

# Masterwork of the Messiah

## Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

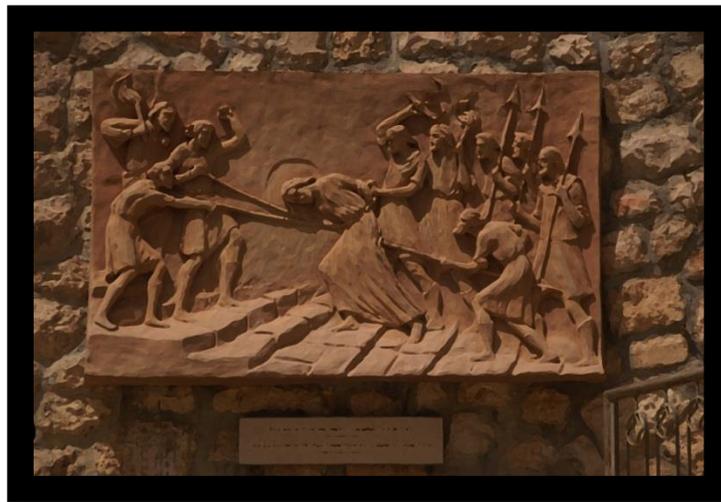
*Man's Plight & God's Light*

Matthew 27:1-10

Written By

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Recently, Liz and I traveled to San Diego to help her aging, post-heart surgery, mother, Marinette, and her Alzheimer inflicted step-father, Andy, deal with personal need beyond their ability. One such need concerned an old apricot tree located on the eastern side of their property.

In the 1990s, when Liz's father, Dave, was alive, this particular fruit tree produced sweet, succulent fruit. However, over the years a mushroom-looking fungus attached to the base of the tree took its toll. Once it became part of the outside, it mercilessly ate its way to the inside, turning the hard inner core wood to a sponge-like substance. The result couldn't have been more predictable: Fruit eventually couldn't form on the exterior branches because no life existed within the trunk.

My job couldn't have been clearer: Take the tree down. So I did ... without a handheld tree saw or gas powered chain saw. How did I, along with Liz's brother, Mark, level the once fruitful tree? Easy. We just grabbed branches with our hands and they instantly just snapped off, like the Hulk had ahold of them. With all the brittle branches laying on the ground around the tree, the seven foot high trunk was all that remained. How did we knock it down? Easy. We pushed from one side real hard and we heard a cracking, snapping noise. Next, we moved to the opposite side and pushed one more time real hard. In seconds, the remaining roots connected to the base simply snapped and the thick trunk slammed into the ground.

Sitting in a lawn chair later reading a book by Ravi Zacharias while catching some rays (yes, there is sunshine in California), I couldn't help but see a spiritual metaphor in that apricot tree. Spiritually (and theologically) it stands as an apt description of man's innate spiritual plight. Since man's fall in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), sin has moved from the outside to the inside of man, resulting in disease and death. None of us can escape the condition either for it is, as Paul teaches, passed down to us from our parents.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—(Romans 5).

The contagion of sin is all about us because it is imputed to us through Adam's misdeed, and it is inherited by us through our parents who are also children of Adam (1 Peter 1:18, "... *knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers ...*"). The result is a tree which might look fine on the outside, but which really has disease and death about it, resulting in the production of faithless, godless fruit.

"Is that your tree?" is the question of all questions. It was the tree of Judas, who betrayed Jesus, the Savior, and the overly zealous religious authorities who tried Him in two trumped up, groundless, illegal trials in the middle of the night of Passover. The disease polluting their trees can't be missed as we turn to the third trial of Jesus in the Temple at sunrise. We can't miss God's divine provision for their disease ... and really all of mankind's disease ... as we rest our eyes on the divinely inspired historical narrative given to us by Matthew in chapter 27, verses 1 through 10. From this timely text we encounter this overarching, pragmatic theological premise:

### Sin Contaminates, But Christ Liberates (Matthew 27:1-10)

Verses 1 through 7 give us a sad, sordid snapshot of ...

#### Man's Plight: Disease and Death (Matthew 27:1-7)

Matthew is the only gospel writer to include this section about the frantic, fearful reaction of Judas to the unfounded, highly illegal guilty verdict leveled against Christ, followed by the callous and devious actions of the Jewish High Court, the Sanhedrin, prior to Christ being taken to Pilate for the three facets of the Roman part of His capital case. Why did Matthew include this story? To emphasize several things to his Jewish audience: One, they were responsible for the death of the Messiah, first and foremost. They couldn't blame it all on the Romans, although they were culpable as well; two, all of their collective actions, from treachery to injustice of the highest order directed at the holy, sinless Messiah, readily demonstrated why He came to earth in the first place ... to save sinners; three, God providentially controlled all of these twisted events to accomplish His over-arching redemptive, kingdom purposes. Take heart from all of this. When your world seems to be spinning out of control, God is at work.

With this all in mind, I direct you now to Matthew's historical narrative. I also direct you to how the story clearly shows the degenerative and disgusting nature of sin. From my study, I've isolated five facets of contagion we call sin:

*One: Disregard (Matthew 27:1-2).* Disregard of what? God's truth, God's teaching, God's law, and all logical reasoning. Put differently, sin, especially when it's wedded to a false religious

understanding, so blinds, so inflames it will motivate sinners to go to unbelievable, unfathomable, and unspeakable lengths to silence Christ, the author of all spiritual and religious truth. And when He is not around, you can expect the same behavior toward His followers, just as He prophesied:

<sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also (John 15:20).

Don't be shocked. If religious zealots went after Christ with an intolerant, crazed zeal in the name of God, don't be amazed when, not if, they eventually seek to silence you in whatever ways are available to them. I am not a prophet or the son of the prophet, but the tolerance movement, which calls for peace between all the faiths, is an accident waiting to happen. All you have to have is one faith which believes all the other faiths are not just wrong, but its adherents need to be either dominated or destroyed and you have the makings of a persecution to end all persecutions.

In Christ's case, the religious authorities were so consumed with eradicating Him, despite all the evidence to the contrary that He was, in fact, the prophesied Messiah, that they completely disregarded the Mosaic Law they were supposed to uphold to achieve their devilish purpose. The two illegal trials they held in the wee hours of Passover morning had to look legal for them to continue with their capital case against Jesus, so, as we see in the verses before us, they held a third "legal" meeting in the Temple (of all places, as is indicated by the actions of Judas in verse 5) to add veracity to their proceedings.

<sup>1</sup> Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; <sup>2</sup> and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor.

The *hoste* clause, "to put Him to death," coupled with the infinitive (ὥστε θανατώσαι αὐτόν), illustrates the ultimate purpose of their meeting.

- They didn't care about truth.
- They didn't care about the fact they had no hard evidence a capital crime had been committed.
- They didn't care about the fact their trails were illegal.
- They didn't care about the fact they weren't waiting the traditional three days before they put someone to death.
- They didn't care that their witnesses committed perjury.
- They didn't care that any thinking person could see they had finally come out of the darkness and shown their sinister hand.

All they cared about was murdering the "menacing" Master, Jesus. They had had enough of His teaching, His powerful arguments against their carefully constructed ceremonial/ritualistic/legalistic religion, His intolerance of their religion, His miracles ... which they attributed to the Devil (Matthew 12), His clearing of their Holy Temple on two occasions

(John 2:14-15; Matthew 21:12-17), His wide acceptance with the people (John 12:19, “*The Pharisees therefore said to one another, ‘You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him.’*”), and His in-your-face denouncement of their carefully preserved and pristine spirituality. And because they had finally had enough of Him, they were willing to disregard known Law and their spiritual vows as priests and judges to uphold the Law to remove Him so they could cling to their false belief system.

To get their wicked way, they, who knew only Rome had the power to execute someone guilty of a capital crime, carefully crafted charges they could live with and which Rome would embrace. Luke identifies the baseless Rome oriented charges:

<sup>2</sup> And they began to accuse Him, saying, ‘We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King’ (Luke 23).

Restated, the charges were subverting the nation, opposing the payment of taxes, and claiming to be a King; thereby, making Christ an insurrectionist. How ironic. They were the insurrectionists. Anyway, despite the fact they accused Christ of blasphemy (Luke 22:71); they took these charges to Pilate, who resided in the Antonia Fortress.

Mark this well. Such is the nature of the disease we call sin. It moves its adherents to eventually disregard laws and logic to silence the Christ and Christians. If a law has to be overlooked, bent, or twisted in order to silence Christ and Christians, then they will eventually do it. If all logic has to be thrown to the wind, they will throw away. If evidence has to be invented to bring about judgments, it will be invented. If tolerance has to become intolerance momentarily, intolerance will express itself unabashedly. If a false religion has to be embraced at all costs, one which seeks to gain entrance into God’s holy presence through the meticulous adherence of a plethora of mind-numbing rules and regulations, it will be embraced with a loud voice and brutal zeal.

Saints, wake up! The same spirit which opposed our Lord is still alive and well on planet earth. Don’t be shocked as it motivates its adherents to go to great lengths to move Christianity off the world stage, by any and all means possible. Be courageous. Stand your ground. Speak truth.

Non-Christians, wake up! Are you angrily and arrogantly disregarding all the evidence that God has placed before you concerning the reality of His existence, the truth of the Bible, and the prophetic stats that Jesus was, in fact, the long-awaited Savior and Messiah? You might feel all smug and secure in your position, why, you might even think you are doing God a favor, but you will be humbled and horrified the day you stand and give account before His holy throne.

A second earmark of the disease called sin is presented in the next two verses:

*Two: Deception (Matthew 27:3-4a).* What sin promises you and what it delivers are always different things. It promises you freedom, and gives you bondage. It promises you real life, and gives you death. It promises you excitement, and gives you sadness. It promises you fun, and gives you ball and chain destructive habit. It promises you perpetual pleasure, and gives you perpetual pain. Yes, sin never delivers the goods it dangles in front of you. Judas found this out the hard way:

<sup>3</sup> Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,  
<sup>4</sup> saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.”

Obviously, Judas had watched the whole “trial” of Jesus: the false accusations, the beating, the mocking, and the laughing. And despite how he thought his betrayal of Jesus might turn out; it didn’t go as he anticipated. Sin never does. It always drags you into a dark direction you never intended or saw coming. When Judas saw the authorities actually circumvented the Law in order to push for the death penalty in relation to his former Rabbi, he couldn’t palate it. Guilt ate away at his mind and heart because he, of all people, knew full-well that Jesus was entirely innocent of all charges. Walking frantically, then, into the Temple area where the Sanhedrin met, Judas stepped forward and attempted to give them their blood money back based on the firsthand evidence he had regarding Christ’s absolute innocence.

Sad, isn’t it? For three years Judas was exposed to the Son of God, the Messiah, to His teaching, His love, His compassion, His comradery, and His outright miracles, and he simply and willfully rejected it all as he laid low, probably hoping for a messianic overthrow of the Roman Empire. No human being has ever had more reasons to come to Jesus in faith than Judas, and no human being has ever more definitively rejected Jesus than Judas, one of the Twelve.

He, who thought he was cleverly in control, was duped in the end by the Devil who possessed him. Whatever he thought he’d get out of the deal beyond the paltry thirty pieces of silver, evaporated instantly when he heard the Sanhedrin collectively charge Jesus with capital crimes. Now, no amount of money would be worth becoming a traitor. Now, all he wanted was a clean conscience, and to get this monkey called guilt off his bent back.

Did Judas get saved at this moment? No. Why not? Craig Blomberg answers the question well:

At any rate, Judas is “seized with remorse” (from Greek *metamelomai*). This verb is much rarer in the New Testament than the typical verb for “repenting” (*metanoēō*) and seems here to refer to a *change of mind* or *feeling of regret*, which falls considerably short of full-fledged repentance (cf. 2 Cor 7:8, in which such remorse precedes repentance; and Heb 7:21, in which it refers to a change of mind and not sorrow for sin), even if in other contexts the semantic ranges of the two words overlap (e.g., Matt 21:29, 32). Judas does acknowledge his sin and Jesus’ innocence, but he does not demonstrate the mark of genuine repentance—appropriate corrective action. He confesses to the wrong group of people and then simply gives up on life.<sup>1</sup>

Again, I say, sad. Judas didn’t turn to Christ and ask for forgiveness. No, he turned to the wrong people, hoping to simply assuage his deep guilt. Finding eternal forgiveness for his treachery never crossed his messed up mind.

Such, my friend, is the nature of the contagion the Scriptures call sin. By its very nature it, like the fungus on the apricot tree, will eat away at your life while promising you all kinds of

<sup>1</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992): 407.

better things. In reality, however, it will give you the opposite of what it promises and it will not be what you want.

This all reminds me of a young man and woman I watched years ago at Harvey's Casino in Lake Tahoe. Sitting at the roulette table, a pile of chips rested in front of him. Before the turn of the wheel, he'd quickly grab from various stacks and place them on numbers he thought would come up. When those numbers didn't come up, he'd reach for the dwindling stack, grab more chips, and place them on more lucky numbers. It wasn't long before he didn't have any more chips. So what did this money hungry young man do? He turned to his wife, asked for more money, and then purchased another pile of chips from the pit boss. I walked away at that point because I couldn't bear to witness the outcome. Sin most assuredly whispered into his youthful ears that he was about to strike it rich, that he was about to be able to afford that car and home of his dreams, that ... well, you fill in the proverbial blank. In the end, the sin of greed would get the best of him, leaving him poor and penniless.

I don't know what message is being whispered into your ears by your own carnality, coupled with the voice of whatever demon is assigned to you, but you have a choice to live differently. Jesus came to give you real life, truly abundant life (John 10:10). Jesus came to give you a life that won't stain your conscience, one which will make you glad you are alive. Judas forsook that life of faith in Jesus in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. What will you do? Will you be a wise man or a fool?

A third aspect of the disease of sin is gleaned from the short response of the religious leaders to the proposition of Judas. I call it ....

*Three: Deadness (Matthew 27:4b).* Deadness in what way? Deadness insofar as sin had so calloused the hearts of the religious leaders they completely, definitively, and willfully walked away from their role as priests with their reply to the wayward sheep called Judas:

But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!"

Regarding their words, the late Alexander MacLaren astutely observes:

Fanatical hatred which thinks itself influenced by religious motives is the blindest and cruelest of all passions, knowing no compunction, and utterly unperceptive of the innocence of its victim.<sup>2</sup>

How true.

The words of these pious, we-can't-be-spiritually-wrong, priests dripped with rudeness. Interestingly enough, in the original text, there is no verb in their first sentence. This verbal ellipsis serves to make their words highly terse and emphatic (Τί πρὸς ἡμᾶς). Truly, their words were harder than steel, coming from hearts completely turned off and deadened to the things of God. This is all most shocking. As priests, they, if anybody, should have been open to the confession of a hurting soul. They, if anybody, should have shown compassion and a desire to hear truth. They would have neither because years of rejecting the spiritual truth Christ placed

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture: St. Matthew*, Vol. VII (Grand Rapids: Eermands Publishing, 1942): 300.

before them has merely caused their hearts to be cold, calloused, and dead ... dead to the things of God, dead to hearing more truth, dead to wanting to discover truth, and so forth.

What about you? Has your heart become calloused to the things of God and to the voice of God? You know that disease has eaten your tree, leaving you as a shell of who God wants you to be, when you only ever argue with your Christian wife over her desire to go to church; when you don't listen to sermons to gain any insight, you only listen in order to incite ... incite your mind against the truths you hear; when you are bothered by the faith decisions your children are making; when you cling white-knuckled to religious rituals instead of developing a faith relationship with the Savior, Jesus; when you are cold and indifferent toward people with real life needs, and so on and so forth.

Should there be spiritual deadness about you, hold on because today is the day I pray you come to see that Jesus came to give you spiritual life (John 6:33, 35, 40, 47, 48; 53). More on that in a moment, but for our purposes now we must turn and look at a fourth characteristic of the disease called sin:

*Four: Dismay (Matthew 27:5).* Realizing he was cursed (Deuteronomy 27:25), that he wouldn't purposefully place himself to the feet of Christ to find true cleansing for his sin and guilt, and that he was an outcast to the Christian and the Judaistic community, Judas took desperate measures:

<sup>5</sup> And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.

We have here a picture of a tortured man, of a man who committed the crime of all crimes, of a man who held onto his sin all the way to the bitter end. And what could have Satan whispered in his ear? "You are worthless. You can never get yourself out of this mess. You can never find forgiveness for what you've done. You have no hope, and you'll never find rest for your sin-stained conscience, so why not just end it all?" Apart from all he had ever heard from the teaching of Christ, apart from all the wide array of sinners he had seen Christ save, sin had so eaten away at Judas' tree he erroneously believed he had no choice but to commit suicide. He thought and chose wrong. True salvation was only a few steps away, yet since he opted to be enshrouded in emotionalism he now, unfortunately, has an eternity to wrestle with the guilt of his treachery.

Let me ask you some probing personal questions right now: Are you in an emotional frenzy right now because of sinful choices you've made? Are you in a self-destruct mode? Are you thinking there is no way out but the way Judas chose? Listen. Your spiritual condition and conundrum, no matter how twisted and tangled it is, can be fixed; however, you must come to Christ in believing faith, which is a step Judas never took. Remember, it was Jesus who said to all of us:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest  
(Matthew 11:28).

He wasn't kidding. Come to Jesus in faith and He'll take your despair and give you joy, purpose, and meaning in its place.

To those who opt to continue to embrace their sin, let me caution you regarding one of its more fearful facets:

*Five: Darkness* (Matthew 27:6-8). These verses leave your jaw on the proverbial floor:

<sup>6</sup> The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, “It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood.” <sup>7</sup> And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter’s Field as a burial place for strangers. <sup>8</sup> For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

How utterly ironic and disgusting. They, who just disregarded key facets of the Mosaic Law to murder the Son of God, an innocent man, now are all of a sudden most interested in acting piously. Those who embrace false religious positions, be what they may, are prone to this type of illogical behavior. After they commit sometimes brutal, godless, and mean-spirited actions, they, then, turn and get all spiritual and religious. I guess they think their actions will someone rationalize their former behavior, as well as help them live with what consciences they have left. How misguided.

What did these particular priests hope to do with the blood money? Purchase a no-named field as a good will gesture to the community south of Jerusalem where Gentiles, which are denoted by the term “strangers,” could be buried in the holy city. Grant Osborne’s analysis of their thinking has to be presented:

Their reason that the best use of the ‘blood money’ was to purchase a cemetery for foreigners: an unclean cemetery for unclean pagans, purchased with unclean money—perfect!”<sup>3</sup>

Thinking doesn’t get any more distorted than this. The same temple monies they used to buy off a traitor so they could kill an innocent man, and the Christ for that matter, are the same monies they won’t return to the temple because that would be evil. Instead, they opted to do a good work by providing a cemetery for less fortunate Gentiles. How kind. How caring ... right. How devious. How utterly dark is their line of reasoning.

What about you thinking? Is it full of darkness? Do you find yourself engaging in religious activities simply to cover for wickedness you are engaged in in other areas of your life? Have you duped yourself into thinking that your religious actions, be what they may, will actually garner you some kind of favor before God? You, my friend, had better rethink your position. Better yet, place your mind at the feet of the only one who can heal it. His name is Jesus. We learn about Him in the final verses where we encounter ...

## God’s Plan: Health and Life (Matthew 27:8-10)

I know this is a positive message from some negative, heavy-duty verses, but it is in there. Let me show you by first introducing you those verses:

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<sup>3</sup> Grant Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010): 1012.

<sup>9</sup> Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: “AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET BY THE SONS OF ISRAEL; <sup>10</sup> AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER’S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME.”

Scholars and Bible students alike have historically found these verses somewhat problematic because they attribute them to Jeremiah, when it seems they are better suited to the prophet Zechariah. This position is taken because Zechariah 11:12-13 speaks of a shepherd, Zechariah, being paid a paltry thirty shekels for shepherding the godless, law-rejecting nation of Israel. Their payment for his effort would not only insult him, but show they rejected him as their shepherd. Prophetically, you can see how this could easily apply to Christ, especially in the trial sequence of Matthew, for what did the religious leaders do but reject Him? In this instance, Zechariah was merely a foreshadowing of the Messiah, the true and ultimate shepherd.

Matthew’s statement that this quote comes from Jeremiah still appears problematic because Jeremiah didn’t talk about thirty shekels being related to anything. Saying the quote is strictly from Zechariah is problematic too because he didn’t say anything about a potter’s field while Jeremiah did in a vague fashion in chapter 19.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thus says the LORD, “Go and buy a potter’s earthenware jar, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests. <sup>2</sup> Then go out to the valley of Ben-hinnom, which is by the entrance of the potsherd gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you, <sup>3</sup> and say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place, at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will tingle. <sup>4</sup> Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods, that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known, and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent <sup>5</sup> and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind; <sup>6</sup> therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when this place will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-hinnom, but rather the valley of Slaughter. <sup>7</sup> I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their life; and I will give over their carcasses as food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.

Here Jeremiah is commanded by God to purchase a potter’s jar and break it front of the political and spiritual leaders of Israel in the dump just to the south of Jerusalem as a sign God would judge them for rejecting Him while worshipping other gods through child sacrifice in this horrid, horrific place. As with the passage in Zechariah, this could also apply to Jesus for He was THE rejected Prophet who would one day judge the false religious and political leaders of

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<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah was directed to buy a field in chapter 32; however, this wasn’t a potter’s field. Hence, this is probably not the right context to refer to when considering the quote from Matthew 27: 9-10.

Israel (Matthew 24-25). But, still, we are left somewhat guessing as to how these texts are seen by Matthew as a prophecy from Jeremiah.

I think the answer is really quite simple. For Jews, the Old Testament was divided into three distinct sections: The Law, the Writings, and the Prophets. To speak, then, of Jeremiah the prophet was to, in one sense, to speak of the prophets. Matthew, therefore, did not make a mistake, but merely took verbal, thematic concepts from the two prophetic books and tied them, by the Spirit's leadership, to Jesus.

Lest we get lost in the weeds of this thorny issue, we need to back up and ask the logical question: Why were these Old Testament quotes placed here in Matthew?

- One, to show that Israel had, again, rejected a God-appointed shepherd; however, this time it was THE Shepherd.
- Two, to show that God, the Father, was in total control of the sordid, tragic situation. He was doing the providential "directing" of the entire trumped up trial, even down to what they the authorities paid Judas, and what the money was used for after his death. Yes these quotes unequivocally demonstrate that THE Shepherd had to become the Lamb so He could die for the sins not just of the wicked leaders and Judas, but for the sins of all mankind.

So the premise is true: *Sin contaminates, but Christ liberates*. That was His Father's lofty plan all along.

Right now there's the remnant of an old, weathered diseased tree laying quietly in a back yard in sunny San Diego. It used to have life, it used to be fruitful, it used to be beautiful, but disease got the best of it. Now it's just a lifeless shell of what its Creator intended.

Is that tree a picture of your spiritual life? Is that not the question? Indeed, it is. What is most wonderful about the work of Jesus is this: He specializes in taking trees contaminated by disease and completely re-making them to His glory (1 Corinthians 10:13). And when He's done with them, they are not only full of life, they go on to produce fruit that blesses Him all those they come in contact with.

Any trees here in need of a touch of the tree surgeon right now? The doctor is in.