

## Thirty Pieces of Silver

Matthew 26:14-16

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** When one mentions “*thirty pieces of silver*,” most instantly think of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus.

A. The Lord’s betrayal is etched in the memory of every Christian (Matt. 26:14-16).

B. Even marginal Christians, and many non-Christians, immediately know what you’re talking about when the name “Judas” comes up, or “*thirty pieces of silver*” are mentioned.

**Matt. 26:14-16:** “Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, 15 And said unto them, ‘What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?’ And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.”

2. **3** The Bible recounts the weak character of various men, not to embarrass them, but to teach us lessons so we might not follow in their footsteps (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11).

A. Saul: We can learn from the weakness of King Saul which led to his disobedience when he thought that sacrifice was more important than obedience (**1 Sam. 15:22**: “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.”; **1 Jn. 2:3-4**: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”).

B. Esau: He sold his most important possession; an inheritance, with eternal consequences, for a measly bowl of bean soup! (**Heb. 12:16-17**: “Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. 17 For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”).

C. Rich young ruler: He was right there on the precipice of the kingdom, but, unfortunately, he loved just one thing more than he loved Christ (\$); he had his priorities in the wrong order (**Matt. 19:16-22**: “...he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”).

3. **\*\*** We too can learn from Judas’ apostasy—important lessons so we won’t stumble as he did.

A. The New Testament tells us Judas betrayed Jesus by making a covenant with the Jews for “*thirty pieces of silver*.”

B. “*Thirty pieces of silver*” is about 15 troy ounces of silver; the current value of silver is about \$16.50/troy ounce (CME quote 3/14/2018); thus, 30 X \$16.50 = \$495 (ave. U.S. household income ~\$60,000/year, ~\$5,000/month; ∴ \$500 represents 1/10 of monthly income).

C. His decision to go to the Jewish leaders follows closely the account of the woman who anointed Jesus with a very expensive, precious ointment in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany (Matt. 26:6-13)

(1) John tells us it was “*Mary*,” the sister of “*Lazarus*” who anointed Jesus (Jn. 12:1-11).

(2) She anointed Him with “*oil of spikenard*” (Mk. 14:3; Jn. 12:3); which Matthew, Mark and John all tell us was a very costly item; Mark and John both specifically tell us it is worth about “*three hundred denari*” (Mk. 14:5; Jn. 12:5).

(3) One can imagine why it was so valuable because “*oil of spikenard*” (aka “*nard oil*”) is derived from a plant that only grows in the Himalayan mountains (Nepal, China, and India; only grows at altitudes between 10,000-16,000 feet).

- (4) A *denari* represents a day's wages for a skilled laborer, and 300 *denarii* would represent a year's wages (@\$15/hr, 8 hr/day = \$120/day; \$36,000 for 300 days).
- D. **4** The Bible doesn't explicitly state it, but Judas apparently resented the "waste" the oil represented (**Matt. 26:8-9**: "*But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, 'Why this waste? 9 For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.'*").
- (1) I don't think it is a stretch to imagine Judas joining in and leading this protest.
- (2) But, Judas was a "phony"; he was not concerned at all for the poor (**Jn. 12:6**: "*because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein*").
4. Judas' love of money led him to try to "cash in" on the Lord.
- A. He certainly knew the Jewish authorities bitterly hated Jesus (**Matt. 26:4**: "*And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him.*").
- B. Judas thought he could profit from this hatred (big mistake!).
- C. He asks the Jews, "*What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?*" (Matt. 27:15)
- D. They made an agreement for "*thirty pieces of silver*" (**Matt. 26:15**: "*And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver.*").
- (1) Ironically, "*thirty pieces of silver*," was the sum legislated by the law of Moses as payment for a slave who had been gored by an ox (Exod. 21:32; vs. Matt. 13:45-46).
- (2) According to Google:
- (a) "*Thirty pieces of silver*" was ~5 week's pay for a laborer in the first century.
- (b) At the most, "*thirty pieces of silver*" would worth about \$500-\$600 today.
- (c) Not a paltry sum, but certainly not a fortune either.
5. **5** Let's consider some things we can learn for our benefit from this tragic episode.

## II. DISCUSSION:

### As we think about *thirty pieces of silver*...

#### I. **6** What it could buy:

- A. There were some things "*thirty pieces of silver*" could buy.
- (1) Jesus: Judas and the chief rulers considered that sum sufficient money to sell/buy Jesus.
- (a) Wow! Jesus the Savior worth no more than an injured slave! What an insult!
- (b) What a pitiful underestimation of the value of Jesus (mistake of so many!).
- (c) Judas thought money (and a paltry sum at that!) was worth more than the "*unsearchable riches of Christ*" (Eph. 3:8; Matt. 13:45-46).
- (d) **Application**: Whenever we put anything in our lives ahead of Him, we are no better than Judas! We "devalue" the Lord! Matt. 6:33
- Phil. 3:8**: "*Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,*"
- (2) **7** Judas' loyalty: Judas sold out his loyalty to his friend for a mere "*thirty pieces of silver*."
- (a) Think of the grand and exalted position Judas held.

- (b) Judas was called to be an apostle to the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe!

**Jn. 1:1-3:** *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”*

**Col. 1:16-17:** *“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: 17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”*

- (c) In all human history can you think of a more exalted, honorable, and valuable position than to be so intimately associated with the Messiah?!

- (i) Think of being able to travel at His side and hear all His lessons and witness all His miraculous deeds!
- (ii) Think of being with Him during the “quiet times” (e.g., at the evening campfire) and being privy to His most intimate thoughts and teachings.
- (iii) Think of being face-to-face with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and being able to engage Him in conversation, ask Him questions, see His miracles, etc.

- (d) Judas willingly sold this position and his loyalty for a mere *“thirty pieces of silver.”*!

- (e) **Application:**

- (i) Knowing right, does not guarantee doing right! Num. 13 & 14
- (ii) We are not able to engage with the Savior face-to-face like Judas.
- (iii) But, we can know Him as intimately, perhaps even more so, than Judas did!

**1 Jn. 1:1-4:** *“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; 2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) 3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”; cf. Eph. 3:1-5*

- (iv) How easily do YOU sell our position with the Lord? Heb. 12:16
- (v) What small thing are YOU willing to exchange for your place by the Master’s side? So many sell themselves to the Devil for such a paltry price!
  - ☛ Money, career, pleasures of the world, absence from services to fritter away our time watching TV, playing video games, etc.
  - ☛ Shoplifting, cheating on our taxes, stealing things from our employer, etc.
- (vi) One can imagine Jesus’ disappointment when Judas sold his loyalty so cheap.
- (vii) I’m sure the Lord experiences the same disappointment when you and I turn our back to the Lord for the things of the world.

- (3) **8 Judas:** Though he didn’t consider it; Judas sold himself for *“thirty pieces of silver”*!

- (a) Judas thought *“thirty pieces of silver”* was the purchase price for Jesus; but in reality, it was not what Jesus was worth; it was Judas’ value of himself!
- (b) Judas made the mistake we all make from time-to-time; we have misplaced values.

- (c) The rich farmer is a classic example of this shortsightedness:

**Lk. 12:16-21:** *“And he spake a parable unto them, saying, ‘The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: 17 And he thought within himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?’ 18 And he said, ‘This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.’ 20 But God said unto him, ‘Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?’ 21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*

- (d) **Application:**

- (i) We can be so ignorant/foolish when it comes to placing a true value on things.
- (ii) The world puts life in \$ terms; “He who dies with the most toys wins!”
- (iii) None of us here today will ever have a net worth like:

☛ Jeff Bezos (founder and CEO of Amazon): \$124 B

☛ Bill Gates (founder of Microsoft): \$91.6 B

- (iv) But you and I have a possession that makes these men’s net worth seem like “chump change”! Our soul!

**Matt. 16:26:** *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

- (v) Judas sold what was worth more than all the world can offer for about \$500.
- (vi) If Satan came to you and offered you the fortune of Jeff Bezos or Bill Gates; yea, every dollar, peso, franc, rupee, euro, yen, ruble, etc. would you give your soul in exchange? What if he threw in every diamond, precious gems, gold bars? Would you sell your soul? What if he was also willing to deed over to you every piece of property on Earth? Would you sell your soul?
- (vii) “Of course not!”; but, like Judas, we often sell our soul for much, much less!
- (viii) Anytime and every time we allow anything (money, possessions, relationships, temper, disappointment, TV, video games, etc., etc.) to come between us and the Lord; we are making the very same mistake Judas made.
- (ix) We easily see how foolishly Judas valued his soul; don’t make that mistake!

(4) **9 Potter’s field:**

- (a) “*Thirty pieces of silver*” were also could buy a field in which to bury strangers.
- (b) When Judas came to these same chief rulers on the morning after he betrayed Jesus, he threw the money at their feet and said, “*I have betrayed innocent blood.*”
- (c) Then he went and hanged himself.
- (d) The Jewish leaders had too much “conscience” to put blood money in the Temple treasury so they used the money to buy a potter’s field in which to bury strangers (Matt. 27:6-10).
- (e) Surely, we see the glaring hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders.
  - (i) They had no qualms whatsoever of sending an innocent man to His death.

- (ii) This is the ultimate in “*straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel*”! Matt. 23:24
- (iii) It did not bother their conscience one bit to murder their own Messiah!

**Acts 2:23:** “*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.*”

**Matt. 27:25:** “*Then answered all the people, and said, ‘His blood be on us, and on our children.’*”

- (f) **Application:** There are so many applications!
  - (i) Hypocrisy of rationalizing: e.g., issues of authority (Matt. 15:9; e.g., Grayling); work/recreation/hangnail vs. faithful attendance, etc.; (Heb. 10:25); associate w/bad company (1 Cor. 15:33).
  - (ii) Danger of searing one’s conscience (1 Tim. 4:2); these men did not start out so wicked as to do this terrible deed; no, they arrived at this destination one small step at a time; slowly over a period of years by rationalizing sin; we need to be very, very careful!

**As we think about thirty pieces of silver, let’s consider now...**

2. **10** What it could **not** buy:

- A. While “*thirty pieces of silver*” could buy Jesus, Judas loyalty, Judas’ soul, and a potter’s field; there were several things which “*thirty pieces of silver*” could not buy.
  - (1) Jesus’ life: “*thirty pieces of silver*” could not redeem Christ from death.
    - (a) We do not know for sure what thoughts passed through Judas’ mind as he witnessed the chain of events which followed his betrayal of Jesus.
    - (b) But, I think one thing is certain: he never intended for his betrayal to lead to Jesus’ death (explain; esp. Jews couldn’t execute someone on their own).
    - (c) When he saw the events which followed, he regretted what he had done and came back to the chief rulers of the Jews and said, “*I have betrayed innocent blood.*”
    - (d) Returning the “*thirty pieces of silver*,” however, was not enough to secure the release of Jesus and stop the ordeal of death which was already set in motion.
  - (e) **Application:**
    - (i) Sin has consequences! Eternal consequences (Rom. 6:23) and temporal consequences (Heb. 12:16-17).
    - (ii) Like Judas, many give little thought to the consequences of their sins.
    - (iii) They only look at sin’s pleasure; never thinking about its effects:
 

**Heb. 11:25:** “*For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*”
    - (iv) Judas learned a bitter lesson: Once a sin is committed its consequences are beyond our control (ripples in a pond); it doesn’t matter that “I didn’t intend for that to happen.” Unintended consequences spin out of control!
    - (v) Like Judas, many sinners give little thought to the consequences of their sins.

- ☛ If Magic Johnson had thought about his possibly contacting the HIV virus, how would he have changed his conduct?
- ☛ “Five minutes of pleasure is not worth a lifetime of regret.” If fornicators thought about an unwanted pregnancy, disease, and getting caught, divorce; they would not commit fornication.
- ☛ If drinkers thought about the death they might cause by an automobile accident, their addiction to alcohol, drinking’s impact on their family, and such things, they would never take the first drink.

(vi) Judas had a conscience, and his conscience told him he was wrong:

**Matt. 27:3-5:** *“Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 ‘Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.’ And they said, ‘What is that to us? see thou to that.’ 5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.”*

(vii) But it was too late! The “train had left the station”! Giving back the “thirty pieces of silver” could not undo the consequences of his sin.

(viii) We need to have that picture firmly cemented in our mind; everything we say and do; once it is “said,” and once it is “done”; there are consequences we will have to deal with! cf. Matt. 12:36-37

(ix) \*\* Sin (always!):

- ☛ Takes you further than you intended to go.
- ☛ Keeps you longer than you intended to stay.
- ☛ Costs you more than you wanted to pay.

(2) **II** Spiritual concern:

(a) “Thirty pieces of silver” couldn’t buy concern for Judas’ soul from the Jewish leaders.

(i) When Judas returned with his money and said, “I have betrayed innocent blood,” the Jewish leaders said, “What is that to us? See thou to that” (Matt. 27:4).

(ii) In our vernacular: “We could care less! That’s your problem, not ours!”

(b) The Jewish leaders led the Jew’s religion (high priest, chief priests, etc.).

(i) They should have been concerned for the souls of those they ministered to, but they had no concern for Judas’ soul. Few are concerned for your soul!

☛ False friends (**Psa. 38:10-12:** *“My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. 11 My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off. 12 They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long.”* (Most are “fair weather friends.”)

☛ False teachers (**2 Pet. 2:3:** *“And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you.”* (KJV)

(ii) Judas learned his accomplices in sin were willing to go much further than he was willing to go.



- ☛ His return of the “*thirty pieces of silver*” were unable to stop them from going all the way.
- ☛ This is what always happens when men join hands with the wicked.
- ☛ The scheme takes one deeper into sin than he is willing to go, he cannot stop them by his decision to bail out.

- (iii) When he decides to bail out, these same men who induced him to join them in their sin will care nothing for his soul, guilty conscience, or feelings of shame.
- (iv) They will say, “*See thou to that.*” “We could care less! That’s your problem, not ours!”

- (c) We need to think about that as we live our lives; as we chose our friends, mentors, colleagues; the places we go, the things we decide to involve ourselves in.

(3) **12** Peace of mind:

- (a) “*Thirty pieces of silver*” couldn’t buy Judas the peace of mind he thought it might.
  - (i) I can picture Judas as he walked away from making the agreement with the chief rulers of the Jews.
  - (ii) Perhaps he had a smile on his face and joyful skip in his steps as he jingled the “*thirty pieces of silver*” in his pocket!
  - (iii) He may have imagined how he was going to spend the “*thirty pieces of silver*”; he may have had a plan all along to spend the money for his own pleasure.
- (b) But the “*blood money*” became abhorrent and hideous; it didn’t give him the peace of mind it had promised earlier.
  - (i) Consequently, he thrust the money from himself (Matt. 27:5).
  - (ii) His treasure turned to trash; his joy to sorrow; his gain to loss.

(c) **Application:**

- (i) Sin always promises more than it can deliver.
- (ii) It promises liberty but brings bondage:

**Rom. 6:16:** “*Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?*”

**2 Pet. 2:19:** “*While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.*”

- (iii) Sin promises peace of mind but creates guilt; it promises pleasure but brings pain; it promises satisfaction but leads to want. **NEVER** forget that!

(4) **13** Clear conscience:

- (a) When Judas threw the money at the feet of the chief priests and elders, he was trying to buy a clear conscience (Matt. 27:3-5).
- (b) But, he found that “*thirty pieces of silver*” couldn’t buy a clear conscience.
- (c) Only the gospel of peace can give us the peace that passes all understanding (**Phil. 4:7:** “*And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*”).

(d) Judas' remorse led him to do the ultimate "worldly" thing to try to clear his conscience: He committed suicide; in his remorse, he hanged himself.

(e) **Application:**

(i) It is so very important that we learn this lesson from Judas!

(ii) Our lives are so short (Jas. 4:14) and this world and the things it offers will **not** provide us with the inner peace we all so desperately crave (Eccl. 3:11).

(iii) I have yet to meet a person who doesn't constantly seek this peace of mind and make their life meaningful.

(iv) But, the world, and the things of the world, cannot provide this for us!

**1 Jn. 2:15-17:** *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."*

(v) As Connie Adams says, "This world is goin out of bidness!"

**2 Pet. 3:10-11:** *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. 11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,"*

(vi) Two men committed sin and forsook the Lord that night; Judas betrayed Jesus and Peter denied him.

(vii) Both regretted their sin: one showed remorse by hanging himself; while the other showed remorse by confessing his sin to God and repenting of it; and he was forgiven by the blood paid for with "thirty pieces of silver." (2 Cor. 7:10)

(viii) Peter became a pillar of the church, a spiritual hero; was given the grand and glorious privilege of delivering the first gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost.

(ix) Judas became an outcast, a pariah, an abomination to God and men; he made history; when you call someone a "Judas" they instantly know what you're saying about them.

(x) "Thirty pieces of silver" could not obtain for Judas what Jesus' forgiveness gave to Peter; we so desperately need to learn that lesson.

(5) **14 Redemption:**

(a) "Thirty pieces of silver" could not redeem Judas from hell; returning the blood money could not save Judas' soul.

(b) Jesus foretold his damnation saying, *"The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born"* (Matt. 26:24).

(c) Judas' eternal state is perdition (**Jn. 17:12:** *"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."*; perdition = utter destruction/ruin).



(d) “*Thirty pieces of silver*” could not redeem Judas’ soul from utter ruin.

(e) **Application:**

- (i) The pursuit of worldly things will lead us, not to eternal life, but to eternal ruin.
- (ii) The same is true for all the “good deeds” we might do (although there are “good deeds” we must do! Eph. 2:10; Rom. 2:5-11).
- (iii) The only thing that will save us is for us to be “*in Christ*” (Eph. 1:3; Gal. 3:29).
- (iv) No matter how trivial or how silly the world may consider it for one to be a Christian; its the only way to heaven (Jn. 14:6).
- (v) I used to be afraid and somewhat ashamed to be a Christian; until I finally learned its true value (Matt. 13:45-46).

B. \*\* “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.” --C.S. Lewis

### III. CONCLUSION: 15

1. There are some things “*thirty pieces of silver*” could buy:

- ☛ Jesus (Ex. 21:32)
- ☛ Judas loyalty
- ☛ Judas (Matt. 16:26)
- ☛ Potter’s field (Matt. 27:6-10)

2. \*\* There were some things “*thirty pieces of silver*” could not buy.

- ☛ Jesus’ life
- ☛ Spiritual concern
- ☛ Peace of mind
- ☛ Clear conscience
- ☛ Redemption

3. \*\* May we learn these lessons from Judas, so we don’t end up a “*son of perdition*” (Jn. 17:12).

Adapted from an article by Mike Willis (*Thirty Pieces of Silver*) and another article by Allen Dvorak (*Lessons from Thirty Pieces of Silver*; Expository Files 18.2; February 2011).