

Our Lord's Trial Before the Sanhedrin, the Ruling Body of the Jews

Matthew 27:1-10

Matthew 27:1-10 - *"When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. ² And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor. ³ Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, ⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" ⁵ Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. ⁶ But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood."⁷ And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. ⁸ Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹ Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, ¹⁰ and gave them for the potter's field, as the LORD directed me."*

Background Notes

Matthew 27:1-2 is the brief record of our Lord's formal or official trial before the highest ruling counsel of the Jews, the Sanhedrin. Remember, the religious trial of our Lord took place in three phases or stages. First He was brought before Annas, the former high priest, then before Caiaphas, the current ruling high priest, and then before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin then delivered the Lord to Pilate for His civil trial under the Roman authorities.

In Matthew 26 we saw the account of the Lord's trial before Caiaphas. As the ruling high priest, Caiaphas gathered the members of the Sanhedrin together at night. According to their own laws, the Sanhedrin was not allowed to meet at night, and only an informal or unofficial gathering could be held. So early the next morning the Sanhedrin gathered together formally to make their death verdict official. But they didn't have the authority to carry out the execution they so much desired, so they transferred Jesus to Pilate and the Roman civil court system. Only the Roman government had the power and authority to carry out the death penalty.

At the end of Luke 22 we have a more detailed description of this third stage of our Lord's religious trial before the Sanhedrin. *"As soon as it was day, the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying, 'If You are the Christ, tell us.'" But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I also ask you, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go. Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God." Then they all said, "Are You then the Son of God?" So He said to them, "You rightly say that I am."*

And they said, "What further testimony do we need? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth." Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate" (Luke 22:66-23:1)

Where was the Lord during the nighttime hours, between His first appearance before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, and this early morning appearance before the official gathering of the Sanhedrin? Most likely He was in a prison cell beneath the residence of the high priest. Archaeologists have excavated the site of what is believed to be Caiaphas' house, and a number of prison cells below the house were uncovered. These grim, stone-hewn cells can be seen today beneath the Church of Saint Peter in Gallicantu (Church of the Cock-Crow) in Jerusalem.

Doctrinal Points

1. The remorse of Judas did not result in the salvation of his soul.

"Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself" (v3-5).

Judas may have thought that His betrayal would force the Lord's hand, and that He would show His power against the establishment of Rome when He was under arrest. But this was not part of God's eternal plan. When Judas saw that the Lord was condemned, he realized his mistake, but it was too late to turn back the clock. Judas was remorseful, and he acknowledged that he had betrayed innocent blood, but that didn't result in his salvation. Remorse over sin is not the same as repentance for sin, and salvation requires more than remorse and feeling sorry about sin. Salvation requires repentance and a willingness to turn to Christ as personal Savior.

Judas could have repented, but he never repented. We know from Scripture that Judas never turned to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Look back at Matthew 26:24 and see what the Lord said of Judas at the Last Supper, "...*woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.*" The Lord would never have said this if He knew that Judas would become a believer in the end. The fact that Judas felt sorry that he had betrayed the Lord didn't result in the salvation of his soul.

Just being sorry about your sins is not good enough – then or today! You are saved only when you recognize that Jesus died on the cross for your sins as your personal Substitute, and then you turn to the Lord and put your trust in the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior. There is no other way of salvation. Feeling remorseful and being sorry about sin are not good enough for salvation. Judas' remorse didn't result in the salvation of his soul.

2. The remorse of Judas did result in the fulfillment of prophecy.

In Acts 1:18-19 we read the following about Judas: *“Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.”*

Matthew says that Judas went out and hanged himself. How do you harmonize Matthew’s account with Acts 1:18-19? There is no contradiction between the record of Judas’ death in Acts and the record in Matthew 27. Most likely Judas hanged himself from a tree that was over a rocky hillside. Possibly the rope broke, or when he was cut down, his body fell and broke open on the rocks below. Not a pretty picture.

Before Judas hanged himself, he tried to give the thirty pieces of silver back to the priests. They couldn’t have cared less about Judas, or his remorse and misery over what he had done (v3-4). And they didn’t want to touch the “blood money” they had paid him, because was money that had been paid to bring about a man’s death. So Judas threw the money into the Temple where only the priests could go, and thus he forced the priests to touch the blood money. The Jewish leaders were self-righteous hypocrites who had no problem taking the blood money out of the Temple treasury, but now they were reluctant to stain their hands by putting it back. So they picked up the money and conveniently bought a piece of ground called the Potter’s Field in which to bury strangers. How humanitarian! What hypocrisy was demonstrated by these wicked priests! Acts 1:18 says that Judas purchased the field – and it was indeed his money that bought the field. The field is known as *Akel Dama*, and it can still be seen in Jerusalem today on the southern slope of the Hinnom Valley.

“Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of Him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter’s field, as the LORD directed me” (v9-10). So Judas’ remorse resulted in the fulfillment of prophetic Scripture.

When we go back to the Old Testament, we find this prophecy in the Book of Zechariah: *“Then I said to them, “If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.” So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter” (Zechariah 11:12-13).*

Matthew 27 attributes this prophecy to Jeremiah (v9). What’s the explanation here? Most likely this is explained by the fact that in Matthew’s day, the scrolls of the prophets in the Hebrew Bible had Jeremiah at the head. The first book of the group, Jeremiah, was often used to identify quotations from any of the books of the prophets.

The main point here, of course, is that the results surrounding the remorse of Judas were all in line with the predictions of Old Testament prophecy. Judas’ remorse resulted in the fulfillment of prophecy.

Practical Application

Don't make decisions you will regret forever!

Did you ever think about “forever”? It's an awesome and dizzying concept, isn't it? Forever! Forever never ends!

Forever Judas will regret his decision to betray the Lord! He will never be able to turn the clock back.

And we can't turn the clock back either, so we should be very careful not to make decisions that we will regret forever.

What decisions? All kinds of decisions! Decisions about what you're going to do with the rest of your life. Decisions about the spiritual and physical well-being of your family. Decisions about your investments of your time and money. And ultimately the most important - your decision about your eternal destiny.

The other day I mentioned to someone that when Margie and I downsized from our family home, maybe we should have decided to buy a condo. We lived in an apartment for several years, and we probably “wasted” money on rent. But that decision certainly is **not** a decision that I'll regret **forever!** In fact, I'm not even losing any sleep over it **now!**

Too many Christians make important life decisions based entirely on money, and gaining financial “success” and security. Finances should be considered, but 1 Timothy 6:9-10 gives us a very strong and dire warning about the desire to be rich: *“People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap, and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows...”*

Don't make decisions that you will regret forever!