

In August 2014... *Esquire* magazine ran an article titled "Lance Armstrong in Purgatory." ... A year and a half earlier... a doping cheating scandal ended the career and the endorsements for the world's most successful cyclist. ... *Esquire* called Armstrong "the greatest cheater of all time" who "doped and bullied other bikers to dope and sued or harassed people for telling the truth about him."

Now Armstrong (the article reads)... is trying to make amends. On *Oprah*... he publically admitted his cheating ways. ... He has also gone around the world to personally tell the people he bullied most... that he's sorry. He flew to Rome to apologize to Italian cyclist Filippo Simeoni... to Paris to apologize to French racer Christophe Bassons. ... Armstrong said, "[I told these people], 'I'm ashamed and embarrassed when I look back on that period. If I saw my son act that way, I'd be livid.'"

But despite his desire to earn redemption... Armstrong hasn't experienced the liberating power of forgiveness. The author of the article writes:

Today, [Armstrong] seems tired and trapped. "Don't we all, when our backs are against the wall, try to push back or fight or control certain things?" he says softly. "But this is so far gone, I don't know what's gonna happen. I can't control what's gonna happen. It's beyond my control."

While it is commendable that Armstrong is seeking to apologize, according to this article, he seems like a man who is a long way from the peace of redemption and the gift of Christ's forgiveness. He knows he can't control things in his life, but he also can't find the freedom of trust and surrender.

This was Judas' story. He sought to reverse the consequences of his betraying Christ. But it brought him no relief. In fact... his "half-repentance" that we will study this morning... only made things worse for Judas.

Today we are going to contrast a "half repentance" (like Judas')... with true repentance. Repentance is so crucial to the Christian life... not just in beginning our relationship with God... but also in maintaining a close walk with Christ. Every day... you and I need to repent of our sin. But many Christians do not realize just what exactly is involved.

Let me present to you... something that I found as I researched this topic this week... because I want to hammer home the need for giving our attention to this necessary topic. (Then we will go to our passage.)

Do you want to make the act of confessing your sin as pleasant as possible? Then make a full... (not a partial) confession. That's the message from a recent study conducted by researchers in the U.S. and Israel titled "I Cheated but Only a Little." Based on a series of studies involving over 4,000 people, the researchers found that people who only partially confessed a transgression... felt worse than those who do not confess at all.

Dr. Eyal Pe'er, the study's lead author, had a surprisingly biblical angle on the results. He said:

"Confessing to only part of the guilt of one's transgression is attractive to a lot of people because they expect the confession to be more believable and guilt-relieving than not confessing. But our findings show the exact opposite ... People seeking redemption by partially admitting their big lies feel guiltier because they do not take complete responsibility for their behaviors."

The *Harvard Business Review* summarized the research this way:

"Confession is a powerful way to relieve guilt, but it works only if you tell the whole truth."

We are about to see what might **look** like a **full** confession from Judas. ... But in truth... it wasn't. ... ALSO... Lance Armstrong's confession... to **many**... looks full and complete – but it wasn't. And as I noted a moment ago... Judas and Lance... were actually **worse**... after their incomplete confessions. Because their confessions were incomplete... their repentance was (at best) only a half-repentance.

Do you want to make the act of confessing your sin as pleasant as possible? Then make a **full...** (not a partial) confession. Today we will see what **that** is.

This morning we open the 27th chapter of Matthew... in our study through his Gospel. ... We have come to the **central fact** of the gospel message: the crucifixion of Christ. ... When Paul defined the gospel to the Corinthians, he wrote,

1 Corinthians 15:3 (ESV)

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

We have now come to the record of that tremendous event.

We will see that Matthew does not give a record of the actual **crucifixion**. In fact... no Gospel writer does that. They merely tell about the events that went on - **around** the Cross. ... Matthew very simply wrote: "*And they crucified him.*"

Leading up to this... chapter 27 in Matthew begins with the morning after Jesus had been arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane... (after Judas had betrayed Him... after He had been brought before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin... after false witnesses had testified against Him... after He had been beaten and ridiculed... and after Peter had denied Him.)

Last week we read that Jesus clearly confessed that He was the Messiah... the Son of God (*Matthew 26:64*). From that point... the anger of the Jewish leadership could not be appeased. ... They proceeded to spit on Jesus... to hit Him with their fists... and to make fun of Him. ... The verdict of death had been issued... but they needed Pilate's order to execute Jesus. Roman law forbid the Jews from carrying out a death penalty – even on their own people.

The trial had been held throughout the night. Such a hearing was illegal on several counts: criminal trials were not to be held at night... trials in capital cases could only be held at the temple... and they could only be held in public (not by a secret meeting.)

None of this was the case for Jesus' trial. And now that an illegal verdict had been provided... they bound Jesus and sent Him at around 6:00 a.m. to Pilate... to get the governor to comply with the execution of the death penalty. The Jewish leaders were still operating under the cloak of darkness... hiding their evil deed from public view as much as possible because they were fearful of the public reaction. ... They attempted to get Jesus to Pilate before the city awakened from sleep.

If hypocrisy is funny to you... MANY parts of this should give you a big laugh. ... (For example)... John's gospel records that the Jews would not enter Pilate's palace (*John 18:28*). ... After breaking virtually every sacred principle of their legal system... in their haste to convict Jesus... the elders refused to enter the palace... because it was a place of the Gentiles. If they were to enter... they would be ceremonially unclean... and... therefore... they would not be permitted to observe the Passover. – Somehow... their minds were able to rationalize this glaring inconsistency in their behavior.

Matthew 27:1-2

The Jewish leaders had arrested Jesus on theological grounds — blasphemy. ... But because this charge would be thrown out of a Roman court... they had to come up with a political reason for Jesus' death. Their strategy was to show Jesus as a rebel who claimed to be a king and thus a threat to Caesar. The charge against Jesus in the Roman court would be treason.

Pontius Pilate served as the Roman governor for the regions of Samaria and Judea from a.d. 26 to 36. ... Pilate happened to be in Jerusalem because of the Passover festival. ... With the large crowds that flocked to the city for that celebration... Pilate and his soldiers came to help keep the peace... through crowd control.

Pilate was a harsh governor who felt nothing but contempt for the Jews. ...They... in turn... felt the same about him. ... He seemed to take special pleasure in demonstrating his authority. ... For example... he had impounded money from the Temple treasuries to build an aqueduct... and had insulted the Jewish religion... by bringing imperial images into the city.

Pilate was not popular... but the religious leaders had no other way to get rid of Jesus... than to go to him.

Matthew 27:3-4a

Standing in the shadows in Caiaphas's courtroom... Judas watched the trial of Jesus. ... As the chief priests and elders were leading Him through that hall... to take Him to Pilate... Judas was there!

When Judas saw Jesus being abused by the religious authorities... bound... and led away to Pilate - remorse filled his soul. ... This seems to indicate that Judas did not suppose that the affair would have results in ***this*** calamitous manner. ... He probably expected that Jesus would have worked a miracle to deliver himself.

Judas was present on other occasions... when Jesus faced a violent mob who intended to arrest Him. ... Every OTHER time... Jesus had always confounded those who sought to harm Him. He would simply walk away. So the likelihood is... that Judas thought Jesus would again escape the men that Judas led to Him.

Judas was disappointed... because Christ had delayed the Kingdom. He was not setting up His earthly Kingdom just yet... from which Judas expected to make a big profit. That is when Judas set his sights on whatever profit he COULD get. He could cut a deal... and be paid for bringing a mob to arrest Jesus... Jesus would inevitably escape... and no one would be any the wiser... just as no one was... when Judas would steal money from the disciple's ministry and travel fund. But things did not work out that way.

The coins were like red-hot coals in his pocket. ... They scorched and scarred his hand. ... They burned like a flame in his conscience.

Why did he take them back to the priests? ... Did he think he could buy back his honor... or purchase with such a small amount of money the Savior's release? ... Did he think the sight of his remorse would melt those stony-hearted priests?

In a vain attempt to ease his guilt and anguish at the result of his betrayal... Judas brought the thirty silver coins back to the chief priests and elders. Whether the leadership accepted the coins or not... there would be no change to the verdict... and Jesus would still stand condemned to die... betrayed by a "friend."

When verse three says that Judas "*changed his mind*" (as the English Standard Version translates it)... several other Bible versions say he "repented." "*Then Judas... when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.*" ... The word translated "repented" (or "changed his mind"... in the ESV)... is *metamelomai*, which literally means "to regret."

This kind of repenting does not denote a change *for the better*... Here it evidently means no other change than that produced by the horrors of a guilty conscience... and by deep remorse... for crime at its unexpected results. Judas regretted the **outcome** of his betraying Jesus. ... Jesus was condemned to death... and He did not seem to fight this verdict.

It was not a saving repentance (that leads to a holy life.) ... This led to an increase of crime - in his own death. ... True repentance leads the sinner to

the Savior. ... This led away from the Savior to the gallows. Judas... if he had been a true penitent... would have come then to Jesus... confessed his crime at His feet... confessed his need for forgiveness (and a Savior)... and sought for Christ's pardon. But, overwhelmed with remorse, and the conviction of vast guilt, he was not willing to come into his presence

The significant thing is that Jesus was present when Judas returned with his thirty pieces of silver. ... In fact... Jesus was on His way to die -- even for Judas. ... Our Lord had given him an opportunity to come back to Him there in the Garden of Gethsemane... when Jesus tenderly called him His ***friend***. Jesus said to Judas... "*Friend, do what you have come to do...*" Judas could have repented fully in the Garden of Gethsemane... and Judas could have repented at this eleventh hour. Judas could have turned to the Lord Jesus... and He would have been forgiven.

Why didn't Judas turn to the Lord Jesus and ask forgiveness? ... Judas must have believed that Jesus ***would*** not... or ***could*** not... forgive him. So... instead of turning to Jesus... he addressed the ***religious rulers*** -- Saying, "*I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood...*"

And they said, "*What is that to us?*"

Matthew 27:4

Peter truly repented... and Jesus restored him. ... But Judas did not repent... He took his sin to wicked men... dressed up as God's priests.

They looked at the wretched... tormented man... eyed him up and down with distaste... and listened to his anguished confession of sin. Then they

callously said, "*What is that to us? See to it yourself.*" ... They were as indifferent to the guilt of Judas... as they were to the innocence of Jesus. "*That's your business, mister,*" they said in effect, "*not ours.*"

BUT - The priests' job actually was to teach people about God and act as intercessors for them... helping them turn from sin and find forgiveness. Judas returned to the priests... exclaiming that he had sinned. Rather than helping him find forgiveness... however... the priests didn't care. ... *They* had secured what they wanted - the person of Jesus - and they cared little now for the feelings of the traitor.

Matthew 27:5

The priests were at that moment moving across the courtyard from the palace of the high priest toward the palace of Pilate (the Roman governor.) Just over the wall were the temple courts. With a final gesture of despair... Judas flung the blood money over the wall and into the sanctuary. ... Perhaps the priests could hear the pieces of silver rolling and rattling across the marble mosaic of the temple court. ... Before they could recover themselves... Judas turned on his heel... rushed blindly away... and hurled himself headlong into a lost eternity.

We need only look at the difference between Peter and Judas to see the difference between remorse or regret and true repentance. ... Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (26:75) – later he responded to Christ's forgiveness... Judas tried to return the money and then "went and hanged himself (27:5).

Matthew 27:6-8

The leaders were careful to observe the Law even while they were guilty of breaking it. ... In sanctimonious piety... the chief priests did not accept the money on the basis of its past usage. ... How ridiculous and hypocritical could they have been?

They were the ones who had created the blood money... by paying for the services of one of Jesus' disciples. ... They were the ones who had taken the sacred intentions of the temple money... and used it for the irreverence of a bribe. ... The chief priests are more concerned about the legal technicality of blood money for the treasury than that they issued the money for a judicial murder... or that Judas is about to kill himself. ... Their fear and hatred of Jesus were so intense that they could not see the glaring inconsistencies of their own actions.

The solution that they found was one that would attempt to put the best face on a bad situation. In fact... to the Jewish way of thinking... their solution (in other circumstances) would have made them appear to be pious.

Burying people who had no one else to bury them... was an act of piety... Many Jews from around the world visited Jerusalem or moved there in their old age... and if they died without sufficient funds... others would need to pay for their burial. The “strangers” might also include unclean Gentiles. Thus the high priests no doubt saw their behavior as pious!

How often do we attempt to put the best face on a bad situation? How often do we rationalize our sins... and appease our guilt... by doing something we think looks "righteous"? ... Judas and the Jewish leadership attempted

to do just that — Judas by returning the thirty pieces of silver and the leadership by purchasing a burial plot for strangers.

But that is not repentance. We will see what repentance is in just a moment. It involves a complete confession... and dependence (that is NOT on ourselves.) But first... let's finish our passage...

Matthew 27:8-10

Verse 9 says: *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,*

Uh oh! ... The words quoted here are not to be found in the prophecy of Jeremiah. ... ANYWHERE! (Let me just clarify this... before I get back to what “full repentance” means.)

Words similar to Matthew's wording is recorded in Zechariah 11:12-13...

Zechariah 11:12-13 (ESV)

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.

Zechariah was directed to go to the Jews as a prophet (a pastor of the people.) ... They treated him... as they had done others... with great contempt. ... He asks them to give him *his price* — in other words... the price which they thought he and his pastoral efforts were worth... (or to show their estimate of his office.) If they thought it of value... they were to

pay him accordingly. ... If not... they were to give nothing. ... So as a show of their *great contempt* of him and his office... (and of God who had sent him)... they gave him thirty pieces of silver - *the price of a common slave*. ... God then commanded him to give to the potter... or to throw into the pottery—to throw away.

So in the time of Jesus... the same thing was substantially repeated. Jesus came as the Messiah. They hated and rejected him. To show their contempt of him and His cause... they valued Him at the price of a slave... showing through the whole transaction... how low the Son of God was estimated.

Jeremiah also has an inference to what was happening at Jesus' trial.

Jeremiah 19:11 (ESV)

and shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury.

What Matthew did was to draw on the resources of both prophets... but he named the more prominent prophet as his primary source. This is not unusual in the biblical narrative. Mark, in the opening verses of his gospel, quoted a prophecy stating that Isaiah was the source, while actually, the first part of the prophecy came from Malachi and the rest came from Isaiah (*Mark 1:2-3*). Jewish writing often did this.

... ..

OK... I have been saying that we need to know what full repentance is... we have so much riding on it... as believers. How do you know if you are confessing and repenting properly?

Verses 3-4 of our passage this morning reads: “*Then when Judas ... 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.’*” - Judas really repented. But he only **half**-repented.

Perhaps the famous repentance train analogy will help. By acknowledging his sin and seeking to make amends... Judas got off the train going the wrong way. ... But that was all he did. ... He next needed to get on another train going the right way. ... That right way was back to Jesus for forgiveness. (That is what we will see Peter do.)

Judas went to the chief priests in the temple... but not to the true High Priest who is the temple. Judas should have gone to Jesus who is sympathetic to our weaknesses and ready to forgive *all* our transgressions. He should have run to the tree of Calvary for life. Instead he ran to another tree for death.

Non-repentant despair turns away from Jesus. Judas not only lost all hope; he lost all hope *in Jesus*. ... He doubted God’s mercy through Jesus. ... He believed Jesus was an innocent man... but he should have added that Jesus shows mercy to sinners. For three years... Judas witnessed... first-hand... the mercy and compassion of Christ. ... His confession needed to be that Jesus was the innocent Son of Man... **and** that Jesus was merciful... **and** that he had great need of a savior. ... His own actions (the giving back the money was not enough.)

The actions of Judas and the religious leaders are not unusual or even unexpected. They reflect the normal pattern of human behavior as it muddles through life in the bondage of sin. It is much easier to rationalize our behavior or perform some "worthwhile" deed to make us feel that there is some merit in us... than it is to simply admit that we have sinned and are desperately in need of a Savior.

Why do we continue to make excuses? Jesus has set us free from the whirlwind of trying to make ourselves look good... of making useless rationalizations for our sins... and committing ourselves to a litany of "good deeds" (all of which will not save us in the end.)

Do you have any sin in your life? ... Is there anything by which you have tried to cover it up... with an action (or ministry) that makes you look righteous...? Think about your little ones (a white lie... a stolen coin... a lustful glance, etc.) ... Think about your big ones (betrayal... slander... false testimony... blasphemy... adultery, etc.) What are you going to do about all those sins? ... If you think there is something YOU can do... you're ***not*** thinking! ... What I suggest you do about them... is completely confess them. Experience a full repentance. Come to Jesus... and admit what you've done is wrong. But don't stop there. Confess that you need a righteous and merciful savior to forgive you and restore you.

My friends... there is no sin you have committed that cannot be forgiven. And there is no other place to have that sin (all our sins) forgiven than the cross of Christ.

*What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

If you won't believe me... or what the Bible says... or an old hymn... then take it from the Harvard study: "*Confession is a powerful way to relieve guilt, but it works only if you tell the whole truth.*"