

## THE PRICE OF INNOCENT BLOOD

Matthew 26:14-16; 27:3-10, 15-26; Good Friday; April 3, 2026

**Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I deliver [Jesus] over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray Him.**

Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus to the chief priests and elders of the Jews for 30 pieces of silver. He must have thought Jesus was guilty of something deserving death, and the chief priests and elders agreed with him. Later, when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned to death and realized that he had made a mistake, He wanted to return the **“blood money”** he had gotten to betray Him. **“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood,”** he confessed.

Judas wanted the chief priests to absolve him of his sin by taking back the price of innocent blood. When they refused to accept back the money, nor absolve him because they did not think he had done anything wrong, Judas threw the coins into the temple and hanged himself, as if his guilty death could pay for an innocent life.

Later, when Jesus was on trial before Pontius Pilate, it was clear to Pilate that Jesus was innocent. During Jesus’ trial, Pilate’s wife sent word of a disturbing dream she just had about this affair and warned her husband to remove himself from it and have **“nothing to do with that righteous man.”** Jesus was a righteous-just-innocent man that should be set free, not condemned to death. After giving the crowd the option of releasing Jesus or a notorious criminal named Barabbas and the crowd cried for Jesus’ crucifixion, Pilate asked them, **“Why, what evil has He done?”** Yet, he ended up condemning Jesus to death.

Pilate’s response to condemning Jesus to the cross was not like Judas who, in despair over what he had done, killed himself. Pilate simply shifted the blame for Jesus’ death to the crowd. Pilate **“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 on our children!’”**

A guilty man, Barabbas, would be set free, and an innocent man, Jesus, would shed His blood on the cross. To free his conscience of condemning an innocent man to death, Pilate self-righteously blamed others and absolved himself. He **“washed his hands”** of the whole matter, and stated, **“I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.”**

Judas Iscariot received 30 pieces of silver to betray innocent blood. Judas thought he was doing the right thing when he agreed to betray Jesus, but when he regretted it and tried to make up for his sin, it was too late. His despair over what he had done cost his own life in the end. The chief priests and elders thought they were doing a righteous deed condemning a man they considered guilty, even though it meant having a violent criminal unleashed to afflict the people again. Pilate had the authority and responsibility to set an innocent man free, but knowingly chose to condemn innocent Jesus while claiming to be innocent of His blood. Pilate’s guilt at Jesus’ death may be greater than anyone else’s.

On Good Friday, we should ask ourselves whether we use the same tactics they did. When we realize that we have sinned and caused Jesus’ death on the cross, we may not despair like Judas did and kill ourselves, but we may try to do something to undo what we have done as if that would free us from our guilt. We feel terrible about our sin, wallowing in our sorrow before others to prove just how sincerely we regret it, offer to make up for it, and promise to not do it again. But that changes nothing; Jesus still dies.

Or we can be like Pilate and self-righteously lament how terrible it was for Jesus to be mistreated by others, as if our sins weren’t that bad. “Yes, I am a sinner, but not nearly so bad as they are. Isn’t it terrible what they did to Jesus. I did all I could to prevent His death, but I was forced to do what I did. It’s their fault, not mine.” We absolve ourselves because we are less guilty than others, even though we are not. We shift the blame from ourselves as if our sins are not our own, or we claim we could not help committing them under the circumstances.

How much was paid for the innocent blood that Jesus shed on Golgotha, the Place of a Skull?

Judas was paid a modest sum of money in reward for his betrayal, but in the end it cost Him his life by suicide and, according to Scripture, his eternity in hell for dying without faith. It cost the chief priests a little bit of money and the inconvenience of a criminal let loose again on society. It cost Pilate his integrity, but he kept everything else he had. In the whole scheme of things, the price to nail Jesus to the cross to die was not all that high – until we look at the price paid from the opposite direction – what Jesus paid.

Good Friday is about our sin and the price Jesus paid to forgive and save us. How much did it cost Jesus to cover Judas' betrayal of innocent blood, and the hard-hearted unbelief of the chief priests who were willing to take responsibility for Jesus' death and let it be held against them and their children, and the knowing unjust condemnation of a righteous and innocent man by Pilate who blamed others and claimed innocence for himself? We shouldn't forget to add our own sins to the list because Jesus' innocent blood paid for us too.

As we consider the price of Jesus' innocent blood, I suggest today that we understand it from the perspective of Barabbas, the notorious prisoner, rightly condemned as guilty, who by Jesus' innocent blood was set free. Of the three crosses set up for crucifixion that dreary Friday so many years ago, the one in the middle was reserved for Barabbas, but he was never nailed to it. Jesus was. The guilty man was set free so the innocent Man could die in his place. Barabbas deserved to die for what he had done, but he did not die. Jesus did.

We look down on Judas for betraying his Friend for money. We accuse the chief priests of rejecting the Lamb of God so they could continue to sell Passover lambs for a profit, from which they could easily pay Judas. We condemn Pilate for condemning an innocent man to death, but we are guilty Barabbas. We deserve to die, but Jesus' innocent blood set us free. Our sins are forgiven and we are free to live as innocent.

*What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered Was all for sinners' gain;  
 Mine, mine was the transgression, But Thine the deadly pain.  
 Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place;  
 Look on me with Thy favor, And grant to me Thy grace. (LSB 450.5)*

Amen.