

Title: Deception and Despair
Text: Matthew 27.1-10
Theme: The wages of sin is death
Series: Matthew #123
Prop Stmtnt: Sin cannot give you what it promises, but will give you what God warns against.

Read Text:

Simonetta Carr describes the scene in Genesis 3 from Eve's perspective when she writes, *"As wonderful as the Garden was, the serpent convinced me we could have much more, right then and there, without waiting for God's timing. The serpent appeared to be our friend, but he was strange. He could speak our language and seemed to know more than we knew, but I didn't give it much thought then. It was an enticing prospect of having our eyes opened, of being like God and knowing more than what God had revealed. The fruit was beautiful and looked delicious. I held it in my hand for a few moments, and then picked it from the tree. Nothing happened. I took a bite. Still nothing, except for a new feeling of uneasiness. Adam didn't react. What was he thinking? I called him, but not to ask for help. I handed him the fruit, and he ate. We looked at each other. I could see on his face the same questioning anxiety that was tightening my chest. Our eyes were opened, but not to wonderful worlds of knowledge and power. We knew something new – it's true – but it was only fear, guilt, and shame. We were certainly not like God! We were just frightened and confused. We had changed, but not for the better."*¹

Like Adam and Eve, Judas Iscariot listened to a lie. If...then. The "if" of eating the fruit is always made to appear to be so much smaller than the "then" of the promise. Or, the promise of THEN is made to appear so much greater than the risk of the if. If you eat the fruit THEN your eyes will be opened. If. No big deal, right? If you eat the fruit. But, think of the THEN. THEN your eyes will be opened. THEN you will get what you deserve. THEN you will be respected. THEN you will get revenge. THEN you will get power. THEN you will be adored. THEN you will be wanted, respected, comfortable, famous, desired, successful, accepted. What is the if that you are tempted to believe?

The hard, raw and difficult truth is this: Sin always writes checks that it cannot cash. In fact, sin is a double curse. 1) Sin cannot deliver on the "THEN" and 2) the "if" that was not big deal? always turns out to be a really big deal.

1. If...Then

A. The "If" is way more serious than we think.

Chapter 26 ends with the rooster crowing and chapter 27 begins with the morning coming. The rooster crowed and announced the morning and the start of the darkest day

¹ Modern Reformation Vo.25 No.1 Jan/Feb 2016 pp. 16-17.

that has ever come upon this world. Matthew summarizes in verse 1 what had been taking place throughout the night. This is where we stood at the beginning of this day. The chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to him to death. In the beginning of chapter 26 they plotted together to arrest him, now they plot together to kill him. All of this fulfills what the Psalmist said in Psalm 2 that *“The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed saying ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’”*

That is exactly what is going on here. The chief priests and rulers make it very clear, that they will not have this man rule over them. This king will not be their king. So, they plot a coup. They hatch a plan to have him eliminated. Earlier their plan included finding a way to arrest Jesus without causing a riot. Judas Iscariot gave them what they were looking for because he thought that they would give him what he was looking for. He wanted respect. He wanted power. He wanted money. Jesus was not giving him what he thought he deserved so he went and heard what he wanted to hear. “If you betray Jesus to us, THEN we will give you 30 pieces of silver.”

"If you betray Jesus to us" seemed to Judas to be a small matter. It was not pleasant. In fact it was downright uncomfortable. During the Passover meal he obviously felt guilty but he convinced himself that it was worth it in order to get the 30 pieces of silver. But the way Matthew writes this account leads us to believe that in the morning, Judas began to realize the consequences of his decision. The “if” was way more serious than what he was willing to think. The promise of the “Then” blinds us to the seriousness of the “if”. Every betrayal brings consequences. Now Judas saw (v.3). He saw Jesus was condemned. When he saw that Jesus was condemned, “he changed his mind.” He changed his mind because he realized that what he considered to be a sin worth committing was so much more serious than what he was willing to believe. It is always that way.

It may not be the next day, or the next month or even the next year. But the morning comes when we wake up and realize that what we did was so much more serious than what we were willing to believe. Every one of us can tell that story. But none of us can go back and change it. So, I want to ask you a different question. What lie are you tempted to believe? What sin are you tempted to believe that is worth committing because its consequences are minimal, but its payoff is more than worth it?

B. The “Then” is so much less than we are led to believe.

Judas was promised money. Judas loved money. Judas loved money because money promised Judas that it would do things for him. So, now Judas has the money that he was promised. “If you betray Jesus, then we will give you 30 pieces of silver.” He now has his “then.” But, like Adam and Eve, what he thought it would be, was not what he imagined. The “then” was so much less. In fact, as the guilt of his sin began to weigh upon his soul, the money that he once loved, he now hated. Isn’t that the truth? Money was an idol for Judas. How do you know if something is an idol? An idol is that which I am willing to sin in order to get, or I will sin if I don’t get it. Judas wanted money. He was willing to sin in order to get it. He was willing to betray Christ. In that moment he believed that the

money that he would get was more valuable than Christ. So, what happens? When he begins to realize the consequences of his sin, then he realizes that in his effort to betray Christ, his idol betrayed him. Idols cannot bear the weight of your happiness. Money, fame, success, thinness, beauty, popularity cannot bear the weight of your happiness. The very thing that he wanted is now detestable to him. The money that he betrayed Christ for now condemns him.

We know this, don't we? So many things that we look to to be our savior end up being our curse. That other girl, that other guy, that new truck, that degree, that job, or whatever it is that we think we have to have, that we imagine giving us what we want, can't do it! And when it doesn't, the very thing we loved we now hate. But, it is not only the money that betrayed Judas. Look at the response of his "new friends." Judas was with them in some capacity as the trial of Christ took place. The bitterness of his soul and love of money that justified his betrayal of Christ was not satisfied as he watched Christ being condemned. And now, he couldn't stand it any longer. He changed his mind. He knew that he was wrong. He knew that he had betrayed an innocent man and they had condemned an innocent man. Did he think that he could stop the process? Did he think that they would change their minds too? Judas is in a nightmare, but he started it. Judas is guilty. Judas is crushed. Judas is pathetic. He confesses his sin to the leaders and they don't care! He was a means to an end. They smoked him like a joint, used him for what they wanted and kicked the stubble to the curb. "What is that to us?" You're on your own! (See to it yourself.) The money and people betrayed him. As the noise of the coins clattered and echoed through the stony temple hall he departed.

2. What do you do with your guilt?

A. **Ignore it.**

Judas' confession implicated the chief priests too. They are guilty, they know it, but are attempting to ignore it. He betrayed an innocent man whom they arrested, tried and found guilty. But, they did not care. They did not care about Jesus, obviously and now it is painfully clear that they did not care about Judas either. All of them are guilty. Judas, the chief priests, and soon Pilate will join their ranks. But notice this. Judas is desperate and of all the people who should care about someone who is in a desperate situation, these religious leaders should. Here is a man about to commit suicide and they attempted to completely dismiss the issue by pretending as if he is the one with the problem, not them. But, you can see their predicament, can't you? If they took Judas' confession seriously, then they would have to admit their own sin. But, when you do not want to deal with your own sin, you forfeit the opportunity to help others deal with theirs. You can try to ignore your guilt, but it won't ignore you.

B. **Cover it with self-righteousness.**

Verses 6-10 describe one of the most brazen and bizarre accounts in the entire Bible. It is truly amazing to see how far we are capable of going in pretending that we are innocent

and righteous when our guilt is so obvious. These men have just broken over 10 of their laws in order to condemn Christ. They all know the laws.

- 1) They arrested Jesus at night, which was illegal.
- 2) They held the trial at night, which was illegal.
- 3) Jesus was initially examined privately, which was illegal.
- 4) The witnesses presented the charges, which was illegal.
- 5) The Sanhedrin convened before the morning sacrifice, which was illegal.
- 6) The trial took place on the Passover, which was illegal.
- 7) The trial was concluded in one day, which was illegal if it resulted in the sentence of death.
- 8) Jesus was condemned on evidence that was inadmissible in court.
- 9) A capital trial had to take place in the Temple, which it didn't.
- 10) The court had already pre-judged Christ, which was illegal.
- 11) By having the trial at night, Jesus was denied defense witnesses.

So now, Judas throws this money onto the temple floor (not in the holy place, but most likely in the treasury area) and these men cannot put it back into the Temple treasury because it is “blood money.” Do you know what “blood money” is? Blood money is money that is given as a bribe in order to kill an innocent man. Blood money is money that is “cursed” and is believed to pass that curse on to every person who either comes in in contact with it or who uses it for personal gain. (Think of the Pirates of the Caribbean movie.) These leaders refuse to accept the money back from Judas because it is dirty money. It is money that is tainted. According to Deut. 23.18, money that is acquired through sinful means is not allowed to be brought into the tabernacle or temple and placed in the treasury. So, get this. These men who have completely disregarded the law over and over in order to have a pretend trial of Jesus, now all of a sudden show concern about keeping the law and refuse to accept the money from Judas because it was acquired by Judas in a sinful manner. But they were the ones who gave it to him! Judas was only giving back their money. They were the ones who made it blood money! I imagine one of them ordering a servant to gather up the coins with a cloth being careful to not actually touch any coin itself, lest the person become defiled.

The men eventually use the money to purchase a piece of land where Judas hanged himself to solve an ongoing problem. The problem was; what do you do with the bodies of foreigners who die in Jerusalem? We can't bury these pagans with holy people. And no one wants to bother with taking them somewhere else. So, when Judas hanged himself and thereby cursed the ground that his decomposing body fell on, they, in his name, purchased the land. They used his money (because they never accepted responsibility for it) to buy that field and that field became the cemetery for pagans. So, do you get it? This is cursed ground, purchased with cursed money from a cursed man, who died a cursed death that can now accept the bodies of cursed pagans. Perfect!

The blatant hypocrisy is stunning! We read this and are basically astonished at the brazen disconnect of these men. Based on the biblical record these men appear to really believe that what they have done is absolutely fine. They are completely blind to their sin. They

will not commit the “sin” of putting the blood money in the treasury when that very money had been used to commit a crime they sanctioned and paid for. This reveals a very dangerous and sad truth. We only see what we want to see.

So here, on the one side of the ledger you have this enormous mountain of guilt due to multiple examples of egregious law-breaking. On the other side of the ledger you have this tiny little facet of law-keeping that really isn't law-keeping since they made the money dirty. But, that tiny little facet is all they focus on and in fact, find further evidence in it as to why they are so righteous and why the rest of the world is going to hell. Anybody can find one little area that makes him or her appear to be better than someone else. Focusing on that alone may give you temporary relief, but it will never actually deal with your guilt. In fact, if that is all that you have, then you will have to massage that story and stretch it out for the rest of your life.

The other day I was talking to an older man who told me that he grew up in church. As a kid he heard it all. But many years ago, as an adult he saw some examples of hypocrisy so he left and never went back. His story is sad, really. He compares himself to a couple of hypocrites as if they are poster children for the gospel. Against them, he looks good, because they claimed to be spiritual and sinned. He doesn't claim to be spiritual and he just sins as if God is so relieved at him not claiming to be spiritual that this “goodness” justifies him in the eyes of God. He looks at the one little area in which he appears to be better and completely ignores the mountain of godlessness in his own life. He is the very thing he condemns. Self-righteousness can never resolve our guilt.

C. Attempt to pay for it.

Peter was seized with guilt and went out and wept bitterly. Judas is seized with guilt and went out and hanged himself. Being seized with guilt is a good first step, but it is not sufficient. He even admits his guilt. He confesses his sin. “*I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.*” But, then, what does he do? He feels the guilt. He admits to the sin. But now, he tries to pay for it. Judas Iscariot committed suicide. There are many different reasons why people commit suicide. The way that Matthew explains it, here, Judas is overwhelmed with guilt. He sees no way out, so he seeks to relieve himself of the pain of his guilt by killing himself. Suicide is not a stranger to my family, nor to some of yours. The one thing that seems to be consistent is that the person who commits suicide wants relief from pain. The pain may be physical pain from a disease. It may be relational pain from disappointment, failure or rejection. It may be, as in Judas' case, the pain of guilt. Judas understood this correctly. He understood that he was guilty of sin. He understood that his guilt was so serious and so grievous that he could not live with this guilt. He couldn't ignore his guilt. He couldn't find something in his life that would be an excuse for it. At least he knew that much, which is quite a bit more than what many understand. But, the problem is, Judas believed that he could pay for his sin. His death did nothing to pay for his sin. In fact, in his case, his attempt to pay for his sin only added to his sin.

When Peter's guilt was exposed he too knew that his guilt was a serious matter and he went out and wept. Weeping over his sin did not pay for his sin, any more than Judas

killing himself did either. Our remorse, no matter how deep cannot pay for our sin. Only Christ can do that. Guilt is a gift from God that is designed to help you face the truth about your sin. A person who sins without guilt is what we call a psychopath. Guilt feels like a bother, doesn't it? It really is a gift. A person without guilt is like a person without nerves. Without nerve endings, you would never know if your hand was on fire, or if your foot was being bitten by a snake. Without nerve endings you would not be able to know your true condition. Guilt is not your enemy. Guilt is a gift to help you identify your true enemy. Your true enemy is your sin. The issue is, what do you do when you identify your true enemy? Let the gift of guilt drive you to Jesus. Guilt is real because our sin is real. If guilt does not drive you to Jesus, then guilt will drive you to do desperate things. Many people try to medicate their guilt through drugs, prescription or not. Others try to cover their guilt through alcohol or busyness or entertainment, or other distractions. Other people deal with guilt by being mean, hateful, or just always looking for reasons to be critical of others. Living with guilt is grievous, and no matter how you respond to it, it always reveals the same thing. We were never designed to be able to live with guilt.

Whenever you purchase a product, say a tool or small appliance or something like that, you find that it comes with an operator's manual that tells you how to set it up or install it. Through the years I've noticed that these manuals have more and more absurd statements in them warning consumers not to do certain things with them. My favorite is the warning label that says, "Do not hold the wrong end of a chainsaw." For example, let's say that you bought an electric can opener. You might find a statement in the manual that says, "DO NOT PUT CAN OPENER IN A MICROWAVE!" And of course it is in all capital letters. And you think what idiot would put a can opener in a microwave? And then you realize that the reason this is in the manual is because someone did and then tried to sue the company for not warning them not to. The Bible is full of warning labels that warn us about the weight of sin. When we sin, we are doing something that we were never designed to do. That is why we cannot handle guilt. Attempting to pay for our own guilt never works. Pilate will try to wash his hands of his guilt. But water and symbolism will not remove it. Judas blames himself and others and then hangs himself but even dying for it, is not good enough. There is only one solution for guilt.

D. Trust in Christ alone.

Understanding what Christ did for you enables you to face the ugly, weighty, grievous truth about your sin. Do not fear to face your guilt because you have a Savior who offers you a two-fold gift. He offers you the gift of forgiveness and the gift of righteousness. The gift of forgiveness was purchased by his death. The gift of righteousness was earned by his life. Both are yours, forever by faith alone in Christ alone. Judas killed himself. But there was another way.

The text is really a contrast between Christ and Judas. Judas condemned himself for the sins that he committed while Christ was condemned for the sins he did not commit. Judas was rewarded for betraying while Christ was condemned for not. Judas was driven to live for the advancement of Judas while Christ was driven for our rescue. Judas took his own life, while Christ laid down his. Judas death added to his own guilt, while Christ's death

paid the price for ours. Judas died only to face a condemnation that will never end. Christ died and was vindicated in his resurrection and will enjoy glory that will never end.

That day, two men climbed a hill just outside the city of Jerusalem in order to die. One would die with the taunts and accusations of a mob still echoing from the city. The other would die in silence. One would die between two thieves, with soldiers at his feet and with bystanders divided between hatred and affection. The other would die alone. The one would die over the course of several hours. His final words were recorded. His death accompanied by inexplicable events. The shame of the cross would soon be overwhelmed by victory. The other died quickly, in silence. His body would not be watched and then taken off a cross in respect. It would be a while before it was discovered after it had fallen on to the rocks below the tree. The one would be buried for a short time in a borrowed tomb that would be revered for centuries. The other would be buried in a shallow grave in a plot of land thought to be cursed since it was purchased with blood money. The one would lay down his life for the sins of others; the other would hang himself in order to try pay for his own sins. Two men climbed a hill one day. The one died in victory. The other died, forever. The first one had to die, in order for us to live. The second did not, because the first one did.