

Matthew 27:1-10

I. Matthew 27:1-2 — When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

“When morning came” probably means “when the sun rose.” Just the night before, Jesus was sitting around a table with His disciples in an upper room. From there He had left the city of Jerusalem and gone across the Kidron Valley with His disciples to the garden of Gethsemane. After a time of intense struggle in prayer, Jesus went out willingly to meet His betrayer. He was seized and taken immediately to the house of the high priest where He testified the good confession and was then condemned to be deserving of death. All this happened through the dark hours of the night. But now the sun is rising.

So “all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.” They had already decided that Jesus deserved to die. This hearing was probably for the purpose of deciding what to say to Pilate. The Jews were not allowed to enforce the death penalty (which for them would have been stoning), so they had to go to the Roman authorities. But Pilate isn’t going to care about a charge of blasphemy. So the Jewish leaders will have to portray Jesus as a political and military threat to the Roman government in Palestine. It was probably for this reason that they *bound* Jesus – who has not once offered any resistance, and who actually commanded Peter to put away his sword. They put Him in chains so that He would look like a dangerous criminal – but we know that He was really just the *lamb* of God going *willingly* to slaughter.

II. Matthew 27:3-5 — Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, he was overcome with conviction and with guilt. Matthew says that he “changed his mind.” This isn’t the usual Greek word for repentance, but it does tell us that Judas genuinely *regretted* what he had done. Judas doesn’t make any excuses (“I have sinned”) and he doesn’t sugarcoat what he’s done (“by betraying innocent blood”). He knows what he’s done, and now he hates himself for it. So all he can think about right now is getting this off his conscience.

But this is not to say that Judas has any great love for Jesus or that he truly believes in Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus said:

✓ Matthew 26:24 — Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.

And in John 17, Jesus refers to Judas as “the son of destruction” (John 17:12). Even now, Judas apparently does not have the godly grief that leads to true repentance and a salvation *without regret*. The grief of Judas was of the worldly kind which leads only to death (2 Cor. 7:10-11). In other words, his grief filled him with regret and remorse, but it did not drive him *to Jesus*. He hated what he had done, but he would not cast himself upon God for His free grace and forgiveness. Instead, he hoped that he could relieve his own conscience by returning the money. And so he was left to a torment and a despair all of his own making. We see his horrible guilt, but can’t we still pity him for his misery?

“[The chief priests and elders] said, ‘What is that to us? See to it yourself.’” I’m not sure what Judas was expecting to hear from the chief priests and the elders. At the very least, they could have tried to convince Judas that Jesus was not really innocent at all – which was what they said they believed. What any true *shepherd* should have done was to minister God’s word of grace and forgiveness to this tormented man. But instead, the shepherds of Judas’ soul sealed his fate with their own words. “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” “We’re not responsible for your conscience. If you feel like you have innocent blood on your hands, then you’ll have to deal with that yourself.” Never have any words had more power to fill a person with despair. Instead of ministering to his soul and helping Judas to find peace, the shepherds of Israel drove Judas to his death. And so “throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.”

III. Matthew 27:6–8 — But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.” So they took counsel and bought with them the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

So far, this story just seems very dark, and morbid, and depressing. By their own words, the chief priests and elders have shown that they don’t care about the blood of the innocent. Neither do they care for the tormented soul of the guilty. They’ve treated Judas with a heartless, merciless cruelty. And then, with a nauseating hypocrisy, they take the greatest care lest they should break the law by putting Judas’ returned money into the temple treasury (Deut. 23:18). “They took counsel and bought with [the money] the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.” Very good tradition says that this potter’s field was located in the valley of Hinnom – maybe a field where potters used to go for their clay, but now depleted of clay it could be sold for a burial ground.

What a sad, horrible story. Burdened with the unbearable weight of his sin, the sheep hangs himself in torment and despair, while the shepherds stand by without a care. The shepherds have blood on their hands – not only the innocent blood of Jesus, but now even the blood of guilty Judas. And then there’s this strange detail about the purchase of a potter’s field. Matthew concludes:

IV. Matthew 27:9–10 — 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, as the Lord directed me.”

We know that Matthew, more than any of the other Gospel writers, loved to emphasize the theme of *fulfillment*. As he reflected on the terrible story of what had happened with Judas and the chief priests and elders, he came to see even here the triumph of God's sovereign word. But where is it? Where is the triumph of God's sovereign word in a story like this?

Well, the first thing we need to remember is that for Matthew, “fulfillment” is never just a matter of God saying something will happen, and then it happens. For example: The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem – and then the Messiah *is* born in Bethlehem. Unfortunately, that's how most of us think of fulfillment. What an amazing *fact*. And I suppose it is. But as we saw in Matthew two it's so much more than just a bare fact. For Matthew, every fulfillment of the Old Testament is loaded with beautiful, profound *meaning* and *truth* – with *God's truth*. For Matthew, all true fulfillment must lead us ultimately to the feet of Jesus, because He *is* the fulfillment of all the Law and the Prophets. If the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem doesn't tell us something *about* Jesus and display to us the *beauty* of Jesus, then we've missed the whole point of prophecy. So how is this story of Judas, and the chief priests and elders, the purchase of a potter's field a fulfillment of prophecy? And how does this fulfillment lead us to the feet of Jesus?

Well, the second thing we have to remember is that when Matthew quotes the Old Testament, he never takes it out of context. Whether he quotes a single verse or a single phrase, he always assumes that we are intimately familiar with the world where that verse or phrase comes from. So let's go back now to Zechariah chapter eleven.

- ✓ **Zechariah 11:4–6** — Thus said the LORD my God [to me, Zechariah]: “Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. Those who buy them slaughter them and go unpunished, and those who sell them say, ‘Blessed be the LORD, I have become rich,’ and their own shepherds have no pity on them. For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of this land, declares the LORD.”

This is a chapter about *shepherds* and their *sheep*. The shepherds are heartless and ruthless. They care nothing for the sheep. They have no pity. Does that sound familiar? But the sheep are no better than their shepherds because God says that He will have no pity even on the sheep. This is the flock doomed to slaughter... at the hands of their own shepherds. “Thus said the LORD my God: “Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter.”

- ✓ **Zechariah 11:7–11** — So I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to be slaughtered by the sheep traders... And I tended the sheep. In one month I destroyed the three [cruel] shepherds. But I became impatient with [the sheep], and they also detested me. So I said, “I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die. What is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed. And let those who are left devour the flesh of one another.”

After delivering the sheep from their cruel shepherds, Zechariah *tended* the flock with gentleness and love. But the flock detested him. They didn't like being oppressed by their cruel shepherds, but neither did they want to follow the good shepherd that God had given them. They wanted to

go their own way. They wanted to live their own lives. So Zechariah gave them what they wanted. He said, “I will not be your shepherd. What is to die, let it die. What is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed.”

- ✓ **Zechariah 11:12-14** — Then I said to them, “If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter.

The people were given two options: “If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” But they mocked Zechariah by doing neither. Instead, they gave him thirty pieces of silver as the amount of compensation for a *slave* who has died (Exodus 21:32). “By paying thirty [pieces of silver], they [were saying] that they did not estimate his service higher than the labour of a purchased slave” (Keil-Delitsch). The sheep are no better than their cruel shepherds. So God told Zechariah: “‘Throw it to the potter’—the lordly price at which I was priced by them.”

“Throw it to the potter” was obviously an expression of contempt and displeasure – and so it was also a sign and a warning of *judgment*. It’s *possible*^{*} that the “potter” was the one responsible for taking people’s temple offerings of silver and gold and transforming these offerings into the ceremonial vessels like bowls and plates and utensils for the temple worship.[†] Could this explain why God told Zechariah to give the thirty pieces of silver to the potter? Yes, but it still doesn’t explain the contempt and disgust of *throwing* it to the potter, “the *lordly* price at which I was priced by them.” *Unless* the potter was in the habit of shaping *idols* out of the temple offerings (cf. Isa. 44:9-20; Hab. 2:18). The book of Judges describes a time when two hundred pieces of silver were made into a carved image (Judges 17:4). So perhaps God is saying to Zechariah: “‘*Throw* it to the potter’—the *lordly* price at which I was priced by them, and let him make of it an idol – nothing more than a tiny figurine, but at least it will satisfy the sheep who have rejected Me.” Whether or not this *is* the meaning, we know that this throwing of the silver to the potter was a sign and a warning of coming judgment. The sheep have rejected their good shepherd, and so God will let the sheep go their own way – doomed to be slaughtered at the hands of foolish shepherds.

- ✓ **Zechariah 11:15-17** — Then the LORD said to me, “Take [this time] the equipment of a foolish shepherd. For behold, I am raising up in the land a shepherd who does not care for those being destroyed, or seek the young or heal the maimed or nourish the healthy, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs. “Woe to my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! Let his arm be wholly withered, his right eye utterly blinded!”

^{*} For this interpretation I referred especially to the article on “*yoser*” in the NIDOTTE, footnotes 22 & 28 in France on pages 1041 & 1043, and the discussion of Smith in his WBC on Zechariah. None of these resources, however, officially adopted this view. Carson is an example of one who does adopt this view.

[†] The basic meaning of the Hebrew word for potter (*yoser*) is one who *shapes* or *forms*. What is shaped and formed is almost always clay, but in a couple of passages “*yoser*” refers to idol-makers who fashion gods out of metal (Isa. 44:9-20; Hab. 2:18; cf. Isa. 54:16-17; Exod. 32:2-4, 24). The Greek translation of the Old Testament actually translates the Hebrew “*yoser*” with the Greek word for a furnace where metal is melted down to be shaped into something new. Remember, too, that this potter was to be found in “the house of the Lord.”

God judges the sheep by giving them worthless shepherds – worthless shepherds who don't care about the ones who are being destroyed. Does this sound familiar? But God will not leave the worthless shepherds unpunished. “*Woe to my worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock!*”

So what does Zechariah eleven have to do with Matthew twenty-seven? Both of these chapters mention thirty pieces of silver, they both mention a potter, and they both mention the thirty pieces of silver being thrown into the temple. These are the things that Matthew highlights in his quotation. But what about the differences? In Zechariah, it is the good shepherd who is paid thirty pieces of silver, but in Matthew it is Judas, the betrayer, who is paid the thirty pieces of silver. In Zechariah, it is the good shepherd who casts the pieces of silver into the temple, but in Matthew, it is Judas, the betrayer, who casts the pieces of silver into the temple. In Zechariah, there is never any mention of a potter's field. But in Matthew, *after* Judas throws the silver into the temple, the *chief priests and elders* pick it up and use it to buy the potter's field – in *fulfillment* of Zechariah. So what kind of “fulfillment” is this? What does this fulfillment *mean*, and how does it lead us to the feet of Jesus?

Every good shepherd of Israel in the Old Testament was a type and a foreshadowing of the *final* and *ultimate* good shepherd – *Jesus*. So not only was Zechariah a foreshadowing of Jesus in his office as a prophet, but now he is uniquely foreshadowing Jesus as he plays the role of a good shepherd of the sheep. This is one of the ways that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. When we come to love this kind of Old Testament foreshadowing and New Testament fulfillment – this way in which Jesus fills up and completes the Old Testament, then the similarities between Zechariah 11 and Matthew 27 will literally jump out and grab us – just like they did Matthew. In other words, no longer are they just incomplete parallels of random words and events (thirty pieces of silver thrown into the temple and the mention of a potter) – now these parallels between Zechariah and Matthew are the cues that motivate us to look for some *deeper* pattern of fulfillment.

So here's the big picture. In Zechariah, the flock was oppressed by cruel shepherds who did “not care for those being destroyed.” In Matthew, the flock is still oppressed by cruel and heartless shepherds. We remember their words to the guilty and despairing Judas. In Zechariah, God gave to the people a good shepherd to replace their cruel, wicked shepherds. But the people detested the good shepherd and valued him at thirty pieces of silver – the price of a slave. In Matthew, God has sent to His people the final and ultimate Good Shepherd. But now, just like in Zechariah, they have rejected Him, valuing Him at thirty pieces of silver – the price of a slave. So far, it's making sense.

But then what about the potter's field? In Zechariah, the money is thrown *to the (temple) potter*. In Matthew, the money is thrown into the temple, retrieved by the chief priests and elders, and then used to *purchase the potter's field* as a burial place for strangers. We can still see the obvious similarities, but what about the one big difference? There's no purchase of a potter's field in Zechariah. So how can the purchase of a potter's field in Matthew be a true *fulfillment* of Zechariah? The key here is to look for the *underlying pattern*. When Zechariah threw the thirty pieces of silver to the potter, it was a sign and a warning of God's judgment. Could Matthew somehow see the same sign and warning of judgment when thirty pieces of silver are used to purchase the potter's field?

So far we've been focusing on Zechariah because it's obvious that Matthew's been quoting from Zechariah. But what does Matthew actually say? "Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet *Jeremiah*." Now Matthew *knows* (and he knows that *we* know) that he's been quoting from Zechariah. So this must be our clue that when it comes to the *meaning* of the potter's field, the answer is not in Zechariah, but in Jeremiah.

- ✓ Jeremiah 19:1–13 — Thus says the LORD... "Take some of the *elders* of the people and some of the elders of the *priests*, and go out to the *Valley of the Son of Hinnom* at the entry of the *Potsherd Gate*, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. You shall say... "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. Because the people... have filled this place with [*innocent blood*; YLT]... days are coming, declares the LORD, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the *Valley of the Son of Hinnom*, but the *Valley of Slaughter*... *Men shall bury in Topheth* because there will be no place else to bury. Thus will I do to this place, declares the LORD, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth.

In Jeremiah nineteen, God warns the chief priests and elders about a coming judgment that will turn the Valley of the Son of Hinnom into a burial ground and cause it to be renamed the Valley of Slaughter.

In Matthew twenty-seven, the chief priests and elders purchase a field (which was probably known to be located in the valley of Hinnom) as a burial place for strangers, and that field came to be known as the Field of Blood.

Maybe now we can understand why in this purchase of the potter's field, Matthew couldn't help but see a fulfillment of Scripture, and therefore a sign and a warning of coming judgment.

Just like in Zechariah, the Good Shepherd has been rejected and valued at no more than the price of a slave.

And yet *just like in Zechariah*, that very price at which He was valued has now become the symbol and the sign of coming judgment – of a flock doomed to slaughter because they would not follow their shepherd.‡

Conclusion

Can we see now how as Matthew reflected on this terrible story of apostasy, and rejection, and judgment, he came to see *even here* the *triumph* of *God's* sovereign word? Even in the seemingly insignificant detail about the purchase of the potter's field, we have a *fulfillment* of Scripture and a clear *witness* to *who Jesus really is*. *Jesus really is* the *good Shepherd* foreshadowed in Zechariah – the good shepherd who was rejected by the sheep – the good

‡ Throughout the Old Testament there is "a pattern of apostasy and rejection that must find its ultimate fulfillment in the rejection of Jesus, who was cheaply valued, rejected by the Jews, and whose betrayal money was put to a purpose that pointed to the destruction of the nation." (Carson)

shepherd whose rejection can only expose the flock to death and judgment. But we know by now that there was more to the death of Jesus than just His rejection by the sheep. Jesus said:

✓ John 10:11 — I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd *lays down* his life for the sheep.

The point of these verses is not *ultimately* the sad facts of apostasy, and rejection, and heartless cruelty, and coming judgment. Even in *this* fulfillment of Scripture, Matthew would lead us once again to the feet of Jesus, who now in just a matter of hours will be bearing our sins on the cross. He's the *only* Good Shepherd who will truly care for our souls. He's the *only* Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. He's the *only* Good Shepherd of whom we can truly say with all our hearts:

✓ Psalm 23 — The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

As we meditate on this terrible picture of a Shepherd rejected by His sheep and a flock doomed to slaughter, may we somehow be motivated to follow our Good Shepherd—who laid down His life for us—more *faithfully* and more *obediently* and more *joyfully* than ever before.