they have brought a curse upon him. But the curse was brought upon him by the sin of accepting them in order to betray Christ. Listen and soak it in. If you have to sin in order to get something or someone, you will destroy the joy and satisfaction you hoped to have in that thing or that person. Watch out because sin never delivers the satisfaction it promises. The devil who tempts suddenly reverts to making accusation against your heart when you do the thing he told you would bring pleasure.

D. Not only did the sin fail to satisfy, the guilt and shame of the sin actually drove Judas over the edge. Then he departed, and he went and hanged himself. Murder is a real problem in the United States of America. In 2018 in the United States there were 16,374 homicides. But in that same year there were 3 times as many suicides as there were murders. Yes, the number of suicides in 2018 was 48,000. But I am going to give you another even more staggering number. In 2018 statisticians estimate that the number of people who attempted suicide was 1.4 million. There are a number of reasons for such attempts, but undoubtedly one of the most common is hopelessness.

Why did Judas take his life? It is clear from Matthew's report that Judas was hopeless. He was hopeless because he was overcome by his guilt and could not shake it.

The Bible portrays the agony of guilt. On the day of Pentecost as Peter was preaching, the Jews fell under conviction of their sin. Acts 2:37 tells us they were CUT TO THE HEART. Isaiah was treated to a glorious display of the holiness of God in a vision, and the result was excruciating discomfort. He cried out "Woe is me! I am undone!" David in Psalm 32 describes his inner sensations of guilt over sin. He wrote, "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." Judas was so completely overwhelmed with the guilt of his sin that he sought refuge from that anguish in death.

Not a few people—as we have pointed out already—not a few people seek refuge from what troubles them by turning to killing themselves. The straightforward truth is suicide does not spare you from trouble. It does not spare from pain. It does not spare from hopelessness, and it does not spare anyone from guilt. Hebrews 9:27 declares that "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." And after judgment comes the penalty of the Lake of Fire where the unrepentant are inflicted with the furious wrath of God for all eternity. Revelation 14:11 says that the smoke of this torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night. This is not relief from anguish of soul. It is the intensification of anguish. Never think that suicide is an escape from anything. Now, I am not saying that suicide is the unpardonable sin. But I am saying that if you hope to escape a conscience that is swarmed with the hornet sting of conviction, you will not find that escape by taking your life.

The only escape from the wrath we deserve for our sins is to receive God's forgiveness as a gift by faith in Lord Jesus Christ. Judas's great mistake was to seek a self-made way of escape and refuse

to turn to Christ. Suicide or not, everyone who dies not having repented and turned to Jesus does not pass into life but further into death when they die. Eternal destruction is their sentence. Where are you headed today?

II. Jews' Rationalization

A. The chief priests would not willingly take back the silver coins, but they had to do something with them since Judas threw them into the temple. They would not put the coins in the temple treasury because they were blood money. These coins were the payment to falsely convict a man of a crime that led to his execution. The chief priests manifest their guilt by acknowledging that this is blood money.

B. Having seen how Judas dealt with his guilt, we now see how the chief priests dealt with theirs. They knew they could not put the money in the temple treasury so what did they do? They performed an act of benevolence. They bought a potters field, a place where potters had collected clay for their craft. Perhaps now the supply of good clay was depleted. They turned it into a cemetery for strangers, travelers who died while visiting the city. Why did people call it the field of blood? Because it was commonly known how it was paid for.

C. The Jews' rationalization was that they could justify their guilt regarding Jesus' death if they performed some altruistic act with these funds. In other words they seem to think that doing something to benefit the poor indigent visitor to Jerusalem that dies while there will somehow at least cover over the missteps they took in prosecuting Jesus. It is like Saul when he disobeyed the Lord by not slaughtering everything belonging to the Amalekites when he defeated them. He kept the best of the livestock alive. He rationalized his disobedience saying he was going to sacrifice to the Lord. And Samuel said, "To obey is better than sacrifice."

We have the mistaken notion sometimes that the evil we do is okay if something good comes from it. That is false. It is true that God can and does use even our wrong for good, but it never makes the evil good.

III. Jeremiah's Prediction

It is at this point that we turn from evil intentions to good repercussions. God brought a couple of very important and very good results from the evil committed by Judas and the evil committed by the Jewish priests. The first of these is the fulfillment of prophecy. Matthew 27 verses 9-10 point to that fulfillment: 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, and they gave them for the potter's field." The prophetic text to which Matthew refers is actually found in Zechariah 13:11, and that raises a question since Matthew specifically tells us that it was spoken by Jeremiah. But the explanation is most likely that since Jeremiah was one of the first books listed in the rabbinic order of the prophetic books, ascribing a text to Jeremiah was like simply ascribing it to the prophets in general. To say that Jeremiah said it is to say that it is in the prophets.

The good repercussion is that here is a seemingly obscure aspect of Jesus' life and ministry. But it was prophesied and here fulfilled. It is yet another evidence of the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the word of God. Fulfilled prophecies demonstrate that God's word is totally true and completely trustworthy. Every prophecy will be fulfilled and every promise will be kept. Fulfilled prophecies are like exclamation points underscoring the Bible's self-testimony: The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord

are right rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Judas had taken but thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus, but the psalmist rightly says in Psalm 119:72 – The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. Praise God for his wonderful trustworthy and authoritative word. Take every warning seriously and hold fast to every promise!

IV. Jesus's Vindication

It says a lot about a person's character if their enemies have good things to say about them. Well, a second good repercussion of what transpired in this passage has to do with the vindication of the character of Jesus. Judas had now become Jesus's great nemesis. He had taken the position of the devil against him. And it would have been in his own interest both for his character's sake and for the sake of salving his guilty conscience to have pointed out if he knew of any defect at all in the character of Jesus.

If Judas could have born witness to one sinful word, one hateful tone, one misstep in the slightest degree, it would have been a basis to feel that what he had done was not so bad. The text does indicate that Judas was on hand for the mock trial of Jesus. Why did he not stand before the council with an accusation? Because he had none to give. And then when his conscience smote his heart and he charged into the temple to return the thirty pieces of silver, we must pay close attention to what he said to the chief priests: "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." Think about this. There was never a man with a stronger incentive to find something wrong with Jesus than Judas. And there was no one else with that kind of motive who was privy to so many moments in the company of Jesus public and private. If Judas could have brought a single charge of wrong doing out of the three years he had spent with him, don't think he would not have done so. Judas is the one man who, if he had knowledge of even a single legitimate instance of sin in Christ, had every reason to make it known. Yet when he came to the chief priests he declares Jesus innocent.

It is a staggering thing that Peter says of Jesus, "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). It is grippingly wonderful that the writer of Hebrews says of Christ that "in every respect [he] has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). But it is also compellingly glorious and assuring that the testimony of one of his greatest enemies is the same. He is innocent. He did nothing wrong. He only and always did what is right.

It is because of the righteousness of Jesus—no blemish, no defect, no spot, no sin, even in the slightest measure—that he qualifies to be our substitute and to take our place of punishment and to have righteousness to place in our account. As Peter says to believers, "you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). It was because he knew NO sin that he was able to be made sin in our place so that by his stripes we are healed. Because he was innocent and holy and righteous, he alone can propitiate the wrath of God by absorbing it unto himself. It was because of the perfect righteousness of Christ that the many who believe in him will receive the free gift of righteousness. Sinners, turn to Christ today. Saints, rejoice anew in the gift of righteousness he gives to you through his glorious and sinless son.

Conclusion

Judas had evil intentions all the way, but God brought good repercussions even from his evil. What he meant it for evil, but God used for good—to fulfill the prophecy and to bear witness to the righteousness of his son.

This is an example of how wonderfully God works. The Bible tells us that the whole earth is full of the glory of the Lord. Don't miss the glory by being so focused on the evil. Learn to look at even the greatest evils as God's opportunities to bring good repercussions for His glory and for the good of his people.

Prayer

Benediction

Glory be to the great and glorious God, who uses even the evil of the wicked to do good to his people. And may he grant that we would flee from sin, but also that we would flee to Christ when we do sin.