

The Twelve: The Triumph of Divine Justice

Luke 6:16-19

April 16, 2017

The last of the Apostles whom we covered just last week was Judas Iscariot. Judas Iscariot, many of you know, is the one who betrayed Jesus Christ. He delivered him over to the sinful, religious authorities of the day so they could try him and put him to death. And because of his notorious treachery, Judas Iscariot has gone down in history as the most infamous of all betrayers in all human history. If you will, he basically set the gold standard for treachery.

It's interesting not just that Jesus knew of Judas' betrayal beforehand, but even in light of that truth, he chose him to be numbered among those original twelve Apostles. Jesus had studied, as we read in Luke 24, he knew the Old Testament very, very well. He had studied the Messianic implications of the Psalms, namely regarding Judas: Psalm 41, Psalm 55, others as well. Psalm 41:9 says, "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me." To lift the heel in that culture is to show disdain, to despise. The next

reference I've named, Psalm 55:12-14, says the same thing, but it's even more sorrowful in its betrayal. "For it is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it: it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together; within God's house we walked in the throng."

But what I find fascinating is not just that Jesus knew what Judas would do from the very beginning. It is precisely *because* he knew what Judas would do. It's for that reason that he chose Judas and numbered him among the twelve. Because God had ordained Judas for a role in the redemptive plan from before the foundation of the world. God determined before the foundation of the world Judas' betrayal. We're about to explore that in more detail in just a moment. Last week we were learning as a church about Judas, how Judas is to us, a church, a warning. I think that's one of the reasons why God ordained that Judas would be numbered among the twelve, why Jesus chose him. We need to realize that not everyone who comes to church is coming with good intent. Not everyone who names the name of Christ actually belongs to Christ. This is first and foremost Judas Iscariot, so closely identified with Jesus and his inner core, the disciples,

the twelve Apostles. Even the other Apostles thought of Judas as a trustworthy man. After all, they made him the treasurer. They had him hold the moneybag and deal out the money they needed to pay to different people because they believed that Judas' integrity was absolutely beyond question.

Like many of you, I have conversations with people, unbelieving people who don't believe in Christ, don't believe in Christianity, and I talk to them about Christianity. Sometimes I'm trying to help people understand the Gospel, understand certain sections of Scripture. Sometimes I am responding to questions or even objections raised against the Christian faith. Like many of you, I've heard a lot of reasons over the years of why people reject Christ, why they don't want to become Christians. "Way too many hypocrites in the church. I don't want any part of that." "I was hurt by church people at one time, so I'm never going back. Who needs that?" Or this one, "What about the Crusades? All those wars in the name of Christ? So much ignorance and bloodshed all in the name of God. I don't want any part of that." We understand Judas Iscariot.

When we look at church history, we realize not all who take Christ's name are truly Christians. There are many hypocrites. There are many people who come into churches who will turn around and hurt others even in the name of Christ. There are some who will, in the name of Christ, go to war. It's not consistent with the Bible. Jesus said, "You'll know them by their," what? "fruit," right? You'll know them by their fruit. The first fruit to grow in the soil of true faith is the fruit of love—love for God and love for others. And the kind of love that's described biblically is the kind of love that God has shown to us in Jesus Christ. It's a sacrificial love. It's self-effacing. It's others-benefitting. There is absolutely no self-interest in *agapé* love whatsoever. That's Christian love. And it only grows in the heart of someone who's truly been regenerated, who then puts their faith in Jesus Christ and repents of their sins. That is the only soil out of which that love will grow. That's the love that Jesus Christ demonstrated when he died on the Cross for all who believe and follow him. That's the love that Judas Iscariot, frankly, never had. His actions revealed that. That's the love that hypocrites, whether they're inside the church or outside the church—and believe me, there are a lot of hypocrites outside the church, you know that as well as I do—but

that's the kind of love that hypocrites are not able to show because it's not in their hearts.

In all the objections I've dealt with in talking about the Gospel over the years, you know what I never hear? I never hear people who reject Christianity because of Jesus Christ. For those who know anything about Jesus, they are loath to criticize him. Why? Because his integrity is absolutely and utterly beyond reproach. Jesus Christ is completely and utterly perfect. Whether friend or foe, ally or enemy, zealous loyalist or devious betrayer, we see all through the Scripture the same thing: universal testimony about Jesus Christ as to his impeccable character, his faultless innocence, his spotless perfection. That's what we're going to study this morning: the universal testimony of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Because we need to understand how the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the greatest injustice ever perpetrated in the history of mankind. It was a crime from start to finish. From the conspiracy, to the betrayal and arrest, to the trial and the sentencing, to the execution, and even to the lies that tried to cover up the resurrection, it was a crime. At the root of it all, they're sins of jealousy and greed, envy and covetousness, pride and self-centeredness.

Listen, that's what we need to realize, every single one of us. The sins that nailed Jesus Christ to the Cross are the same sins resident in all our hearts. They're the same reasons and motivations for all our sins, as well. Those sins led to the greatest injustice against the Son of Man—the Son of Man, who never sinned—ever. So the first point, if you'd like to jot some things down in your notes, just a little bit of a framework to hang your thoughts on, here's the first point: Let's hear first from the testimony of friends, Jesus' friends. I could go all through the Scripture and take a lot of time talking about the testimony of Jesus' friends, but I just want to take two in particular: Peter and John. Peter and John, out of all the disciples, they were Apostles. Out of all the Apostles, they were kind of in that inner circle of close, close friends of Jesus Christ. They were in that most intimate circle of his Apostles.

So let's start with the Apostle John. The Apostle John is the longest living of all the twelve. He lived until about AD 98 or so. And in John's first epistle, he starts by affirming the fact that his testimony about Jesus Christ is a firsthand

account. What he saw in Jesus firsthand, up close and personal, was not only sinless and innocent perfection, but divinity. It says in 1 John 1:1 and following, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life [That's Christ], the life was made manifest and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us."

John says this Jesus is the Christ all through his epistles, and he says that anyone who says otherwise about Christ is a liar and is anti-Christ. He is saying this in the face of his fellow Jews, who crucified Christ. Such boldness, such strength! He's saying it in the Greco-Roman world where they scoff at a crucified Messiah. He says Jesus is Christ, and anyone who says otherwise is a liar, the anti-Christ. Why? Because he knows, having seen and heard and touched and been around him, that Jesus is righteous. His testimony about God is irrefutable and unassailable. 1 John 2:23: "No one who denies the Son has the Father." They are connected. Whoever confesses the Son, though, has the Father also. So whatever judgment you come to about Christ, that is the same judgment you must have about

the Father. The two are linked. Not only is Jesus Christ the Righteous One, but he has become the propitiation for our sins. Jesus satisfied the wrath of God against us that we deserved for our sins. He did so by dying on the Cross.

According to John, Jesus is the one who laid down his life for us, which is how we know what love is. Jesus was able to lay down his life for us on our behalf because he is the spotless Lamb, because he is the Christ, because he is Son of God and Son of Man, fully God, fully man. He is the one who came in the flesh. Everyone who believes Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. Jesus is the one who is true; he is the Son of God. 1 John 5:20: "He is the true God and eternal life." That is why 2 John 9 tells us we must abide in the teaching of Christ because doing so means that we know God and we have both the Father and the Son. If you're familiar with John's writing, you know that almost every phrase that I've quoted is coming directly from those epistles.

The second friend who knew Jesus well is the Apostle Peter. And like John, Peter also spoke with superlative praise about the perfections of Jesus Christ. Peter called him "precious,"

comparing him to a sacrificial lamb that he says is without blemish or spot. He said Jesus was "in the sight of God chosen and precious." Peter commended Jesus to us as exemplary in every way. We're to follow him. He called him "the shepherd and the overseer of our souls." Peter testified to the sinless perfection of Jesus when he wrote this in 1 Peter 2:22 to 24: "[Jesus] committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."

Listen, think about that testimony of Peter, who saw Jesus intimately, closely, for three years. He never committed a sin, not one syllable of deceit in his mouth. Is that like you? Is that like me? We've never seen anybody like that. Being reviled, never reviling in return; when we suffer, not threatening, not pushing back at all. We can pull a lot more from Peter's writings regarding his testimony to the absolute perfect innocence of Jesus Christ. But I want to point out just one more text because it demonstrates the boldness of his testimony, the testimony of a close a friend and the testimony he had in the face of

potential and likely actual opposition and hostility to him.

After Peter's shameful denial, after the arrest of Jesus and during the trial, you know that Peter fled, and the sentence of death was handed down and carried out by the Romans, but after Peter saw the risen Jesus Christ, he became one of the boldest witnesses in the bunch. He used that old nature to confront his own nation—the Jews, the very ones who put Jesus to death. And he told them this in the Book of Acts in Chapter 2: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

Jews and Romans were complicit in the death of Jesus Christ.

That is basically the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike. That's Peter and John, the testimony of friends. And you say, “Oh, sure. That's exactly what you'd expect Jesus' friends to say about him, right? Of course they're going to be loyal. They have a vested interest in the outcome.” Some cynical types might call that a conflict of interest, right? They stand to profit on this Gospel.

What did Jesus' enemies say about him? That's the second point for your outline: the testimony of enemies. Let's start by considering Jesus' main opponents: the Jewish leadership. And they're represented here by the ruling body called the Sanhedrin. Turn in your Bibles to Mark 14. We'll get some insight here into some of the opinions and conversations among the religious leadership in that day. It's not at all a pretty picture. It's kind of what you might have assumed would be going on in battles of politics, right? That's exactly what was going on there. The Sanhedrin was a body of lawyers and politicians. They were the best theological and legal minds in the land, and they held the confidence of the people. The Sanhedrin consisted of men from two of the main religious parties in the land, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The meetings of the Sanhedrin were presided over by the high priest. In many ways it was a profoundly thoughtful body of religious and political leaders in Jerusalem, a very powerful group of men. And they were overseeing the most important city of the world.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, members of the Sanhedrin had deployed scribes and Pharisees, and basically this was a squad of lawyers and religious zealots. They sent them out to spy on Jesus as he conducted his ministry. They sent them there to

challenge them, and finally to try to catch him in some contradiction or biblical error, some doctrinal issue or some bad behavior. They hated Jesus most pointedly because the people were listening to him instead of them. They held the ear of the people. They held the confidence of the people, and that's now starting to shift over to Jesus Christ, and they did not like that. That means the loss of power and influence and guess what? Money. These guys are politicians, and they're theologically, biblically informed politicians at that. They're no dummies. They realize as politicians that no one is squeaky clean. With all their knowledge of the law, surely they'd be able to dig up some kind of dirt on this so-called Messiah, right? So far they're finding that difficult because they couldn't ensnare or trap Jesus on any point of the law, yet rather than bowing before him as Messiah, they wanted him dead. Look at Mark 14:1: "It was now two days before the Passover and Feast of the Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, 'Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.'"

Here the Jewish leaders are in a bind. They're talking, they're scheming, they're planning together. They're proposing different strategies. They're thinking about the right tactics to

use to remove this religious interloper from their midst. Because they're religious leaders, no doubt they're praying about it too. It's part of their fervent prayers, offering up even sacrifices in the temple asking for God's help in ridding the land of yet another false Messiah, this Jesus. Just then, as they're thinking, "You know what? Let's do it after the festival. We don't want to cause an uproar from the people"—just then opportunity came knocking. It must have seemed to them that God was answering their prayers in the form of a man named Judas. Skip down to verse 10: "Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. [Ah, answered prayer!] And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him."

After visiting the chief priest, this meeting right here where they conspired to together and started to concoct a plan that would betray Jesus, do you know what Judas did? He went back to the Apostles. He went back to join Jesus and the Apostles at the Last Supper. He actually sat there eating bread with them, carrying on polite conversation, sharing pleasantries and jokes. He actually allowed his Savior, his Lord whom he proclaimed, to wash his feet. He reclined there among all the

other believers. He ate bread with them. He raised the cup in fellowship. It was all external. Judas' heart was not with them and never was. So even during that meeting, before Jesus actually taught his true disciples, he peeled away from the fellowship so he could meet with the religious leaders and plan how he would deliver Jesus over to them. After Judas had met with them, look at verse 43. Skip way ahead in chapter 14 to verse 43. We're going to see Judas enter the scene again. He's at the head of the arresting party. Judas is leading the ones who are going to arrest Jesus, the soldiers and the ones deployed from the chief priests. He's going to lead them to Gethsemane where he knew Jesus would be. Look at verse 43: "And immediately, while [Jesus] was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priest and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard.' And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, 'Rabbi!' And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him."

Stop reading there. What an insidious sign! So coldhearted. So indifferent to the all the love that Jesus truly had expressed to Judas all through the three years he had been with

him: all signs of sacrifice, no signs of favoritism, even. Jesus loved all his disciples to the very end, even washing their feet. And he comes and betrays the Lord Jesus Christ with a kiss, a kiss of friendship, a kiss of trust. Well, they immediately took Jesus to the high priest, to Caiaphas, who presided over the Sanhedrin. Caiaphas convened the council right away in the middle of the night. In keeping with their hypocrisy, they conducted all this dirty business at night out of the public eye. But they hit a snag. Look at Mark 14:55. "Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none." They're putting together their case against Christ. It sounds like they're kind of cobbling it together on the fly, doesn't it? Well, they are. This is completely backwards. They realized in order to put him to death, they needed to charge him with a capital crime. They had to establish guilt for an offense that would allow them to put him to death. Here they've already determined the sentence; now they just needed to reverse engineer this thing, throw together this phony trial, more like an interrogation trying in vain to establish guilt. This all proved harder than they thought. So they sought testimony. They had to gather it pretty quickly.

I want you to notice in thinking about just that verse that in seeking testimony against Jesus, there is no mention about asking Judas Iscariot to testify. Why not? Isn't Judas Iscariot the perfect inside man? I mean if anyone could have gathered all the dirt on Jesus in his inner circle, it would have been Judas, right? After all, he'd been traveling with this inner group of Jesus' disciples since the very beginning. He was specially selected by Jesus, numbered among the twelve Apostles. He is the ultimate insider. He's the mole deep inside the camp. He could be a whistle blower for their cause. Even better, Judas came to them. He came willingly. He came eagerly to betray Jesus. But Judas also came secretly. And if they had put Judas on the witness stand, do you know what would eventually come out? That the Sanhedrin had used dubious means to make a baseless arrest of Jesus without probable cause and for money. There is no probable cause that Jesus had committed any crime, any offense the law of Moses. In fact, when Jesus was arrested, he exposed that very thing: that they didn't have cause to arrest him. You can see in Mark 14:48-49; he told the arresting party when they came, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled."

Look, if they had had probable cause to arrest Jesus, they would have done so, and they would have done it publicly in the sight of everyone. If Jesus had said something blasphemous, heretical or even erroneous, they could easily defend taking him into custody, but they had nothing on him. Most devious-minded people like this would be begging for an insider like Judas Iscariot to give them all the hidden dirt on Jesus so they could put together their case. They didn't put him on the witness stand because that would expose their hypocrisy, their duplicity, their conspiracy. They're paying for Judas to come and betray him. It would expose their whole thing as a sham, as a fraud. They didn't even interrogate him. They didn't even try to find out what Judas knew, what could they use. There is something strangely suspicious about building a case against Christ, but ignoring the only available testimony of a true insider, a hostile insider, one who has collaborated with you? And since they decided against his involvement, the halls of the court became filled with the contradictory voices of false witnesses. They had a charade of respectability to justice to uphold and maintain. Judas was an unacceptable risk to that. It might taint their respectable image. They needed to keep him at a distance. Look back again at Mark 14:55. "Now the chief priests and the

whole council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. And some stood up, bore false witness against him, saying, 'We heard him say, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands."' Yet even about this their testimony did not agree."

Look, when you're trying to build a case against someone and it's all based on a fabrication, when it's all based on a lie, I guess you shouldn't be too surprised when these testimonies don't agree with one another, when they contradict each other because error, by its very nature, is logically inconsistent and contradictory. The law of Moses is very specific about what should've happened at this point. In Deuteronomy 17:6, Moses says, "On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness." Two or three witnesses, testimonies in agreement with one another. They form a collaborative witness against the offender in a capital crime. No one is permitted to be put to death on the basis of a single witness. Again in Deuteronomy 19:15, "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime for any wrong in

connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established."

Isn't it amazing that they couldn't come up with two? Not finding any agreement among those who testified against Jesus, what should the Sanhedrin have done at this point? Summarily, they should have dropped the case immediately. They should have released Jesus with a public statement of his innocence. But no—look what happens. The high priest steps up—lest anybody register a voice of protest at this travesty of injustice—the high priest intervenes to interrogate Jesus. Look at verse 60: "Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, 'Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?' But he remained silent and he made no answer."

At this point, had Jesus continued that course to remain silent, if he had refused to open his mouth, the Sanhedrin would have been forced to release Jesus. They would have been unsuccessful in trying to reverse engineer this case because they couldn't put him to death without a believable, credible

charge. And that was necessary to sell this thing to the Roman governor so they could get Jesus executed, to say nothing of selling this thing to the Jewish nation. So here the high priest tries again, one more time. This time, though, Jesus breaks his silence. This time he speaks up. He's clarifying the basis of their rejection of him, and he's providing them with the real reason they have against him, the real reason they want to charge him and sentence him to death and then execute him on a cross. Look at Mark 14:61: "But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And Jesus said, 'I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.' The high priest tore his garments and said, 'What further witnesses do we need? You have heard this blasphemy. What is your decision?' And they all condemned him as deserving death."

Look, what is the offense there? What is the charge? Blasphemy, right? He simply answered the high priest's question in the affirmative. "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Matthew records the high priest's demand for an answer as, "I adjure you by the living God," which is why Jesus answered conforming himself to the prescriptions of the law. "I adjure you

by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." And so by God, Jesus said, "I am." Jesus told the truth. They called it blasphemy. His answer, "I am," it's interesting. It's *ego eimi* in the Greek. It's an explicit reference to the divine name Yahweh: "I AM." That's something that almost resulted in his being stoned in the past on the spot because he claimed equality with God. This time it actually is going to result in his crucifixion. And notice, not only did Jesus answer in the affirmative, "I am," *ego eimi*, he also claimed for himself the Messianic title, "Son of Man." He even warned them there as they're about to make a decision that would guarantee future regret for them, "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."

Notice here, they don't stop to test his claim. This isn't really court. They don't examine any evidence. They don't engage in any theological debate about the meaning of his miraculous signs or the accuracy of his teaching. They simply pronounce a verdict. They all condemned him as deserving death. They made a decision consistent with their predetermined unbelief. This is what Jesus told Nicodemus very early on at the very start of his ministry. He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak what we

know, we bear witness to what we have seen, but"—here's the issue, Nicodemus, you from the Sanhedrin—"do not receive our testimony." They refused to receive it. Why? Because they didn't believe. "I have told you. You do not believe because you will not believe because you cannot believe." Unbelief! That is what he's smoking out here. That is the issue.

Now, these are the testimonies of enemies to Jesus. Well, fraudulent charges raised against him are no true charges at all. Everything we've heard from their voices attests to his innocence. They can't find two witnesses who will agree about anything about him. He's innocent. But that's just the testimony of one group of Jesus' enemies. We see here that the case against Christ is a total sham. It's a farce. It's a complete miscarriage of justice. In the end we can see that their complaint has nothing to do with Jesus' actual condition or nature or character. He is absolutely, totally innocent of any crime, any offense, any error. Their complaint against him is grounded in the rejection of unbelief. It's the same thing today, folks. No one can bring a charge against Christ because there is none. No one can justly accuse him of doing any wrongdoing or of any lie or any error. He didn't even make a mistake.

Someone may say, "But what if the Sanhedrin, instead of involving all of these false contradictory witnesses, did so hastily?" Anybody can make mistakes putting together a case before the court. It was a terrible miscalculation on their part, but what if the Sanhedrin actually hadn't paid Judas and actually had put him on the stand? What if they just had interviewed him and gathered witnesses according to his testimony?" Wouldn't it have been interesting to hear dirt from an apostolic insider that could reveal the private life of Jesus, what only the inner circle knew? It's true that Judas Iscariot would have made the perfect witness against Jesus. In fact, I'll tell you this: He is the perfect apostolic witness about Jesus' true character. He's a true insider, and he's got the distinct advantage of not being related in any way to any of these other Apostles. He's not a cousin of anybody. He's not the friend of anybody. He's not even a Galilean like the rest of them were. The Galileans are up north and he's down in Judea in the south. He's got no ties. He's less inclined to be biased to favor Galilean interests. It's true: He's disgruntled, disillusioned. He made a deal with the chief priest and the elders. But all the more reason, right? If his testimony could be heard, his testimony would be a strong case about the true character of

Jesus Christ. Folks, that is the fundamental reason that God ordained Judas Iscariot to be named among the twelve Apostles. God wanted us to hear his testimony, not to the guilt of Christ, but to his innocence.

Turn over to Matthew's Gospel, and we're going to start reading in Matthew 27. It's a portion before what all the men read earlier. The scene is set for us starting in Matthew 27:1-2. After the ad-hoc trial before the Sanhedrin, which took place in the early hours of the morning, we read this: "When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor." The Sanhedrin, having determined the verdict from the very beginning, and then carrying out this trial to find some kind of a charge, proceed here with a process. The process of putting someone to death in their land at this time required Roman involvement. They could not carry out the sentence of crucifixion or death on their own; they needed the Romans. In Roman-occupied Jerusalem, the Jews did not have the power of capital punishment. They were required to submit all capital cases to the Romans for their review and approval. This is a

reminder from the Romans to the Jews that they're in charge, not the Jews. They held the power of life and death, not the Jews.

So the Sanhedrin proceeded according to what was really for them a distasteful plan, but they submitted to it and went forward. We find a very interesting account inserted between their delivering Jesus to Pilate and then the examination before Pilate. So they're going to deliver Judas to Pilate, the Roman governor, but they're going to come back to Pilate in verse 11. But notice in verse 3: "When," 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 saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.'" There you have it. The testimony of the consummate insider. That's the testimony of the betrayer. The one with every interest imaginable to find a cause for handing Jesus over to the Jewish authorities after three years of intimate association with Jesus—he's eating meals with him, he's sleeping in the same room, he's around the same campfires. They're traveling everywhere together. They're inseparable, and after all that time, he can't find one condemning accusation to raise against Jesus. And it's important because if he would've exposed Jesus as a fraud, instead of becoming a pariah of human history, Judas would have

been the hero of the Jewish nation. He would have saved the whole nation from the wiles of yet another false Messiah. So if he had been able to find one single reason for betraying Jesus, not only would it have cleared his name, cleared his conscience of any nagging guilt, but it would have literally saved his neck. Let's keep reading. It says in verse 4: "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' They said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself."

We find out from Chapter 1 of Acts that not only did he hang himself, but either the rope that he was using broke, or the tree branch on which he hung himself broke, and he fell to quite a distance, and his body was broken and crushed on the rocks below him. Judas wanted to make sure he got it right. He did get it right. He did that well. He did everything well, really. But isn't it interesting how the Sanhedrin responded to him with such disdain—a shabby, shabby treatment of the fellow collaborator. I mean, they owed him everything. Sinners, especially religious ones, hypocrites, will turn on their own in a heartbeat. Such cold hearts these chief priests and elders, the ones who shunned Judas. Notice they don't care one bit for his anxious soul, which again reveals their true nature. At this

time in Israel, shepherds are not overseeing Israel; these men are ravenous wolves.

Since they rejected Judas' blood money, he threw it into the temple. Why the temple? Why would he do that? It's not the Greek word *heiros*, the large temple complex; it's the Greek word *naos*, the small inner sanctuary. Again, why would he do that—throw those thirty silver coins into the *naos*, the inner sanctuary, the Holy Place? Spite for spite. The *naos*, the Holy Place, is a place only the priests could go. Not just any person from among Israel could walk in there; it had to be a priest. So the priests had treated Judas spitefully. They refused to take that money from his hands because it was blood money, after all. But since this was the blood money they had paid them, Judas returned spite for spite. He made those hypocritical priests go into the Holy Place, get down on their hands and knees, and gather up those thirty pieces of silver. And get this: They're gathering the blood money from the floor of the inner sanctuary, from the Holy Place behind and before the veil that hid the Ark of the Covenant. They're basically bowing before God, picking up the blood money. Their supposedly pure hands were just as dirty as his, and he wanted them to know that. So Judas forced the priests to acknowledge their complicity in killing the Christ,

their guilt in the crime of betraying innocent blood. And in a revealing bit of irony, we find the religious leadership are on the same level of the most notorious traitor of all human history.

Look, that is why Judas' testimony is important. That's why God ordained that he would play that role in the redemptive story as a part of the apostolic band. The testimony of Judas, though he departed from the number of the twelve Apostles to go to his own place, his testimony is etched into the foundation of the church itself. Through the lips of his betrayal came the testimony of the innocence of Jesus Christ, spoken by a man who never loved Jesus and knew him to be an innocent, guiltless, sinful man, nevertheless.

Well, we've heard from the Jewish leadership, and we've heard from the apostolic betrayer, the consummate insider. What about the Romans? What is the testimony of those enemies, these pagan Gentiles? Well, you're already there in Matthew Chapter 27. Skip down to verse 11 and let's read Pilate's judgment of Jesus, along with Pilate's wife as well, as she speaks. What is their conclusion about him? It says there in Matthew 27:11: "Now Jesus

stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'You have said so.' But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate said to him, 'Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?' But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas [this insolent instigator of rebellion], or Jesus who is called Christ [against whom you can find absolutely no charge]?' For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream.' Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' Pilate said to them, 'Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?' They all said, 'Let him be crucified!' And he said, 'Why? What evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!' So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather a riot was

beginning [If there's one thing a Roman governor cannot do, it's allow a riot to erupt], he took water and washed his hands before the crowd saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' And all the people answered, 'His blood be on us and our children!' [Chilling words!] Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified."

Matthew condensed his account of the trials of Jesus before the pagan authorities. But Luke records something that Matthew skipped over. During this time, Pilate actually sent Jesus to stand before Herod because he hoped Herod would take over the case since Herod had jurisdiction over Galilean matters. But Herod examined Jesus as well and sent him back without any charges against him. So Pilate called the chief priests—the Jewish leadership—into his chambers and he told them privately in Luke 23:14: "'You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him.*

They protested so loudly, so violently that Pilate feared a riot might ensue, so he delivered Jesus over to their will. Spineless reaction in this instance. As governor, Pilate should have used his authority to stand for justice. He should have delivered Jesus from the hands of wicked men, from this irrational mob, but he didn't do so. What was the testimony of the Gentiles portrayed here by Pilate and his wife? "Righteous man," verse 19. "Innocent of evil," verse 23. "Nothing deserving of death." They know it's only because of envy that the Jewish leaders want Jesus dead, and so complicit in handing Jesus over, complicit in the murder of Jesus, Pilate washed his hands in front of the people. He's symbolizing his innocence and guiltlessness in the matter. The Jewish nation shouts, "Let him be crucified. His blood be on us and our children."

Added to the voice of Pilate's protest, there was a veteran soldier in charge of the crucifixion detail. We heard from him earlier. He's a high-ranking centurion. He's a man familiar with death. He's in charge of the crucifixion detail, and if he had reported to the leadership, to Pilate and to others, that Jesus was dead when he truly wasn't dead, he would have forfeited his own life. This man knows death. Not only did he affirm the death of Jesus Christ, but he also testified this, "Truly this was the

Son of God." Take one of the thieves crucified next to Jesus. He rebuked the scornful thief next to him, and he added his own testimony to Jesus' innocence. "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

From top to bottom, from leadership to laity, from the criminal fringes of the nations to the very heart and soul, from the temple itself, the universal testimony is of the innocence of Jesus Christ. As Peter said in 1 Peter 1:19, he is "like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." He is the sinless One. And yet, "you leadership, you Jews, crucified and killed him by the hands of lawless men." Why did they do that? Setting aside for the moment the tainted motives of Judas Iscariot, setting aside the criminal who scorned him, setting aside the *hoi polloi*, the rabble who stirred up this fickle mob to cry out for Jesus' blood, how could a nation of such God-fearing people be so confident, so self-assured that they were justified in crucifying Jesus the Christ? Why did they deliver him to death on the Cross? Listen, they thought God was on their side. They felt assured because they thought God was on their side.

That's the final testimony we want to consider this morning, a third point for your notes. And this is the most important of all voices we need to hear. It's the testimony of God. The leadership of the Jews, as I said, truly believed God was on their side. They saw Judas as an answer to their prayers. They interpreted the course of the last 24 hours as the perfect outworking of divine providence in their favor, affirming, confirming their cause. The very fact that Jesus hung on a cross seemed to indicate to them that they are the ones who are righteous. They believed, because he's hanging on a cross, that God himself is against Jesus. They're simply the human instruments carrying out God's sentence of death, which is just, which is merited. After all, Galatians 3:13 alludes to Deuteronomy 21:23: "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree." That's why as they walked by Jesus, as he hung there on the Cross, bleeding and dying, it says—we read it earlier in Matthew 27:39: "Those who passed by derided him [...] saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.'" So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we

will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, "I am the Son of God."'"

But God didn't come down from Heaven to deliver him from death, did he? God the Father let him die on that cross. So is that the final word? Did God the Father affirm and confirm the Jewish leaders who crucified and killed Jesus of Nazareth by the hands of lawless men? All we need to do is turn the page to Matthew 28:1 and following. "Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow." Notice the Pharisees said as they walked by, "Let God come down from heaven and deliver him if he desires him," and here is God sending an angel from heaven to come down and deliver him because he desires him. "His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen

from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.'"

Look, Jesus did appear, as we read at the beginning of the service from the Apostle Paul. He died for our sins, his body was buried, he was raised on the third day, all according to the Scriptures—prophecies in the Old Testament. Jesus appeared in his resurrected physical body, first to Cephas, then to the twelve. He appeared to more than 500 brothers, appeared to James and then to all the Apostles and then last of all, he appeared to Paul—that last Apostle, "one untimely born." He confirms for us the testimony of God the Father to the innocence and perfection of Christ because of the resurrection from the dead. If you can get there quickly, turn to Romans 1:1-4: "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an Apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God, which was promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and [get this] was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."

Remember again those last words of scorn from the Jewish leadership. In their minds every word of Jesus Christ would be true if God himself would save him. "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now if he desires him." So what is God's testimony? The most important testimony we can hear: Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." Listen, if God raised Jesus from the dead, God, whose testimony is the supreme, the absolute, the ultimate, the final authority, then we're assured of the perfection of Jesus Christ. And God did raise him, which means it's all true, folks, every last word of it. All that Jesus said is true, all that Jesus' Apostles said is true, every word of the Gospel, every word of the Bible from Old Testament to New—it's all true. If you reject that Word, you'll join Judas. You'll join the unbelieving members of the Sanhedrin, the mocking crowds, Pilate, Herod, the brutally sadistic soldiers. You'll be numbered with that chorus of voices, who, though rejecting Jesus Christ because of hard-hearted unbelief, you'll at the same time affirm with them the innocence, the perfection of Jesus Christ as an undeniable fact. Talk about being on the wrong side of history!

But if you'll receive him, well, to you is the promise of God: "For to all who have received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God who were born not of blood nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Why didn't the Father come and take him off the cross since he was innocent? Because of the plan of redemption. He had to die for your sins and mine. 2 Corinthians 5:21: God made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of him.

Listen briefly to Isaiah 53. It explains this so well. "[Jesus] was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter; like a sheep before its shearers is silent, he opened

not his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? They made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."

Look, according to that text, the only way Jesus could see his offspring, the only way he shall prolong his days, the only way the will of the Lord is going to prosper in his hand, the only way that any of that is going to come true is if God raises him from the dead, which he did. And by the power of the

resurrection, God causes all who believe in Christ to become the righteousness of God in him. God is pleased to allow the resurrection of Jesus Christ and through his resurrection to divide a portion with the many, divide the spoil with the strong, and to grant them all eternal life. As Jesus said in John 5:21, "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will." As Paul said, "If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you."

Listen, folks, friends, all of you. It's so important to repent of your sins. As we said from the very beginning, that same root of sins that put Jesus on the cross—sins of jealousy and greed, sins of envy and covetousness, sins of pride and self-centeredness—those sins, all of them, are in our hearts as well. If we'd been there at the moment, along with Pilate, along with the Jews, but for the grace of God, we would have been among that mocking, jeering crowd, letting him be crucified, his blood be on us and our children. Same sins. Same hearts. So, look, if you'll repent of your sins, if you'll embrace Jesus Christ by faith, if you'll follow him from here on out as your

only Savior, your one and only Lord, God will save you, too. "For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Look, that's the message of the Gospel, which we know to be true because of the resurrection, because God raised him from the dead. Amen!

Father, thank you this morning that we can take some time to reflect on the meaning of the crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection of Jesus Christ, his appearing to many and now, even, his ascension into heaven, bodily where he is with you at your right hand to intercede for us transgressors. We thank you that he was numbered among the sinful, numbered among the sinners even though there was no sin in him. He knew no sin, and yet you numbered him among transgressors that we might become the very righteousness of God in him.