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Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
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Matthew 27:3-10 “When You Mess Up & Feel Guilty”

Intro. Have you ever realized that you have *really* messed up? Perhaps you committed a major sin that resulted in a lot of people getting hurt. Or you did something to bring great embarrassment to yourself and to your family. The truth is, we all have failures in our lives. There is not one of us who doesn't sin.

Well one of the greatest blunders of all time was committed by Judas Iscariot. He betrayed Jesus! Of all the things that he could have done wrong, nothing was worse than that. Now to understand the betrayal, you need to know some background to this horrific crime. Judas became one of the 12 apostles of Jesus some 3 years earlier. He was attracted to the potential he saw in Jesus of establishing an earthly kingdom, free from Roman control. Judas felt that he would share in the riches and glory of that kingdom. But as the true nature of Christ's work and kingdom became more obvious, he became weary of Him. Disappointment over Christ's failure to materialize an earthly kingdom probably played a large part in his decision to betray Christ to the Jewish authorities for 30 pieces of silver. And when he betrayed Him, he probably expected Christ to extricate Himself from the snare of His enemies. Judas knew of other occasions when Jesus escaped from His enemies. If that happened this time, Judas would be better off financially, and he probably hoped that Christ would finally assert Himself with force. But things did not work out that way. Judas probably watched the trial of Jesus from the shadows of Caiaphas's courtroom. Jesus made no effort to defend himself. When Judas saw Jesus abused and sentenced to death by the religious authorities, remorse filled his soul.¹ He may have said to himself, “Oh no, what have I done?” His soul was filled with guilt over the consequences of his sin, betraying a good, innocent man.

Judas was not the first person to experience the pain of guilt. Guilt has plagued the human race since the fall in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve felt the pain of guilt after eating of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When *we* make a mistake, or commit a sin, it is normal to feel guilty about what we have done. Even so Judas felt very guilty about what he had done. Exactly when it was that Judas was seized with remorse is not indicated, but the text leaves the impression that it was immediately after he knew that Jesus had been sentenced to death.

Now the question I want to address today is this, “What should you do when you've done wrong and feel guilty?” Let's look into our text for some answers. Now the first main point I want to address from our text is this:

I. AT TIMES WE *SHOULD* EXPERIENCE GUILT

God has given us a conscience and when we violate our conscience, we have God-given feelings of guilt. Our conscience sounds an alarm. At times our conscience has been trained incorrectly, and we have false-guilt as a result. But more often than not, our conscience is usually a pretty good moral guide, and we need to pay attention when our conscience tells us that we

¹ Only Matthew records Judas' feelings of remorse and his attempt to reject the blood money.

have done wrong by making us feel guilty. The consciousness of sin is a good thing. It promotes improved behavior, and it leads us to seek forgiveness. So while guilt feels bad, it is necessary for our well-being. Guilt is to the soul as pain is to the body. Pain feels bad, but it tells us that something is wrong. Pain will motivate you to avoid further injury or it will at least motivate you to seek healing. Even so, the anguish of guilt will motivate you not to repeat that same sin, and seek forgiveness.

While I'm discussing guilt, let me make an important point. What an awful difference there is in the look of a sin before we do it and afterwards! Before we do it, the sin seems so attractive, and the transgression seems so comparatively insignificant. But when we get the prize of our wrong-doing, we find out that it is not as satisfying as we expected it would be. Its pleasure lasts but a moment. Then we are left alone with the thought of the sin that we have done and with a sense of guilt. And as someone has said, "Conscience may not prevent you from doing wrong, but it will surely keep you from enjoying it."²

Now our text reveals 2 causes of the feelings of guilt. The first is the most obvious:

A. When We Realize Our Own Sin – Judas himself said in v.4, "I have sinned by *betraying* innocent blood." I can imagine that he probably said those words with tears. He was deeply convicted of the fact that he was guilty of betrayal, and the fact that Jesus was innocent made the betrayal even worse.

When was the last time you realized that you had done wrong? Was it yesterday? Was it this morning? Did you feel a sense of guilt?

I want to encourage you not to suppress guilt. It really has an important role in your life. You need to train your conscience by the Word of God. You need to be open to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. You need to be open to correction and rebuke by family, friends, and people at church. A guilty conscience is not pleasant, but it has an important role in our lives.

Now we also have a greater sense of our own guilt:

B. When We Recognize the Righteousness of Christ – What I mean by this is that our own sin is clearer when we compare ourselves to Christ rather than other people. Judas had plenty of opportunity to witness the life of Jesus. He knew He was a good and righteous man. He had personally seen the miracles of Jesus, demonstrating that He was sent of God. He witnessed the love of Jesus reaching out again and again to hurting people (cf. Acts 10:38). And after Judas witnessed the official trial and sentencing of Jesus, he realized that he had a part in the impending death of a good and righteous man. That just made his own sin even more regretful. And Judas acknowledged that Jesus was not guilty of any crime when he said in v.4, "I have sinned by *betraying innocent* blood." He knew that the charges against Jesus were false, and that He had done nothing wrong.

There are many people who never come to Christ because they just don't sense a need to be saved. They compare themselves with other people and feel they are as good as or better than most people. Why, they are even better than quite a few church members that they know. But their evaluation of themselves is based on a wrong standard. Then there are those who embrace environmentalism, or social justice, and they make themselves feel morally superior to others. Or others feel morally superior because they fight for a conservative moral issue. Yet they should be comparing themselves to Jesus. He is innocent; we are guilty. He is full of love, mercy, truth, and righteousness. We are at best a mixture of vice and virtue. And God's judgment will not be based

² Sparks in Bulletin Inserts, Pulpit Helps, page 9 [Illus.#C-1433].

on grading on the curve. God demands a standard of righteousness equal to that of Jesus. So when you compare yourself with Jesus, you *should* indeed feel guilty, for we have sinned all too often.

Now the second main point I want to make from our text is this:

II. WE SHOULD AVOID WRONG RESPONSES TO GUILT

When it comes to being sinners, we are all in the same boat. But there is a world of difference in the way we handle our failures. We all want to avoid guilt or do something to make the bad feelings to away. So a guilty conscience will often try to find temporary relief. And too often we take wrong or inadequate steps to deal with the problem of guilt. Indeed, most people choose to deal with guilt in wrong ways, such as turning to drugs or alcohol to soothe the pain of guilt. Likewise, our text gives several other examples of some of the wrong ways to handle guilt.

A. Being Remorseful, but Not Repentant – Notice in v.3 that Judas “was remorseful.” In this case the Greek word (*metamelomai*) indicates a regret or sorrow that things had turned out the way they did. He was remorseful for the *consequences* of his betrayal but not repentant of his betrayal. He didn’t think Jesus would actually suffer and die. His remorse not only resulted from a feeling of guilt, but also from fear of what might be the result of his actions. But just feeling sorry for sin fails to go the root of the problem. He did not experience genuine repentance, a basic change of heart and mind. There is a different Greek word for that. Remorse stops short of repentance because it only looks inward and fails to look to God for the strength needed to change.

It’s like a brother and sister getting into an argument and Johnny gets caught calling Sue by an ugly name, and mom says, “Tell Sue your sorry.” And Johnny says, “Sorry.” More often than not, Johnny is not even really sorry, much less repentant!

So when you have done wrong, it is not enough to say, “I’m sorry.” It is not enough to feel regret or remorse. Now the Bible does say that “*godly* sorrow produces repentance...” (2 Cor. 7:10). In other words, a sorrow over sin directed to God is beneficial, leading a soul to repentance. An example of that is the confession of David in Psa. 51:4, “Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight....” But Judas evidently did not have godly sorrow. Instead, Paul goes on to say in that verse, “but the sorrow of the world produces death.” So don’t just express sorrowful remorse.

Now Judas gives us an example of another inadequate response to guilt:

B. Doing Deeds to Try to Make Up for Wrongs – Some call it penance. A man wrote a letter to the IRS: “I have been unable to sleep knowing that I cheated on my taxes. I have enclosed a check for \$200. If I still can’t sleep, I’ll send the rest.”³

Well, Judas was certainly bothered with guilt, and he was hoping that by giving his ill-gotten money back he would soothe his conscience. He had not spent a penny of this money yet. The coins were like red-hot coals in his hands; they burned like a flame in his conscience. He could no longer enjoy the jingle of the silver in his moneybag. His conscience gnawed away to the point that in v.4 he tried to return the money they gave him as his reward for betraying Jesus. He also tried to defend the innocence of Jesus. But it was too late. So often we can’t undo the consequences of our actions. The damage has been done. If you go around spreading gossip, you

³ *Reader’s Digest*, April ‘05, p.126.

cannot go back and erase that gossip from people's memory. And so when they wouldn't accept they money, we read in v.5 that he just threw the money down into the temple. The Greek word used here normally refers to the sanctuary of the temple. If that's the meaning here, that would mean that he brazenly went up to the door of the temple sanctuary and threw the money into the temple. Yet only priests could approach that closely to the sanctuary. Approaching the temple was a small thing in his sight compared to the reality of what he had done in betraying the Son of God. However, John 2:20 is one example where the word refers to the whole temple complex. If that is the meaning here, I can tell you where he may have thrown the money. Against the wall in the Court of Women stood thirteen trumpet-shaped chests in which the people deposited their gifts and offerings. Hence, this court was also called "the Treasury" (John 8:20). The money may have come from the temple treasury. So we can picture Judas, emotionally upset, flinging these pieces of silver into this court. Perhaps they rang loudly on the stone floor and scattered in every direction.

Now I'm not saying that you should not bother to make restitution when you have wronged someone. You should. But equal restitution does not atone for your sin, especially with God. Besides, Leviticus 6:5 says, "He shall restore its full value, add one-fifth more to it, and give it to whomever it belongs...." But the main problem I am addressing is the common practice of doing some good deed, or giving to some charity, as an effort to atone for your sin and sooth a guilty conscience. We try to shut off the inward alarm of a guilty conscience through doing nice deeds. But giving money to the church, or going to church, or doing acts of religious penance will not atone for your sin. Giving or raising money for a children's hospital will not atone for your sin. We should do good deeds and give to support worthy causes, but not as a means of making up for our sin or soothing our guilt.

So don't think that that you can deal with a guilty conscience with good deeds or good gifts. Zeph. 1:18 says, "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath...."

There is yet another way that people deal with guilty feelings, and that is by:

C. Denying Guilt – I believe this was the response of the chief priests and elders. Now in v.3 we see that Judas came to them. His soul was obviously burdened with guilt. The priests in particular were bound by their office to help anyone who was struggling with a wounded conscience. Then Judas told them that he had sinned. He had betrayed innocent blood. They should have sought to help heal his wounded conscience. Furthermore, his words should have pricked their own conscience, for Judas had just told them that they had condemned an innocent man. Instead, they shrugged their shoulders saying in v.4, "What is that to us? You see to it!" In other words, they told him, "It's not our problem; take care of it yourself." It must have been with sublime unconcern and scorn that they uttered these words. Judas had served their purpose. They wanted to have no further dealings with him. Not only had they rejected God's Messiah, but also their role as priests.

Now the main point I want to make is that they refused to accept another witness to the innocence of Jesus. They refused to allow themselves to feel guilty for what they had done to Jesus. They denied any guilt. They refused to heed those words of Judas and change course in their determination to ask Pilate to condemn Jesus to death. Yet we see in v.12 that they proceeded to accuse Jesus of various charges before the Governor.

Even so, far too many people try to soothe or prevent a guilty conscience simply by denying that they have done wrong. In fact, you can go to some counselors who will tell you that

you shouldn't feel guilty, even concerning what the Bible clearly says is a sin! Don't deceive yourself. Don't live in denial. God knows your sin even while you deny it.

Another way that people deal with guilty feelings is by:

D. Redirecting Guilt – I believe that the chief priests and elders were guilty of condemning an innocent man. They used the judicial system and political pressure to murder Jesus! You can hardly commit a sin greater than that! And yet when Judas returned the blood money, they took their attention off their own *major sin* and instead focused on avoiding some *minor sin* of the proper use of blood money. They said in v.6, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood.” The Law would not permit the use of this kind of tainted money for temple purposes, according to a principle found in Deut. 23:18.⁴ So they felt guilty about putting blood money back into the temple treasury. Now consider this: They had just conspired to break God's law by murdering an innocent man. In fact, they admitted that the money they had given Judas was blood money! It was used as a bribe to take the life of Christ! And yet, they are concerned about a much lesser legality! And the fact that they themselves had in a sense “created” this kind of money did not seem to bother them in the least! They redirected the focus from what they had done to what they would *not* do.

It's amazing how people do something similar all the time. People who have moral failures in one area of their life will boast that they do not do wrong in some other area of their life. For example, a drunk may condemn someone for being a thief. An adulterer may condemn someone for being a glutton. You cannot absolve yourself of guilt by focusing on what you're *not* doing wrong.

At this point in the story we see another example of a previous point. They did some charitable deed to soothe their conscience concerning what they had done to Jesus. In v.7 we read that “they consulted together and bought with them [i.e. the silver coins] the potter's field, to bury strangers in.” This term probably indicates a field from which potters (or a potter) used to obtain their (his) clay, but which had become depleted as a source of further supplies, and had therefore been offered for sale. So they decided to do some good deed with that blood money. They were probably thinking of using this burial ground especially of Jews who had come to Jerusalem to attend one of the great festivals, and then overtaken by death, needed a place for burial. So they would have such a place. They felt so much better about themselves for having done this! They redirected attention away from their crime to their good deed. But if the priests thought that by means of this “good deed” they would be able to cleanse their hearts and hands, they were mistaken. In the future this field would be called the Field of Blood because it was purchased with blood money. The name of the field would then be a continuing testimony against Judas, the priests, and all who had agreed with them.

By the way, what they did was a fulfillment of prophecy. We read about this in vv.9-10. The Prophet's action in throwing his despised wages to the potter foreshadowed the chief priests' action in using the despised wages of Judas for buying the Potter's Field.⁵ Once again the Gospel writer points to the fact that prophecy is fulfilled, and God's plan is being carried out.

⁴ “You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the LORD your God for any vowed offering....”

⁵ But why did Matthew relate this event to a prophecy in Jeremiah, when the prophecy is found in Zechariah 11:12-13? One possible solution is that his prophecy was spoken by Jeremiah (v.9) and became a part of the Jewish oral tradition. It was later written by Zechariah. The Prophet Jeremiah definitely was involved in the purchase of a field (Jer. 32:6ff), and also with a potter's house (Jer. 18:1-4), and a burial ground (Jer. 19:1-12). Matthew may have been referring to these general facts as background for the specific prophecy written by Zechariah. It is clear that in many

There is one more tragic way that some people deal with unresolved guilt, and that is by:

E. Committing Suicide – Some people are so burdened with guilt that they even resort to suicide. That’s what Judas did, even though the Rabbis taught it was morally wrong. We read in the last of v.5 that he “departed, and went and hanged himself.” He couldn’t live with himself for what he had done. Acts 1:18-19 adds to our understanding of the event.⁶ There we read that “he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out.” If he hanged himself from a tree located on a high cliff, and if then the rope or tree limb broke and the traitor fell on the rocky ground below, then that would explain what was pictured in the book of Acts. This was especially true if the break occurred after some days had passed, and his body became bloated. The main point of the Acts account was to show that a great crime deserved a most terrible end.

However, our focus in Matthew is just upon the suicide, and what caused it. As with any suicide, we might ask, “Why?” In many cases suicide happens as a result of a mental illness, especially deep depression. Yet even in those cases people reach a point where they can’t live with the pain any longer. In Judas’ case, he couldn’t live with the pain of great guilt. Yet why did he not repent rather than just have remorse? Why did he not seek out the disciples for help? Why did he do it? Was it self-condemnation, thinking that he didn’t deserve to live in light of what he had done? Probably the main reason was he saw no other way to deal with his guilt. So enveloped by guilt and maybe even outraged by his sin that he could find no way to God and no hope for the future. So he ended his life. But the problem with suicide is this: you don’t really end your life. You only plunge yourself into eternity. In Judas’ case, he went to “his own place” according to Acts 1:25, no doubt a reference to hell. After all, Jesus called him a “devil” in Jn. 6:70, and the “son of perdition” in Jn. 17:12. He never truly believed (Jn. 6:64). He went from the mental anguish of guilt to the anguish of hell.

Guilt can indeed be a factor in suicide. Did you know that according to a 1996 National Survey of sexually active girls that had attempted suicide, they had a 3-times greater incidence of suicide compared to sexually inactive girls. Liberal society says we should deal with guilt by removing standards of sexual morality. They say, “Don’t feel guilty. There’s nothing wrong with what you are doing.” Yet there is a better way.

So how should we deal with our own guilt?

III. WE SHOULD TAKE THE RIGHT STEPS TO DEAL WITH GUILT

There is only one pathway to truly deal with guilt. First:

A. Acknowledge Your Sin – In a sense Judas did this. He said in v.4, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” The betrayer admitted that what he did was wrong—a sinful act toward the Son of God. He also proclaimed Christ’s innocence in his confession. The only thing that was probably lacking in his confession was that he did not direct his confession to God or to Christ.

respects Matthew’s passage reflects Jer. 19. What Matthew does, therefore is this: he combines two prophecies, one from Zechariah and one from Jeremiah. Then he mentions not the minor prophet but the major prophet as the source of the reference.⁵ Mark does this also. Thus Mark 1:2, 3 refers first to Malachi, then to Isaiah. Nevertheless Mark ascribes both prophecies to “Isaiah,” the major prophet.

⁶ Some see the Acts account as contradictory (Plummer). But when comparing the Matthew account we may conclude that Judas indirectly purchased the field by returning the money. The priests were in effect his agents.

So don't try to deny or hide your sin. Confess your sin to God. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Then, the next step is to:

B. Repent of Your Sin – Judas had remorse, but not repentance. Real repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of life. Jesus said in Luke 13:3, "unless you repent you will all likewise perish." So what you need to do is fess up when you mess up, and then straighten up. In fact, Prov. 28:13 says, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."

We need only look at the difference between Peter and Judas to see the difference between remorse and true repentance. Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (26:75); Judas "went and hanged himself" (27:5). After bitter sorrow over his sin, Peter truly repented, and Jesus restored him. But Judas did not repent.

When you mess up and say, "I'm sorry," do you also mean, "I'm *so* sorry that, with God's help, I don't ever want to do that again"? If not, you have not repented. There is no true relief from guilt until you have repented.

But even repentance is not enough. You must also:

C. Turn to Jesus for Forgiveness – Judas failed to do this. Jesus was probably nearby when Judas returned with his thirty pieces of silver. He could have gone to our Lord's prison cell and found forgiveness in the great mercy of our Savior. After all, the next day Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them..." concerning those who crucified Him. But instead of turning to Jesus, he addressed the religious rulers. I do not suppose that Judas was lost because he betrayed Jesus Christ, but because, having betrayed Jesus Christ, he never asked to be forgiven.

Listen, there is no transgression which is so great but that forgiveness for it may come. Judas heard what Jesus said in Mt. 12:31, "... every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men..." And we may have it for the asking, if we will go to that dear Savior that died for us, and trust in Him. And when you say, "I have sinned," He comes with outstretched, wounded hands, saying, "Cast your burden upon Me, and I will free you from it all." We must keep in mind the context of our passage. It stands in the middle of the passion story. Isa. 53:4 says, "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows!" Jesus Christ has taken our guilt upon Himself, and borne the judgment of God that we deserve so that we might exchange our guilt for His joy through faith in Christ. Trust in Him, in His great sacrifice, and you will find that His innocent blood has the power to liberate your conscience from its agony and despair.

One rainy afternoon a six-year-old little girl was riding through town with her father. She was in deep thought and said, "The rain is like sin, and the windshield wipers are like God wiping our sins away." Her father was impressed with her analogy and said, "That's really good, Aspen." Then, out of curiosity he asked, "Do you notice how the rain keeps on coming? What does that tell you?" Aspen didn't hesitate one moment with her answer: "We keep on sinning, and God just keeps on forgiving us."⁷ The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:20, "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more..."

Unfortunately, we can't seem to free ourselves from sin. We keep messing up over and over. But the good thing with God is this: Based on the work of Christ, He keeps forgiving over

⁷ From the Internet, 11/30/05 [Illus.#C-1449].

and over again. All we have to do is confess, repent, and trust in Christ for forgiveness, and God will wipe away every sin yet again.

Conclusion: So conscience brings us to the crossroads just as it did Judas. We have two paths before us. We can either walk the path of repentance and trusting in Jesus for forgiveness, or we can go the pathway of self-effort to sooth our guilt. We either turn to Christ or we choose to go our own way to deal with our guilt.

Perhaps you have messed up recently, and you still haven't dealt with your sin. Now is the time to allow God to take the burden of sin's guilt away. Don't try to deny your guilt. Don't imagine that feeling remorse will be enough. Don't think that you can do deeds of penance to make up for it. Don't choose alcohol and other drugs to soothe the guilt. Instead, confess your sin to God, repent of it, and then trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness. He is the One who suffered and died for your sins. He will forgive you and lift the burden of guilt. Trust in Him today! What He did for me and others He can do for you.

Sources: Ronald A. Beers, ed., *Life Application Study Bible* (Tyndale House & Zondervan, 1991); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2021; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible, Vol. 4* (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Phil Newton (notes from his sermon on this text dated 8/14/2005); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [Ver. 5:30]* (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, reprint, Christian Publishing Co.; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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