

## **Intro**

Sometimes sin is so irrational it's perplexing. When I speak of sin I mean any word, thought, or deed that doesn't conform to God's moral law revealed in the Bible. Rebellion against our Creator. Sin is internal and external. Something we think. Something we feel. Something we do. Sin includes what we don't do. Failure to do what God commands. Sin is what we do. Breaking God's commands.

On December 18, 2013 in Glasgow, Scotland Gary Rough entered a betting shop and proceeded to approach the counter clerk with a "long cylindrical object covered in a black sock" and demanded cash. An off-duty police officer happened to be in the shop, heard the commotion, and quickly took Mr. Rough down. The cylindrical object inside the sock was a cucumber.

When questioned, Rough said it was a joke, a dare. Rough was well compensated as a plumber and had no financial debts. Investigators couldn't uncover a motive. Rough admitted he was foolish and was sentenced to 40 months in prison.

Sometimes sin defies all logic. This morning we learn that...

**BIG IDEA: Sin defies logic and comes in many forms**

**READ PASSAGE**

**PRAY**

## **Body**

### **Passage Focus**

Matthew provides Jews with an account of the crucifixion to ensure they're not confused about what happened.

We see Jesus' silent obedience while being condemned as sin surrounds the proceedings.

5 ways sin manifests itself in our passage...

**Point 1: Sin brings grief and ends in despair (27:1-5)**

**27:1-2**

The Sanhedrin made their final verdict when morning arrived. Jesus must be put to death. So they sent him to Pilate who had authority to execute.

### **Judas**

Judas witnessed the proceedings. When the sentence came he experienced regret. Judas knew he had betrayed "*innocent blood*." Judas knew Jesus was innocent and undeserving of death. What went on inside Judas?

- 1) Judas never actually placed saving faith in Jesus (John 6:64, 70-71).
- Judas was unmoved by the miracles and teaching and compassion he observed!

2) Judas' unbelief manifested itself in the form of theft (John 12:6).

▪ Judas had regular access to the community money bag and he regularly stole from it.

3) Financial gain was a factor in Judas' betrayal.

4) Unbelief was a factor in Judas' betrayal.

5) Satan entered Judas' heart before he made an arrangement with the Sanhedrin (Luke 22:3) and during the Last Supper (John 13:27).

▪ Satan moved Judas' heart to betray Jesus in such a way that Judas remained responsible for his sin. Jesus pronounced a woe on Judas for his action (Matt 26:24) indicating Judas retained responsibility for his actions.

▪ Through unbelief Judas admitted Satan's entry. Some form of demonic possession. Greater influence on Judas.

6) Besides regret that Jesus was innocent we're left to speculate...

▪ Grief that the Messiah was condemned?

▪ Grief that he never believed Jesus?

▪ Grief that I helped put the Messiah to death = God is done with me?

Regardless, Judas doesn't know what to do with his grief. Judas had three options:

1) Repent and believe.

Confess his sin, receive God's forgiveness, and follow Jesus from here on out.

2) Harden his heart.

Carry on with life as is and do whatever he can to convince himself what he did was okay.

3) Despair

Be crushed by the weight of failure to the point of hopelessness. There's no coming back from this one. God would never forgive me so I may as well end it. I can't be redeemed. Hope extinguished gives way to impending doom.

Judas opted for despair.

## Application

Have you ever been deeply ashamed of something you've done? Serious regret like Judas. What did you do with it? Let's be clear. **It is right to be grieved by our sins!** Judas was right to have regret. **The question is, what do we do with that grief?**

In meditating on my own regret and grief as a Christian, failure to open my mouth and clearly share the gospel when non-Christians asked me questions comes to mind. But a particular moment of embarrassment stands out. I've shared this once before. I found myself in my first year of seminary (2001) serving as a bartender at the JW Marriott Hotel when Billy and Franklin Graham walked into the restaurant. Before seminary I was a Restaurant Supervisor. I had recently stepped down from management to go to seminary.

So they worked me into the schedule as a bartender. I was horrified when I saw the schedule. Disturbed and confused I served my shift. This was my first night as a bartender.

This was the most ashamed I was as a Christian. Clear violation of conscience. How could I have responded at that point?

3 responses possible:

- 1) Despair = unfit for ministry, stop leading Bible study, quit seminary, give up, etc.
- 2) Harden = be okay with violating my conscience. Keep on working as a bartender and convince myself God is okay with it.
- 3) Repent = confess, accept God's mercy, and turn from sin.

I chose the repent option. I told the people in the Bible study I led. I told my boss (who I had worked closely with the last 2 years in management) that I would not work another bartending shift. My boss obliged and I never served a bartending shift again.

### **Non-Christian**

Maybe you're convinced God would never forgive you. So you despair. God is merciful and he welcomes anyone who comes to him on his terms. God forgives the underserving. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, died on the cross for sinners such that if you believe you will be forgiven and God won't punish you as you deserve. What I'm saying is Jesus is a worthy sacrifice to cover your guilt. And God delights in forgiving sinners. If you think you can't be forgiven you're believing a lie!

### **Christian**

Maybe you're a Christian and you're despairing about something that happened 10-20 years ago. Or longer. "I did this. So God will never use me." God is concerned about where you are today. Have you learned from that incident? Has God transformed you since then? God is pleased to forgive us and shape us for service.

Is there something you're doing right now that you know is wrong? Is your conscience killing you like it did me when I bartended? Repent. Don't despair. Don't harden.

## **Point 2: Maintaining the law while condemning the innocent (27:3-10)**

### **Explanation**

While Judas faced regret, the Sanhedrin remained hardened.

Judas wants to make restoration by giving back the money he should have never accepted in the first place. I betrayed "*innocent blood*." This is of no concern to the Sanhedrin. "*What is that to us?*" Deal with it yourself. Why should we care? Your problem not ours.

Judas' confession should have prompted them to reconsider. Maybe we're condemning innocent blood? They could care less. In their moral code condemning the innocent wasn't a big deal.

Judas throws down the silver coins and now they have a moral dilemma. What should we do with the silver? The problem is the silver is "blood money." Deuteronomy 23:18 likely stands behind their reasoning.

*You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a dog into the house of the LORD your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God. – Deuteronomy 23:18*

Meaning money acquired sinfully can't be used for temple purposes. If we can't spend it on the temple what should we do with it? Let's use the silver to buy a burial lot for strangers = foreigners. Unclean money used to purchase a place for the graves of unclean people = the Gentiles.

Did you catch the irony? The Sanhedrin's conscience isn't troubled by a deceitful trial where the innocent is condemned (they were looking for whatever false charges would stick – 26:59). But they are troubled about using the money for temple purposes. Neglecting the weightier matters of the law (justice), the heart of the law, while strictly adhering to lesser points of the law.

*"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." – Matt 23:23*

Justice unimportant. Temple purity. Absolutely critical.

### **Application**

Have you ever encountered this person? Tithes to the penny. Won't use a scratch ticket. Won't play cards when the pot is \$1. Reads the Bible every morning. But no problem lying on a resume or cheating on taxes or stealing from the company or failing to pay back a loan. No problem slandering other Christians or gossiping or lying. No problem laying into a brother for a speck while having a log in their own eye. No problem harboring bitterness against a brother. No mercy when others stumble. Okay with shameful sin but very meticulous about minors or manmade rules.

How does this happen? Blind spots. Not emphasizing weightier matters. Focusing on externals not the heart. Focusing on manmade rules not love for God.

Is this you? Do you major on minors while neglecting weightier matters? Are you okay with flagrant sin? If so, repent by pursuing justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Get help in this local church.

The Sanhedrin should have been troubled by condemning innocent blood. Is there something you should be troubled by?

### **Point 3: The innocent condemned, the wicked released (27:11-23)**

#### **Before Pilate**

When questioned by Pilate Jesus says, *"You have said so."* Indirect answer. You've said it with your mouth. When questioned by the Sanhedrin, Jesus is totally silent. No answers in keeping with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:7.

Jesus isn't here to defend himself and escape the cross. Jesus is here to submit to the Father's will and finish the work given to him = securing our eternal redemption. Securing the mercy we don't deserve. Taking the punishment we deserve.

A man who won't defend himself and seek pardon puzzles Pilate. Something's off here. Who wouldn't seek pardon?

## **Before the crowd**

The scene shifts to Jesus before the crowd. As a Roman official, Pilate had authority to release a prisoner. Based on custom there were two options: Jesus or Barabbas. In the other gospels Barabbas is described as a robber, murderer, rebel, and insurrectionist (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:18-19; John 18:40). He was a known criminal, but a criminal who stood up to Roman authority. This explains why the crowd would want to release Barabbas. They hated Roman authority. Barabbas stood up to Rome. Jesus didn't.

Pilate had reservations about condemning Jesus. First, he knew the motivations of the Sanhedrin (envy). Second, his wife had a troubling dream where it was revealed Jesus was a righteous man. We should take this as a supernatural dream from God. God was confirming Jesus' innocence. Pilate was faced with a decision. The crowds are getting louder. "*Let him be crucified*" (27:22)! Pilate goes with the crowd over conscience.

## **Application**

Matthew highlights the injustice of the proceedings. A notorious sinner released instead of the innocent. Even Pilate found Jesus unworthy of death. The Jewish leadership and crowd wanted a murderer released and the innocent punished. Injustice.

## **Point 4: The innocent opposed because of envy (27:18)**

### **Explanation**

Matthew says Pilate recognized the Sanhedrin's envy of Jesus (27:18).

Why were they envious of Jesus? The crowds were rallying around Jesus not them. Think Palm Sunday when Jesus came into town on a donkey with crowds in front and in back of him praising him. The Sanhedrin wanted to be noticed and honored (Matt 23:5-7). Jesus was getting in the way of the attention they desired. They wanted to be celebrated and along comes this Jesus and the people are celebrating his arrival. Will the people reject our traditions in favor of this Jesus fellow? They wanted Jesus executed because he stood in the way of the attention they coveted. Opposing the innocent because they're taking the attention I want.

### **Application**

How might we do this? We see someone serving in the local church and appreciation is expressed to them (fellowship committee, deacon, etc.). We think, "I wish people would appreciate me like that" = envy. So we seek to hinder the appreciation they receive. Maybe gossip or trying to block their ministry. I'll stop this person from teaching or being a deacon.

This is all hypothetical. Don't have a particular incident in mind here. Just meditating on how it might play out in a local church.

We should ask ourselves, Am I opposing this brother or sister because of envy? The desire to be noticed is the problem! And it leads to sin. Sanhedrin spirituality neglected the heart.

## **Point 5: Lack of conviction (27:24-26)**

### **Explanation**

Pilate gives Jesus over to the crowd's wishes to avoid a riot (27:24). Pilate sanctions the crucifixion while attempting to absolve himself of guilt. Washing his hands as a symbol of innocence. As if saying I don't think Jesus deserves it makes it acceptable to sanction his execution. We see a pragmatist. Not a man of conviction. A pragmatist is one who lives according to whatever works rather than principle or moral conviction. Pilate wants to release Jesus but he fears the consequences. Pilate went against his conscience.

We also see a crowd lacking in conviction.

*Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. – 27:20*

How did we go from "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*" (Matt 21:9) to "*His blood be on us and on our children!*" (27:25)?

- 1) Those worshipping Jesus as he arrived were out of towners entering with Jesus; those calling for execution were primarily in-towners.
- 2) Some of those who previously worshipped Jesus were easily persuaded by the charges of the Sanhedrin.

### **Application**

As Christians we are people of conviction. Because of God's truth, not because it's the easiest option. Sometimes doing the right thing is costly. Conviction protects us from doing what is easy yet wrong.

In one church when a pastor commits sexual immorality they're allowed to continue leading because numbers and money will suffer if they're removed. Too many people like him. That's pragmatism.

In another church when a pastor commits sexual immorality they're removed from office because that pastor violates character requirements. Regardless of the fallout. Because there's conviction to obey God and do what's right.

We live according to what is true, not what works. Conviction is the antidote for sin. Conviction protects us from giving in to peer pressure. Conviction protects us from being easily influenced by false teachers or violating conscience. Pilate and the crowd lacked conviction.

Know what God's Word says! Be convinced that God's Word is always right!

### **Conclusion**

5 ways sin manifests itself in our passage...

**Sin brings grief and ends in despair.**

**Maintaining the law while condemning the innocent.**

**The innocent condemned, the wicked released.**

**The innocent opposed because of envy.**

**Lack of conviction.**