

**SUICIDE**  
Matthew 27:4-5  
By Raymond White

This subject is disturbing, particularly to those family members who have lost a close loved one, a parent or a child or a sibling, to suicide. And the prevailing Christian view, that suicides are damned as murderers is not at all helpful. Their grief is painful enough, they don't need to hear that.

What is also not helpful is that the Bible says substantially nothing about the subject (other than the examples of Saul and Judas), so we are left to ourselves to grapple with it and understand it the best we can.

So, does the Bible say anything at all that might be of some comfort? There may be something helpful and I'll get to that, but I must caution myself: I do not want to be so comforting that my comfort actually causes someone to proceed to that desperate act. Sometimes good intentions have bad consequences and I am determined that no one will conclude from what I write here that suicide is ever acceptable.

**[1] WHAT IS SUICIDE?**

To start, I'm not entirely sure just what suicide is. The reason being is that suicide is not the only motive for causing one's own death.

"How can that be?" you might ask. Here is my answer.

Decades ago, a co-worker of mine accused Jesus Christ of committing suicide. He claimed that Jesus died because he chose to die, and if that's not suicide, what is?

I argued back this way: If a fireman rushes into a burning building, grabs a child, throws the child out the window into a safety net, but then he is himself unable to escape and perishes in the flames, is that an act of suicide? Using my co-worker's argument, it is, because the fireman took a direct action that brought about his own death.

While it is true that the fireman had assessed the likelihood of dying, and rolled the dice with fate so to speak, and lost, we would never call his heroic gamble a suicide.

But let's ratchet up the argument. Suppose the fireman assessed the situation and *knew* he must die to save that child's life — he was in fact willing to exchange his life for hers. Is *that* an act of suicide? My co-worker's argument would still say, yes, because he *intentionally* brought about his own death.

I say, no. The fireman's act was not suicide, but was, in fact, an act of self-sacrificing heroism, and that is not suicide. Suicide requires the will to die, and the Bible says as much.

***John 15:13*** Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend.

***Romans 5:7*** For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

Neither the fireman nor Jesus was guilty of suicide. They must both be credited with heroic gallantry and that is a far different thing from suicide.

By the way, I did convince my co-worker friend that Jesus' death was an act of heroism and not suicide. Whether he ever became a Christian or not, I don't know.

This situation is not rare but in fact happens all the time where a person chooses to die to save another. I can think of people that I would be willing to die for: off the top of my head there's my wife, any of my children, and any of my grandchildren for starters.

But what's the point? The point is that just because a person brings about his own death, that does not necessarily make it an act of suicide. Heroism is one alternate motive for bringing about one's own death, and heroism is not suicide.

So there are two motives anyway that cause one to terminate his own life: suicide (the wish to die) and heroism (the wish that someone else live). Are there any other motivations for ending one's own life? Let me suggest a possible third.

## [2] SELF-EXECUTION

Imagine, if you can, that you committed a murder. Not manslaughter, not any of those other variations of killing that are almost like murder but not quite, but actual murder: pre-meditated, full knowledge, sane, in-cold-blood murder. And imagine that you got away with it. Then imagine that years later your conscience got the best of you, that you could no longer live with the guilt, and you decided that justice finally had to be done — the death of your victim had to be avenged.

And so you go to the police and confess your crime. You might say, "I committed a murder years ago. Law and justice demand that you arrest me, try me, convict me, and execute me." Now, there are two possibilities.

*First:* What if they believe you, convict you, and execute you? Is that suicide because you caused your own death? No, it is not. It is justice.

*Second:* What if they *don't* believe you? You take them to where you buried the body but it's gone. They ask you, "Who did you kill?" You answer, "I don't know. Just some bum in an alleyway." Finally, it becomes clear to you that no matter what you do, you're not going to persuade the law that you had, in fact, committed the murder. In short, you are never going to get justice for your victim. What do you do then?

If you are really convinced that justice must be done, you take the only option available to you: you get a rope and hang yourself, and maybe leave a note explaining.

Now. Is that self-hanging an act of suicide or something else? Is it self-execution?

Suicide is wishing to die and acting on that wish. But this person, this self-executioner, does not wish to die, what he wishes for is justice. In fact, if he wished to die (to escape guilt for instance) that would defeat justice. Justice can only be served if he wished to live and was forced to die. *That* is justice.

My mind was drawn to this subject today because I saw a movie last night (today is 5/21/09) that ended with something like this. In the television series "Foyle's War" (about a British murder detective during WWII), in the 7<sup>th</sup> episode called "War Games", the story ends with the bad guy killing himself. It was certainly an act of suicide and nothing heroic about it. But it got me thinking about Judas Iscariot.

Now, I'm not asking you to agree with the argument I'm about to offer. But I am suggesting that there may be other motives besides suicide for ending one's own life. Heroism

certainly is one such a motive. Perhaps self-execution is another. And if you think about it, isn't that exactly the situation that Judas found himself in? Let's explore that example.

### [3] JUDAS

Judas Iscariot is arguably the most despicable and tragic person in the Bible, perhaps in all history. For money, 30 pieces of silver, he betrayed his best friend and brought about his death. Then, overwhelmed with guilt and self-loathing, he committed suicide by hanging, so that's two deaths he caused.

Just for the challenge and the fun of it, I want to play the role of Judas' defense attorney, to play "angel's advocate" (certainly not devil's advocate). If there is an indefensible person, that person is Judas, and that's why I want to defend him. I think I can surprise you. You be the judge, the jury, and certainly the prosecuting attorney, and let's give Judas his day in court.

Here is my case:

Judas does not plead innocent, he does in fact plead guilty to the first charge. For money he betrayed his best friend Jesus, and in fact murdered him, and he confesses to that crime freely and without conditions.

*Matthew 27:4* Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. :5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

Judas, understanding the enormity of his murder, submitted himself to the law and confessed and demanded justice. In other words, when Judas said to the Sanhedrin "I have betrayed the innocent blood" what he was saying was: "I am guilty of murder, arrest me, convict me, execute me. Put *me* on a cross because that's what I deserve."

But they wouldn't arrest him. They said, "What is that to us?" And the reason they wouldn't arrest him is because if they did, they would be implicating themselves in the murder of an innocent man. If Judas was guilty of murder, then so were they.

So, what happened next? Judas did exactly what they advised him to do. They said to him: "See thou to it," which means, "*you* deal with it.," and he did exactly that. He "went and hanged himself." In other words, he obeyed their direct instruction.

The point I am making to the court is that when Judas hanged himself, that was not an act of suicide, to relieve himself of pain and guilt, but an act of self-execution, an act of justice. The law wouldn't execute him so he took matters into his own hands: he executed himself *as he was instructed*. He had no alternative. Justice demanded he do it.

This interpretation is significant for two reasons:

*First:* Although Judas is guilty of murdering Christ and has already confessed to that, he is not guilty of murdering himself. His self-inflicted death was not a murder but was in fact an execution that needed to happen. No one else would do it so he did it himself. That is not suicide.

*Second:* Since Judas was in fact executed for his murder of Jesus, he did in fact pay the legal price: he was executed for murder. Now, whatever post-mortem penalties God wishes to inflict on Judas (hell or whatever), at least it cannot be said of Judas that he "got away with it." He didn't get away with it. He paid the full price for his crime.

And that's important because in American law there is the notion of double jeopardy.

***U.S. Constitution, Fifth Amendment:*** *Nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb.*

Now if that legal notion has any meaning to the heavenly court, it must be applied here. And whatever penalty heaven inflicts on murderers who got away with it, heaven ought not to inflict that penalty on Judas because he *didn't* get away with it.

And regarding his own death, Judas should receive no penalty for that at all. He did not commit suicide, he was executing a murderer.

***Genesis 9:6*** *Whoso shedeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed ...*

So Judas was simply being obedient to the express commandment of God. He was acting as executioner just as God demanded.

My point: Causing one's own death is not always an act of suicide, there are other reasons why one might do that. Therefore there is hope, and hope is what this is about.

#### [4] ALTERNATIVES

Quick review: The Bible says almost nothing about suicide so that leaves us in a quandary. What I'm trying to do is to give families some hope that God has not slammed the door on their suicide loved ones — especially a child, especially an only child — and that maybe God has grace enough even for them, if for no other reason than as a show of grace to a believing and bereaving parent.

Now, what about suffering? There is cancer, and Parkinson's disease, and whole hosts of cruel and evil ways to die. Should a really sick person be allowed to terminate his own life to avoid such suffering? The Christian answer is no.

Does the Bible give us any indication of that? It does give us this —

***Proverbs 31:6*** *Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish...*

In today's language, that would mean give morphine or any substantial narcotic to a person who is dying of cancer or any other painful disease. In other words, suicide and euthanasia are not the options that God permits. So don't think it for yourself and don't suggest it to another. And certainly don't help anyone terminate his or her own life.

But what God *does* permit (per the verse above) is for the dying to get drunk and stay drunk to avoid pain, or in modern vernacular, stoned on whatever medication is strong enough to do the job. Doctors call that "snowing."

And how about this possibility? Why not a self-induced coma? Why should the dying have to suffer agony when we have the drugs to prevent it?

And then there is the Advanced Directive. That's a modern document that instructs a physician to allow you to die rather than subject you to on-going pain. Is that murder? Is that suicide? A strongly pro-life person might say yes, that life should be fought for in every circumstance. But let me offer a counter argument. We Christians always like to answer difficult questions by asking, "What would Jesus do?" Well, in this instance we don't have to wonder

what Jesus would do, the Bible tells us what he *did* do. He was hanging on a cross, dying in agony, and he picked the moment and the means of his death. He said:

***Luke 23:46*** *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*

And

***John 19:30*** *It is finished*

So Jesus controlled his dying. Six hours on the cross was enough, it was time to end it, and he did. “Into your hands, *I* commit my spirit.” It was his choice to die right then.

But isn’t that like suicide? Well, if one chooses to die, yes, that’s suicide. But Jesus didn’t choose death, (***Luke 22:42*** *Father, if thou be willing let this cup pass from me*), death choose him, and that’s all together different. The question is, when death comes knocking and picks you — you will die and there is no escape — do you have a right to negotiate the kind of death, a more pain free death? All I can say is, Jesus said, *It is finished*, and it was. Now, you make of that what you will.

But illness is not the only reason people commit suicide. People sometimes choose to end their lives rather than to face overwhelming problems of life; for instance, bullying at school, bullying on the internet, abuse at home, financial disaster, guilt, and more. To anyone who is so troubled that suicide seems the right answer, I have three pieces of advice:

*First:* There is an escape. You can simple refuse to go to school. You can shut down the internet, after all no one *needs* the internet, it’s not oxygen. You can call child protective services. You can file bankruptcy. You can facedown an angry parent or an angry spouse. Anything is better than dying, and especially dying by one’s own hand.

*Second:* If there is no escape (like a molesting parent) there is still an escape. No problem is so bad that you can’t just leave. I said that to a church class one time and I drew lots of fire. They thought I was advocating divorce. I wasn’t. I was advocating not committing suicide. Anything is better than suicide, including divorce, including running away, including just vanishing in the night and going to some place of safety.

*Third:* If there *really* is no escape, remember, even this shall pass away. Time really does heal all wounds. However bad your life is right now, in five years, I guarantee that it will be different. Jeffrey Holland (a Mormon apostle) said it like this: “Sometimes the only way out is through.” Amen to that. And all you need to do to get out is to survive long enough to get through. Surely you can do that. Just survive and you’ll be okay. And in the very worst case, death will eventually happen anyway, and not by your hand. There is this comforting saying (well I think it’s comforting anyway): “If the whole universe collapsed, it would only kill you once.”

## [5] DEFENSE

Now to the real issue. To those who have committed suicide, I offer a possible legal defense. And to their families, hope that God will not be so harsh. Here it is:

***1 Timothy 1:13*** *I obtained mercy: because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*

Well, if Paul got forgiveness for killing Christians (*Acts 22:4 unto the death*) and torturing them (*Acts 26:11 compelled them*) and escaped judgment simply because he was ignorant, why can't a suicide plead the same defense before God? "My life was so painful that I killed myself. But I did not know I was violating your commandment, so please God, forgive me." Isn't that what we all ask anyway? Forgiveness?

Now let me warn anyone who might be thinking: "I'll commit suicide then ask God for forgiveness based on ignorance." It doesn't work that way. That's not ignorance, that presumptuous. And God does not forgive presumptuous sins.

*Numbers 15:30 But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously ... shall be cut off from among his people.*

So if you are planning suicide, ignorance will not work as a defense before God, if for no other reason then you have just read this article and you now know better. So if you're looking for a justification for a planned suicide, you haven't found it here. There is no forgiveness for presumptuous sins.

But what some of you *may* have found here, if you are a parent or a child of a suicide, is hope. Hope that you might have a persuasive argument to bring to God's court to defend that person you love. Forgiveness is available, *if* the sins were ignorant.

*Numbers 15:27 And if any soul shall sin though ignorance ... :28 the priest shall make an atonement for the soul ... and it shall be forgiven him.*

Was the suicide of your loved one done in ignorance? Well, you don't know that, do you? But it's fair to believe it. And that is the plea you can make before God in your child's defense. And there is hope. Remember too that Jesus did say —

*Luke 23:34 Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

If God can forgive those who killed his only begotten son, then why would God not forgive yours?

## [6] FINAL THOUGHT

For those who have lost a child though suicide, you now have a double reason to live right before God.

*1 Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.*

There is such a thing as divine nepotism. If God loves you, and if he loves you a lot, you might want to ask God, "Whatever divine favor you intend to grant to me, please grant it to my poor child instead."

Fair enough. After all, isn't that what atonement is all about, Jesus redirecting divine proxy favor from himself to us? And Jesus did say —

***Matthew 21:22** And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

So if you are a grieving parent of a suicide child, you should live your life in God's love as best you can, and ask. Asking can't hurt. And why not? My bet is that one day you will be reunited with your unhappy child and share a happiness not known in this mortal life.