

# Thirty Pieces of Silver

## The Sovereign Fulfillment of God

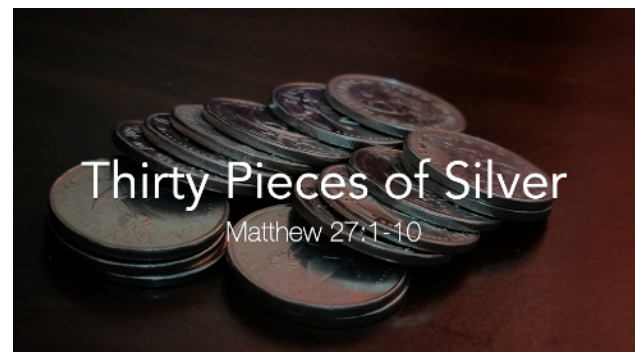
**Scripture:** Matthew 27:1-10

**Sermon Series:** *Matthew*

**Topic:** Fulfillment, Prophecy

### Introduction

Matthew continues to lead us through the final hours of Jesus' life leading up to his crucifixion. His dominant theme remains the fulfillment of God's plan. In the passage before us, God's sovereign control over the choices and decisions of men is demonstrated by the enemies of Jesus. This fulfillment will be seen first in Jesus being handed over to the Gentiles, then in what Judas does with the thirty pieces of silver, and finally in what the priests and elders do with the thirty pieces of silver.



Matthew is the only gospel author to include this information. His aim is to demonstrate that God is absolutely and completely sovereign over every detail of Jesus' arrest, betrayal, crucifixion, and ultimately his resurrection from the dead. He aims to give the followers of Jesus unshakable confidence in the power of God and indefatigable faith in the purpose of God to fulfill his every promise—even when it looks like the enemies of God are winning the day.

### The Context

The last scene (vs.69-75, which we considered last week) ended with Peter fulfilling the prediction of Jesus that he would deny him three times (Mt 26:34). As the rooster crowed, Peter realized that he had done what he promised he would "never"<sup>1</sup> do, but exactly what Jesus predicted he would do. When this settled in on him, then "*he went out and wept bitterly*" (Mt 26:75).

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 26:33.

## Jesus Delivered Over to Gentiles (vs.1-2)

This next scene is brief, but transitional. This is first fulfillment in this part of Scripture. It continues the account of the progression of Jesus' trial, but highlights to the careful reader another couple of steps in the fulfillment of God's plan.

**Matthew 27:1-2 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. <sup>2</sup> And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

Morning has now come. The sun has now risen on Friday morning, but the enemies of Jesus remain steadfast in their aim "**to put him to death.**" The chief priests and elders have all night been seeking evidence to put Jesus to death. They found it in Jesus' own words, which the high priest declared was **blasphemy**. However, as we saw last week, Jesus is not technically guilty of blasphemy because he never actually spoke the name of God.

Nevertheless, they were seeking to kill him and so they found the evidence for which they were looking. However, the problem is that only the Romans could carry out the death penalty. The Jewish authorities were not allowed by Roman law<sup>2</sup> to execute anyone. Thus, all capital cases were required to be brought before a Roman governor. Therefore, if Jesus was to be killed, which was the ultimate goal of the religious leaders, then the Gentiles would have to be brought into the process. Jesus had foretold Gentile involvement in his death even before he arrived in Jerusalem.

**Matthew 20:17-19 (ESV)** <sup>17</sup> And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, <sup>18</sup> "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death <sup>19</sup> and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

Note the two uses of the words "**delivered over.**" Jesus will be "delivered over" to the chief priests and scribes and then he would be "delivered over" to the Gentiles. Judas—as predicted by Jesus during the Last Supper (Mt 26:21-25)—would fulfill the first "delivery," while the chief priests and scribes themselves are now fulfilling the second.

Thus, both Jesus' "condemnation of the death" by the Jews and his being "delivered over" to the Gentiles are further steps in the fulfillment of God's sovereign plan for Messiah to accomplish all that is necessary to secure salvation for the redeemed.

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<sup>2</sup> John 18:31.

## Money Returned (vs.3-5)

The second dimension of fulfillment comes as the enemies of Jesus deal with the thirty pieces of silver used in securing Jesus' capture. The focal point of this next section of Scripture is the money, not Judas. Matthew's purpose is not primarily to explain what happened to Judas, but rather to highlight the way in which *even the disposition of the money fulfillment aspects of messianic prophecy*. The literary weight of this paragraph lands on the *thirty pieces of silver*, not upon Judas. This can be seen in the fact that Judas is referenced three<sup>3</sup> times in this paragraph while the thirty pieces of silver is referenced six<sup>4</sup> times.

**Matthew 27:3-5 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, <sup>4</sup> saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." <sup>5</sup> And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

*When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he changed his mind* (v.3). Matthew once again refers to Judas as "*his betrayer*." The repetition of this fact underscores the enormity of Judas' sin. This is now the fourth time in the last two chapters that Matthew has referred to Judas as the "betrayer." It is almost as if it is beyond Matthew's comprehension that Judas could have betrayed Jesus.

Peter was not the only one who "*saw*" what happened to Jesus. Judas also was watching the outcome of Jesus' trial. Judas had also been somewhere among the bystanders watching. When he "*saw*" that Jesus had been "*condemned*" to death, then "*he changed his mind*." Apparently Judas had not expected that his betrayal of Jesus would lead to his death. What exactly he thought, we are not told, but at this point "*he changed his mind*."

The Greek word (*μεταμέλομαι metamelomai*) means "to feel regret as the result of what one has done—to regret, to feel sad about, to feel sorry because of."<sup>5</sup> This word is similar to but slightly different from the word that is typically used in Scripture to communicate repentance, which is *metanoieō* (*μετανοεῖν*). *Metanoieō* describes repentance that is accompanied with forgiveness, and refers to a different way of thinking, while this word (used to describe Judas' "change of mind") describes a different way of *feeling* about something.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, we should understand that Judas *regretted* what he did, but in such a way that *fell short of true and genuine repentance*. It is possible to regret something that one has done without being truly repentant in a way that involves a genuine change of heart. You can *feel sorry* for the bad results of an action without genuinely being convinced in one's mind that such action is morally sinful and wrong and ought never to be repeated.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 27:3, 4, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 27:3, 5, 6 (twice), 7, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 317.

<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 694.

*Brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders* (v.3). Judas decided he did not want the money. He returned the "*thirty pieces of silver*" to those same men who had originally given it to him, "*the chief priests and the elders.*" This is an example of what we might call "buyers remorse," which is the feeling of having done wrongly that sometimes arises after making a purchase.

*I have sinned by betraying innocent blood* (v.4). Judas offers a confession to the chief priests and elders, but not to God. He admits (to sinful men) his own sinfulness while simultaneously confessing Jesus' innocence. He admits his own guilt, while also acknowledging that he has "*betrayed innocent blood.*" Jesus' blood is sinless and Judas knows this fact. Perhaps Judas remembers the curse written in the law against all who do what Judas had done.

Deuteronomy 27:25 (ESV) 'Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

This is exactly what Judas had done. He had received money from those who were seeking and planning to kill Jesus. After regretting what he had done, he sought to undo what he had done by returning the money. But it was too late.

*What is that to us? See to it yourself* (v.4) The response of the chief priests and elders is cold and clear. They will not accept the returned money. They want nothing to do with Judas' second thoughts. They care nothing for his pangs of conscience. They essentially tell Judas that his guilt is his own problem, not theirs. Their own words reveal that they care nothing for justice or righteousness. However, their response implicitly affirms, the fact that Judas was guilty for what he did and that Jesus was innocent! These are not truly righteous men. They care nothing for the sin and guilt that is plaguing Judas, nor do they care that Jesus is in fact innocent.

*And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple* (v.5). All of this took place "*in the temple.*" The discussion of condemnation, sin, guilt, and innocence unfolded in a holy place and yet these men who were supposed to be holy are behaving and responding in a way that is the very opposite of holy. When the chief priests and elders refused to accept the money that Judas was seeking to return, Judas then "*threw it down into the temple.*" The word 'throw'<sup>7</sup> here carries the notion of a somewhat aggressive act, which reveals Judas' frustration and emotional agitation.

*He departed, and went and hanged himself* (v.5). Judas despaired of life and condemned himself to death. Judas was the protagonist in this conspiracy to arrest Jesus and he willingly participated in his betrayal. He was now the primary party responsible for the death sentence against an innocent man. There appeared to be no way out, thus he went out and "hanged himself" to death.

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<sup>7</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 1011.

It is almost impossible to miss the parallels between Judas and Peter. Matthew uses almost the exact same language to describe them both. After denying Jesus, Peter *“went out and wept bitterly.”* However, after betraying Jesus, Judas, *“went out and hanged himself.”* Peter kept his eyes on Jesus, while Judas did not. Peter received the gracious gift of forgiveness by Jesus, while Judas condemned himself to death. After his resurrection, Jesus restored Peter to position of usefulness in his kingdom, while Judas exiled himself from that kingdom. Peter allowed himself to be judged by Jesus—who showed him mercy, while Judas executed himself.

Satan is the one standing behind the impulse that drove Judas to his death. It is Satan who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy<sup>8</sup>, while it is Jesus who gives grace upon grace. If you ever hear a voice inviting you to kill yourself, know that that voice is not the voice of Jesus, but rather of Satan. It is Jesus who says, *“...whoever comes to me I will never cast out”* (Jn 6:37). It is never the will of God for a person to end his or her own life. Do not listen to the voice of Satan who may be telling you that you are better off dead. That is a lie. Trust in the one who gave you life in the first place. Only He has the right to take life. But even if you have attempted to take your own life, you can be forgiven. There is nothing in Scripture that says that attempting suicide is an unforgivable sin. If you have tried to take your life, then know that you can be forgiven and restored to hope in Jesus.

## Money Refused (vs.6-8)

As the thirty pieces of silver is transferred from Judas to the chief priests and elders, so is Matthew's attention. He now reveals the sinful hypocrisy of the religious leaders, but also the fact that their actions lead to the fulfillment of Scripture.

**Matthew 27:6-8 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.” <sup>7</sup> So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. <sup>8</sup> Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

*It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money* (v.6). The words of these priests may be the very height of hypocrisy. It was they themselves who paid this *“blood money”* in the first place, and now when it is returned to them, they then conclude that it is *unlawful* to receive it back again? If it is unlawful to *receive* “blood money,” then certainly it is unlawful to *pay* blood money. “Blood money” is the price paid in exchange for a man's life and this payment originated with these very priests and elders! Their hypocrisy is nearly blasphemous. Though they pretend to be concerned with the law, clearly they are not. They have no concern for what is truly lawful. They are just as guilty, if not more so, than Judas himself. This “unlawful” money originated from “unlawful” priests and they are not now being lawful by refusing to receive it back.

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<sup>8</sup> John 10:10.

*They took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers* (v.7).

These hypocrites “took counsel” together, they put their sinful minds together and used the thirty pieces of silver to purchase “the potter’s field,” which they repurposed into a cemetery for foreigners. Whereas it had previously been a field for obtaining clay by a potter, from now on it would be a field only to be used for burial. Burial grounds were unclean places and strangers were unclean people. *Thus, these unclean priests used unclean money to buy an “unclean place for unclean people!”*<sup>9</sup>

*Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day* (v.8). “To this day” makes clear that this field was well known to the audience to whom Matthew was writing. “The traditional location of this field is near the juncture of the Kidron and the Hinnom Valley.”<sup>10</sup> This valley has historically been an unclean place given its ancient connection with idolatry and child sacrifice.<sup>11</sup>

The story behind the purchase of this particular field is what gave rise to its name, “**Field of Blood.**” The name derived as such because it was purchased with “blood money,” thus it is called “the field of blood.” Luke also seems to indicate that this was also the very place where Judas hanged himself (Acts 1:18-19). Luke’s account reveals that Judas’ own blood was shed in this field, for after hanging himself—apparently over a ravine or a cliff, at some point, his body fell down and burst open in the middle. Thus, there were two reasons for the name “Field of Blood,” the blood money used in securing its purchase, and the blood of Judas being shed in that field.

## Money Fulfilled Prophecy (vs.9-10)

Now Matthew comes to the point. This specific amount of money, its use, return, and eventually what it purchased were all spoken of beforehand by God through the writings of his prophets.

**Matthew 27:9-10 (ESV)** <sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.”

Many have stumbled here because this quote is more akin to something written by Zechariah (11:12-13), not Jeremiah. Why would Matthew essentially quote Zachariah and yet attribute the quote to Jeremiah? There are good reasons not to doubt Matthew or the veracity of God’s word here. If we assume that Matthew does know his Bible (i.e. the OT), which he quotes more

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<sup>9</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 408.

<sup>10</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 3, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 567.

<sup>11</sup> See Jeremiah 19:1-11.

often than any other Gospel author, and that the Holy Spirit never contradicts himself, then how are we to understand this? There is a way.

***New Testament standards of quotation are different than ours.*** We must keep in mind that referencing the essential meaning (*ipsissima vox*) of an OT Scripture passage, rather than merely the precise words (*ipsissima verba*) of Scripture was considered among the biblical authors to be an acceptable and faithful way to cite OT Scripture. Today we have different literary standards than did they in the first century. They were primarily an oral culture whereas we are primarily a written culture. While we have access to original documents, they, for the most part, did not. Thus, we must understand acceptable standards of quotation for twenty-first century authors are slightly different than the acceptable standards of quotation for first-century authors.

***Key words in this section originate with both Jeremiah and Zechariah.*** As Matthew is writing this portion of Scripture, he is being helped by Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> There are several key words and phrases that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, would likely have triggered his memory of OT prophetic literature, such as; elders and priests (Mt 27:1), innocent blood (Mt 27:4), thirty pieces of silver (Mt 27:3), that amount being “thrown into the temple” (Mt 27:5), the purchase of the potter’s field being converted into a cemetery (Mt 27:7).

***This prophecy originates with Jeremiah<sup>13</sup>, not Zachariah.<sup>14</sup>*** Jeremiah ministered around 600 - 550 B.C. Zachariah began his ministry in 520 B.C. Jeremiah preceded Zachariah in both chronology and prominence. The prophecy related to the transformation of this field from a potter’s field to a burial ground originated with Jeremiah, not Zachariah. The first mention of this field being made into a burial ground was spoken of by Jeremiah in chapter 19 (vs.1-11). In this chapter (Mt 27) we find several of the same words and ideas used by Matthew as he wrote his gospel.

First, in this chapter, God tells Jeremiah to speak to the “elders and priests” (19:1; cf. Mt 27:1) about their sinful shedding of “innocent blood” (19:4; cf. Mt 27:4) in the “Valley of the Son of Hinnom” (19:2; cf. Mt 27:7-8) and he is to speak to them in the “Potsherd Gate” (19:2) and break a “potter’s vessel” (19:11; cf. Mt 27:7). God promises to bring an end to their murderous idolatry (i.e. child sacrifice 19:4-5) in this valley and turn it from being a place of idolatrous worship and into a place for burying the dead (19:11; cf. Mt 27:7). This is exactly what has now happened as the elders and priests (Mt 27:1, 3) take Judas’ thirty pieces of silver and purchases the “potter’s field” and turn it into a cemetery.

Second, Zechariah expands upon these ideas by naming in advance the exact price that would be paid to betray a Shepherd of Israel who would be rejected by the people, through no fault of his own. That price was “thirty pieces of silver” (Zech 11:12). God then commanded

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<sup>12</sup> “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” 2 Peter 1:21 (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16).

<sup>13</sup> Jeremiah ministered around 600-550 B.C.

<sup>14</sup> Zachariah began his ministry in 520 B.C.



him to “throw [the thirty pieces of silver] into the house of the LORD, to the potter” (Zech 11:13). This of course is exactly what Judas did. Thus, the exact amount spoken of by Zechariah was the exact amount the chief priests and elders paid Judas to betray Jesus. These same “thirty pieces of silver” was then the exact amount Judas took and threw into the temple, which is of course “the house of the LORD.” This same “thirty pieces of silver—the very money the priests used to purchase “the innocent blood” of Jesus—they then took and gave “to the potter” to purchase his field and then turn it into a cemetery.

Matthew simply attributes these prophecies to Jeremiah alone almost certainly because Jeremiah was the first to speak about what God revealed would take place in the Valley of Hinnom, in this “Field of Blood,” and because he is the more prominent and well known prophet over Zechariah. Craig Blomberg notes that most likely Matthew is following “a standard literary convention of his day by referring only to one source (in this case, the more obscure, though probably also the more important one.”<sup>15</sup>

## Conclusion

All of these things were fulfilled by the enemies of Jesus as they dealt sinfully and treacherously with him. Thus, Matthew wants his readers to see God’s good intentions are more powerful than is the evil intentions of his enemies and even through the fiercest of opposition God’s good will and word will be accomplished.

God reigns sovereign over his plan to accomplish salvation. Each time the enemies of Jesus “took counsel” (Mt 27:1, 7) together, the result was they fulfilled God’s plan. His sovereignty was reigning when Jesus was delivered over to the murderous chief priests and elders. He was sovereignly reigning when Jesus was delivered over to the Gentiles. God reigned over the thirty pieces of silver that was paid to Judas to betray Jesus. God reigned over Judas’ return of the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and even over his throwing them into the temple. God reigned sovereign over the decision of the priests not to accept the thirty pieces of silver. God reigned sovereign over the decision to take the thirty pieces of silver and purchase the potter’s field. And God reigned sovereign over the decision of the wicked priests to convert that field into a burial place, which fulfilled what God had long ago spoken through Jeremiah and later through Zachariah.

If God’s sovereignty reigns over the financial decisions of wicked priests, then is he not sovereign over yours? If God’s sovereign reign extends to the malicious intentions of traitors, then is he not sovereign over your relationships? If God’s sovereignty reigns over the real estate investments of hypocritical priests, then is he not also sovereign over your household? If God can sovereignly fulfill his plans for fallen Peter, then is he unable to do so in your life? Certainly we should rest our souls upon the sovereign power of God’s good will love for us!

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<sup>15</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 409.



## Discussion Questions

1. What is the main point of this portion of Scripture?
2. Why do you think Judas changed his mind and sought to return the money?
3. Why do you think Judas threw down the money into the temple?
4. Why did Judas hang himself?
5. What is the difference between regret and repentance?
6. Do you think Judas was repentant? Why or why not?
7. What aspects of fulfillment do you see in this passage?
8. What is the most challenging portion of this Scripture? Why?
9. What from this passage do you find most encouraging? Explain your answer.
10. What questions do you still have?