

The Potter's Field (and the Greatest Real Estate Deal in History)

Matthew 27:3-10

Pastor Peter Hiett

February 12, 2006

Lord God, we give this offering to You, but Lord, may our whole lives be an offering. We just pray that you would use this offering through the institution of this church. And Lord God, we do pray that we would trust Your heart, Jesus the Christ, from the bosom of the Father. And now Lord God, I pray that we would believe Your word, and I pray that Your spirit would protect us, that Your angels would protect us, that Your blood would cover us. Lord God, I claim the blood of Your covenant over every heart in this room that struggles with suicide. Guard them, Lord Jesus. I claim the blood of Your covenant over every heart in this room, Lord God that struggles with someone else's suicide. Guard them, Lord Jesus. I pray the blood of Your covenant over the words that come out of my mouth, that they would not be used by the evil one, but Lord, may they be Your words that cut and devour the works of evil and purify Your kingdom for good. We pray, Lord God, that You would preach. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[The cover of the Creed CD Human Clay is shown on the screen. The words to the song, "Say I" are interposed over the picture of a human form clawing its way out of the clay.]

The dust has finally settled on the field of
Human Clay
Just enough light has shown through
To tell the night from the day
We are incomplete and hollow
For our maker has gone away

Who is to blame?
We'll surely melt in the rain
Say I, Say I

[The song fades into a clip from The Passion of the Christ. Judas is shown after throwing the money back into the temple. He is sitting alone in a field below the city walls of Jerusalem. He looks up to the sky as if looking for God. He looks down again, and he sees a decaying donkey being eaten by worms. There is a rope around the donkey's mouth. The next scene shows Judas securing that rope around a tree and hanging himself.]

Matthew 27:3,

Then 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." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple [the "naos," the inner sanctuary, the presence of God], he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

Acts 1:18 elaborates...

(Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling

headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

He bought the field. How did he do that?

Matthew 27:5

And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

The Potter's Field was just to the south of Jerusalem through the Potsherd Gate in the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom. Jesus and the residents of Jerusalem referred to this valley as "Gehenna." It was the refuse dump of Jerusalem where they burned their waste.

In Jeremiah's time it was also where they burned their children. They sacrificed them to the demon god, Molech.

In English Bibles, Gehenna is often translated "hell." So Judas hung himself on a skulon (a tree) in hell.

The name Judas comes from the word Judah from whence comes the word "Jew."

At the destruction of Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day and in 70 A.D. countless bodies of dead Jews were buried in Tophet. That is, Gehenna.

Jesus and all the disciples were Jews. However, Judas may have been the only disciple from Judea and the one with the closest ties to the priests and the temple.

Anti-Semites love that fact, for they make Jews their scapegoat and Judas the epitome of evil. For 2,000 years Judas (the "son of perdition," that is "waste") has been placed in a special category of evil as the one responsible for Christ's death.

In Dante's Inferno, Judas is relegated to the lowest level of hell. This is an artist's rendition of Dante's 9th circle of hell where Satan continually gnaws on the bodies of three traitors: Brutus, Cassius, and Judas.

Judas in hell.

[image: the 9th circle of hell]

Jesus chose him. Satan possessed him. All in fulfillment of prophecy, according to God's almighty plan.

This is a picture from the book God is Fond of You that John Warren quoted last week in the sermon. I thought his sermon was right on target. God is our Daddy, and He is fond of us, and He is love.

[image: handwritten memo from God saying, "I love you and I always will."]

[The screen flashes back and forth between the Dante's Inferno picture and the God is Fond of You picture.]

Now, you may be feeling a tad ambivalent, and this may raise some questions like:

1) Is God good? Is God just? Is God to blame?

Jesus chose Judas and throughout this Gospel Matthew has been constantly reminding us this all fulfills prophecy “according to the purpose of Him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will.” (Ephesians 1:11)

Scripture makes it clear we were “chosen in Christ Jesus”... “predestined” (Ephesians 1, Romans 8). So if only some are predestined for glory, it implies that others are predestined for hell. That's called double predestination.

In Romans 9 Paul talks about vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath and how God “hardens” some like Pharaoh and the Jews who reject Christ. And so Paul raises the question, “Is there injustice on God's part?” (Romans 9:14) “For who can resist his will?” (Romans 9:19).

And now, even if we could resist his will... even if we had free will, doesn't everlasting conscious torment make you ask some questions? Like, God, how does it bring You glory to deliver a 13 year old boy to unending conscious torment because he found Sunday School boring, kept a Playboy magazine in the closet, and was killed by a bus on his way home from school?

We can say God is perfectly just and so that's justified, yet it's hard for my heart to trust God if that's who He is.

I'm a father, and I would never do that to one of my sons... Discipline? Yes. But endless torment? No. And *if they thought that of me?* It would *kill* me for their hearts would be far, far from me.

Well, if that Potter's Field makes our hearts fear that God is not just, we think, “I better be just,” and so we ask in terror...

2) Am I just? Am I good?

For 2,000 years the institutional church has found that terror is a great motivator for certain things... like building stone temples, but not the other kind.

This is a picture of Brendan Bluestine. I got it this week in the Fuller Alumni Newsletter. Brendan was a Jewish kid that lied about his age to get into my youth group in L.A. He came with his best buddy, Bill. They both came to Christ, and now Brendan is a Christian psychologist counseling our troops.



I saw this... felt responsible... and felt proud.

This is a picture of Brendan in the upper left. Bill is in the lower right. If I ever did a good job of evangelism and discipleship, it was with Bill.



About 10 years ago I got a call, and a man told me Bill went for a walk over at UCLA where he was going to school. He sat down in a garden, pulled a gun from a paper bag, and shot himself dead in the heart.

When I heard that... I felt responsible... and I felt pride. I mean that I felt terror about myself. I wanted to curl up and never ever preach the Gospel again. That's pride and what goes with it... terror of the Potter's Field.



This is a picture of my Aunt Joycie. I never met her, but she looks just like my sister, Rachel. She struggled with depression and became an alcoholic.

A counselor said she needed to live alone, so my dad did not insist Joyce come live with him. He really loved her.

One night, she took a whole bottle of sleeping pills and never woke up.

My dad was the best picture of Jesus I've ever had and yet he had a really hard time speaking hard truth to people he loved. He used to say, "But Peter, I can't say that to him or her. What if she kills herself?"

Many of us are terrified to speak truth to those we love for we're terrified of the Potter's Field. Yet the truth is Jesus, and only He can set us free.

Hebrews 2:15 tells us it's "through the fear of death [fear of the Potter's Field] that Satan keeps us in lifelong bondage." Some are so afraid of death that they kill themselves.

That's ironic... but maybe not because you can't kill the self with the self for it's only more self. Like we said last time, suicide doesn't work. We can kill our bodies but only the second death or something—someone—else can destroy our pride-full selves, our full of self selves.



This is a picture of Tim Brewer. I always wanted to be like Tim. He'd speak at our youth group when I was in high school. He was the youth director in California before I took his position. He was senior pastor at Central Presbyterian EPC in St. Louis.

Awesome preacher, tons of fun, great guy, wife and small kids... Several years ago, he went home alone, wrote some letters, then went to the garage, ran a hose from the exhaust to the inside of the car and asphyxiated himself.

In his suicide letter to the church he wrote, "Out of the countless sins I have committed in this life, it is my own wretched weakness of which I am most ashamed."

Now, I don't know all that was going on with Tim, yet I think he was being emptied like an earthen vessel, but he didn't surrender the emptiness. He despised the emptying and broke the earthen vessel... like Judas in the Potter's Field.

"It's my own wretched weakness of which I am most ashamed." Yet Paul wrote, "I will all the more gladly boast of my weakness that the power of Christ may rest on me," that God might fill me with grace like red wine in a clay jar.

But Tim was terrified of the emptiness... afraid of his weakness, so he broke the clay jar.

It raises questions...

1) Is God good?

2) Am I good?

3) What am I anyway?

The Potter's Field terrifies us and raises a million questions. Most would counsel, "Best not to ask those questions." Yet it seems Matthew wants us to ask the questions. Jesus told these confusing stories (parables) just to get us to ask questions, better questions, and in the end the answer is always Jesus, so let's start asking.

There are some things we know, and some things we don't know well, if even at all.

Things We Know:

1) The Bible is true.

I believe it's true. Like Campolo says, "I even believe the leather is genuine Moroccan."

The Bible is true, and it communicates in powerful pictures, pictures that are not less than real, but more than real. In other words, the pictures aren't metaphors. This world is the metaphor.

Most people that say they take the Bible literally, don't take it literally; they take it scientifically, materially—as if "flesh availeth much and the spirit availeth little."

They take it like Nicodemus when Jesus said, "You must be born again." So they ask, "Shall I enter again into my mother's womb?" And then when Jesus says, "No," they think "What Jesus said is just a metaphor." Wrong! Your mother's womb is the metaphor! This world is the metaphor! And you must be born again.

1) The Bible is true, and

2) Jesus is the Truth.

We can't arrive at what's true unless we follow the Truth. We can't arrive at objective truth until we're subjectively true—that is, submitted to "the Truth," Jesus. That is, we must be honest.

Israel means, "He who wrestles with God." Israel wrestled with the God-man. The God-man is Jesus. He is the Truth.

We're not saved by what is true... "the knowledge of good and evil." We're saved by the One who is Truth, Jesus, crucified on that tree. So,

3) The only way to the Father is through the Son, Jesus. Jesus is the manifestation of love. God is love. So,

4) Fear doesn't save us; love does. "We are saved by grace [khesed, mercy, love] through faith."

So terror of the Potter's Field may get your attention, but terror of the Potter's Field never saved a soul. Only Jesus, the manifestation of love, can save. And "perfect love casts out fear."

These things we know.

Here are some things we don't know well, if even at all:

1) Freedom and Sovereignty.

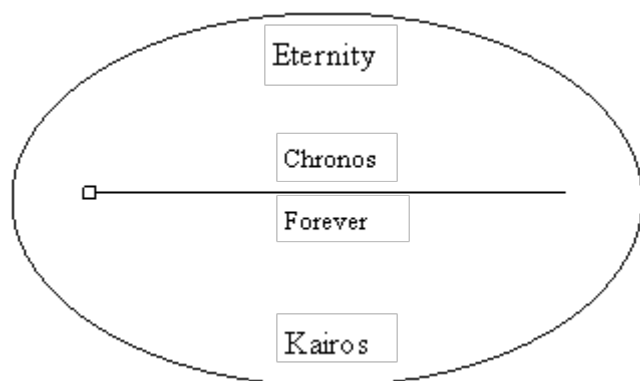
We think freedom is choosing our soft drink at 7-11 (my dog can do that). In scripture,

freedom is the ability to choose the good. None of us are free 'til Christ makes us free, and then it's not referred to as *free will*, but *His will* in us. That is faith, hope, and love—in a word, mercy.

2) Forever and Eternity.

In Greek, *aion* means “epoch” or “age.” *Aionos* is translated “forever,” “eternal,” or “of the age.” That is, there's great debate over how to translate that word, and there's great debate over what that concept is. And I'm not sure we can know just yet for we're stuck in time, and God is the creator of time.

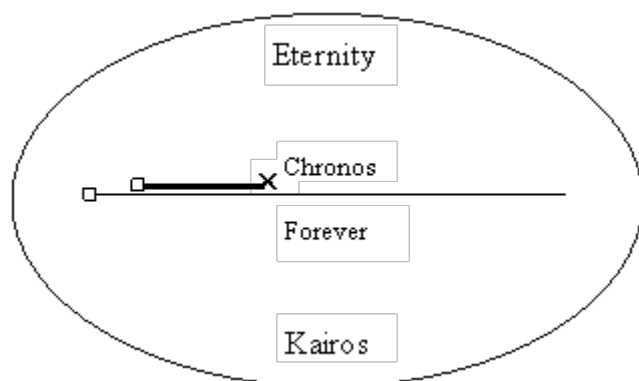
[Peter writes on the overhead.] So this is time “*chronos*.”



Some used to think it has no beginning. Now even scientists say, “In the beginning.” Some think it has no end, but in the revelation a messenger that looks like Jesus stands on land and sea and cries, “Time [*chronos*] will be no more.” (“Time no longer will be.” Greek translation)

I believe time comes to an end, that there will be a last day in time, which means “forever” has a duration, a beginning and an end. So this is “forever”—all of time, “*chronos*”—and this is eternity—beyond our time, God's time, “*kairos*.”

If something is forever destroyed, it means that it appears on this line and then disappears from this line—destroyed for the rest of time.



But how could something be eternally destroyed? For time exists in eternity, so if something is eternally destroyed, it means it never existed, and so it wasn't destroyed. It was either not destroyed or it never actually existed. You only thought it existed, like a shadow or a lie. Eternally destroyed is like an oxymoron: Eternally (no time), destroyed (assumes time).

So if a real something is forever destroyed, how could it be eternally destroyed? I don't know, but I do know lots of things get destroyed in scripture but show up in eternity:

- Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed, and Ezekiel prophesies that they will be restored.
- Jerusalem is utterly destroyed, like a clay pot shattered in Gehenna, and then at the end of the Revelation, She comes down from heaven the eternal city who is our mother, whom we've already come to in Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 Paul writes that "some will suffer aionios destruction," and yet he also writes, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22) And Jesus cries from the throne in Revelation 21:5, "Behold, I make all things new. Write it down. These words are trustworthy and true. It is finished. I am the Alpha and the Omega, beginning and end."

St. Paul was destroyed, and yet he lives. He wrote, "It is no longer I who live [destroyed], but Christ who lives in me." Eternal life in me.

Well, I'm just saying we don't understand forever and eternity and

3) We don't understand hell.

Hell really isn't a Bible word. It's an English word used to translate two very different Biblical concepts and the place they come together. The Greek "Hades" or "Tartarus" and the Hebrew "Sheol" refer to the grave in the dirt, the dust and the clay, the shadowy realm of the dead and of demons. That's the first concept.

The second concept is the fire. It's the fire that comes from God—the consuming fire—that is, God. God is love and that fire is eternal. (The lake of fire and brimstone, "theion," can be translated the lake of fire—that is, divinity.)

Gehenna is where Hades meets that fire—where the trash is burned, where they bury the dead, and the fire descends, the edge of the city.

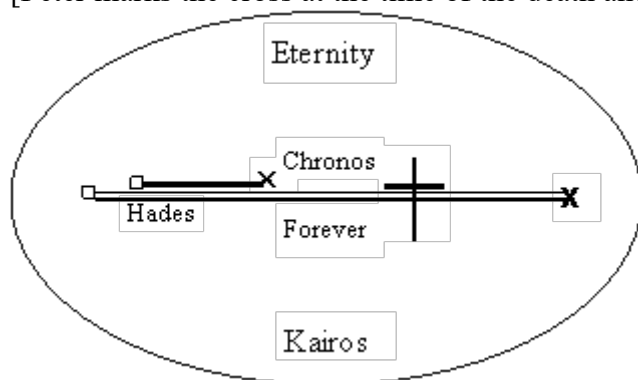
Hades, the realm of the dead, is temporal. It exists in chronological time for at the end of the Revelation (chapter 21), "death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire" and "death shall

be no more.”

[Peter draws on the chronological timeline.]

I suspect death is eternally destroyed which means death was forever nothing. That is, the kingdom of death is revealed as shadows and lies. It's thrown into the lake of fire here [Peter marks the end of time] or maybe here

[Peter marks the cross at the time of the death and resurrection of Christ].



Right now there's not enough time to tell you all the details, but I've spoken to Satan. I've heard Satan. I hate Satan.

Once battling Satan, Jesus appeared to my friend in a vision. In frustration I said, "Ask Jesus, 'Why don't you just throw Satan into the lake of fire?'"

My friend heard Him answer. He said, "I AM, all the time."

Jesus Christ is manifesting His victory through His body in time. Whenever we love, we cast Satan to the fire. Like Jesus, His saints bleed fire.

3) We don't understand hell, and

4) We don't understand our enemy.

It's not the Iraqi's, it's not the Jews, and it's not Judas. It's Satan and the principalities of darkness.

Satan is not the equal opposite of God. He is like nothing. I'm not even convinced he's a created being, creature of the Creator. He's more like the presence of an absence.

Evil is the presence of an absence.

Evil is what God does not will.

Sin is what God does not will.

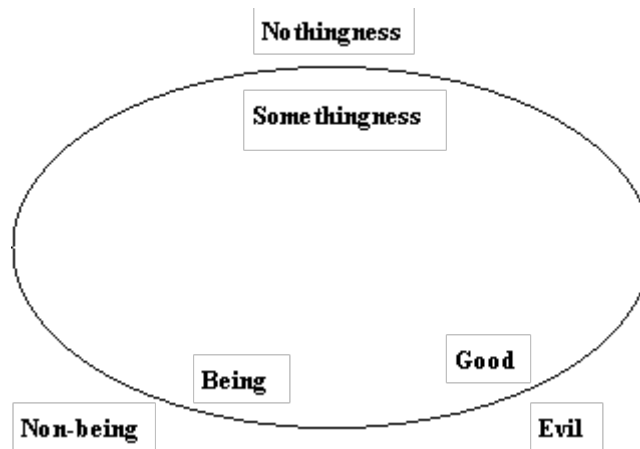
So by hiding our sin and harboring evil,

we give flesh to Satan.

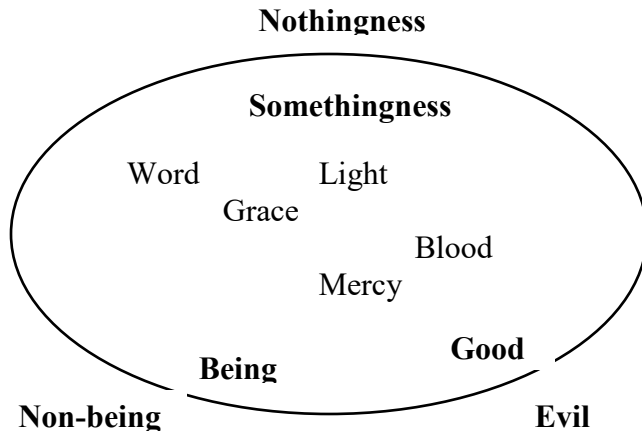
God is Creator.
 Evil is desecrator.
 God is Light.
 Evil is dark.
 God is Truth.
 Evil is lies.
 God is Life.
 Evil is death.
 God is the Substance.
 Evil is the absence,
 a real absence,
 and our real enemy

who tempts us to
 desecration
 darkness
 and lies
 and to harbor our own emptiness
 rather than surrender it to our Creator.

It's like this is creation [Peter draws a diagram].



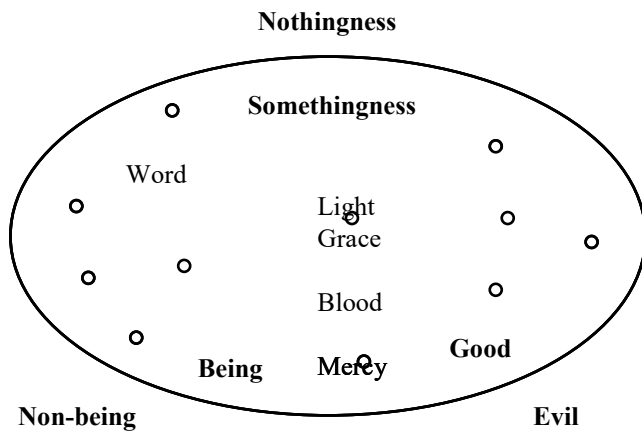
Creation is
 all Word of God,
 all Light,
 all Grace of God,
 all Mercy,
 all blood
 (we swim in the blood of the Lamb)
 "In Him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28)



4) So we don't know who our enemy is, and

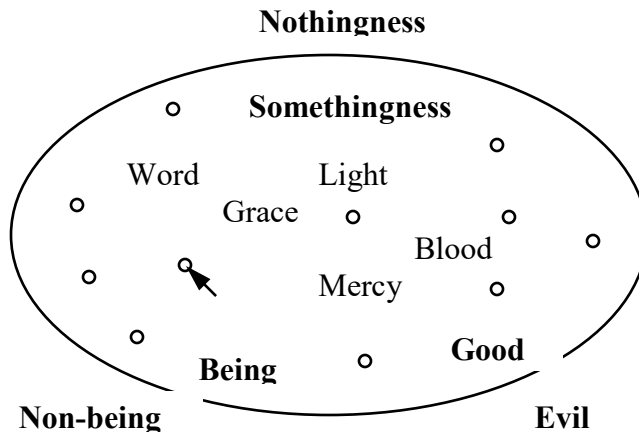
5) We don't know who we are.

I think we are this... holes in the substance. [Peter continues drawing the diagram.] We are creatures being made and not yet finished. We exist at the burning edge of being and non-being.



In and of ourselves we are nothing... nothing but sin, nothing but nothing. As we surrender our sin, our nothing, we are filled with grace—the substance of God, the life of God, the blood of the living God.

[Peter draws an arrow, bursting one of the bubbles with grace.¹]



God bursts our bubble, and we are saved.

But when we harbor our sin and hide our nothingness, we fill ourselves with ourselves. Then we make ourselves nothing but nothing, or perhaps nothing but the edge of nothing.

I don't know how to say it...

We make ourselves clay pots filled with clay
(full of ourselves).

Earthen vessels filled with earth
(unclean vessels),

rather than earthen vessels
ready to be filled with wine,
wine that is blood,
blood that is mercy.

Vessels of mercy,
holy grails,
like a bride filled by her groom,
like a city inhabited by God,
like a temple filled with a Spirit,
like blood vessels filled with blood in a body,
like the body of Christ,
bride of Christ,
the new Jerusalem.

We don't know who we are.

5) We don't know who we are, and

¹ God bursts our bubble with His grace. Then it's no longer "I who live but Christ who lives in me."

6) We don't know who God is. God is the Potter, and we are the clay. Isaiah prophesied that over and over.

God tells Jeremiah in chapter 18 to go watch a potter at the wheel. The pot is spoiled in his hand, and the potter remakes it. God says, "Oh, Israel, can I not do that with you? Repent."

In chapter 19, God commands Jeremiah to take an earthen vessel, go to the Valley of Hinnon (Gehenna) and publicly smash it in the potter's field saying, "So will I break this people and this city as one breaks a potter's vessel so that it can never be mended."

Yet then in Jeremiah 31, Jeremiah prophesied a new covenant and a new city with new boundaries—boundaries that include the valley of dead bodies—for it will be "holy" writes Jeremiah and "never overthrown again."

Then as Jerusalem is besieged by Babylonians, God instructs Jeremiah to buy a field for He has the "right of redemption." And the field is a sign that Jerusalem, though it is to be forever destroyed "so it cannot be mended," will be rebuilt so that it cannot be destroyed because "nothing is too hard for God."²

The Bible ends with a vision. Saint John writes, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. . . And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

Old Jerusalem and the temple were finally destroyed in 70 A.D., one generation after Christ's death on the cross about the time John had his vision.

Well, Zechariah (who prophesied after Jeremiah) was commanded to "shepherd the flock doomed to slaughter." The high priest paid him 30 pieces of silver for his pastoring. Then Zechariah was commanded to throw it into the House of the Lord to the Potter.

See, God is the Potter.

Matthew quotes Zechariah almost word for word and says it's Jeremiah. Some say Matthew screwed up. Well, Matthew's been quoting Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah his whole Gospel. So you see what he's saying? "I don't entirely understand it, but Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah... it's all the same thing, and it's all about now.

As if *now* is the judgment of this world,

now is the evil one cast out, and

now the kingdom comes,

as Jesus is lifted on His cross,
the tree."

7) We don't know what judgment is.

God is the definition of justice. He is judgment. To say He's "unjust" is to say He's not acting like Himself. When we complain to God, we're saying, "You're not acting like Yourself today."

Our problem is we learned *about judgment* before we *met Judgment*, who is Love.

We stole the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So we know *about* good but don't *know* good until we surrender to Jesus.

He's the substance of good.

He is God's judgment on the tree.

²He instructs Jeremiah to put that deed, that covenant, for the field in an earthen vessel... an earthen vessel like you and me. Every Christian is a "messenger of the covenant."

When His earthen vessel was broken,
 love poured out.
 He bled fire.

He fully filled the Law.
 He is the substance and content of God's Law.
 He fulfills the moral Law,
 Himself and in us.
 He fulfills the sacrificial Law,
 He paid for our sin.
 "He has borne our griefs and carried our iniquities."

Anthropologists say every society has a scapegoat, a person or people that everyone blames, in order that the society can have peace and unity.

For 2,000 years Christians have blamed old covenant Jews saying, "It's your fault. You killed the Messiah." Jews are made the scapegoat. Judas is made the scapegoat.

I imagine some of you are nervous because certain people you've consigned to hell are your scapegoat (Iraqi's, Muslims, in-laws, Jews, maybe Judas).

Well, Jesus says to you and to all humanity,

Look! You (not just Judas), you... you betrayed me. You offered me up. You killed me with your sin. And look... I let you. I'm your damn scapegoat! I'm your scapegoat, damned by God on your behalf. You need no other.

Jesus fulfills the moral law, sacrificial law, and even all the little details of the ceremonial law that we're only beginning to see.³

Jesus called Judas "friend." It doesn't mean Judas was good, but the word does mean "partner" or "comrade."

Through Judas Jesus fulfilled the prophets and even ceremonial law. Judas goes to the temple and declares that Jesus is innocent.

The priest was to declare the lamb spotless before Passover.

Judas casts the money into the temple. Money for the temple treasury was to be used for temple construction.

Through Judas and the priests, God used that money to purchase a field, and with His blood He built a temple.

³ Someone pointed out that in Exodus 21:30 Old Testament Law states a man with a dangerous animal (like an ox) is responsible for any death it causes and must pay with his life. Well, it was God's plan to pay with His life for the death of Adam and Eve, tempted by Satan in the snake. God took the form of a slave in Jesus and died in our place. If a slave is killed by that animal, "gored by the ox" (or snake?), the owner shall give the slave's master 30 shekels of silver (Exodus 21:32). Did God pay God to exhibit His justice?

The field was used to bury strangers (for the burial of unclean gentiles was not allowed in the city.)

Yet God builds His temple with strangers purchased with His blood. They are the new Jerusalem.

Years ago in France (so the story goes) some soldiers brought the body of a dead comrade to a French cemetery. The priest asked if the man had been baptized a Roman Catholic. They said they did not know. The priest said he was very sorry, but in that case, he could not permit burial in the church yard.

So the soldiers took their comrade and sadly buried him just outside the fence. The next day, they came back to check the grave and could not find it. They found no trace of the freshly dug soil.

Bewildered, they were preparing to leave when the priest came out. He told them that his heart had been troubled because of his refusal to allow their dead comrade to be buried in the church yard. So early in the morning, he had risen from his bed, and with his own hands, he had moved the fence to include the body of their comrade who had died for the kingdom of France.

Thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave (God made	Himself a slave in Jesus).
Judas threw it into the temple to the Potter, then hung	himself alone on a skulon, a tree in a
field.	

Then he fell headlong, bursting open (like a clay pot that cannot be mended).
 He fell into Gehenna, a field in Gehenna, but that very day that field was purchased, purchased by the One who had the right of redemption, purchased by the Potter for 30 pieces of silver... blood money.

Whose blood?
 Jesus' blood.
 It's the field of blood, God's blood.

The Potter's Field
 purchased by God
 with the blood of Christ.
 Judas fell into that field.

Gehenna doesn't belong to Satan.

It belongs to the Potter, and God is the Potter.

You know, if clay is wet it can be re-formed on the wheel. It happens to us all the time as God forms that empty place inside of us in order to fill us with Himself.

It happened to Peter.

If the clay dries, the pot must be broken if it is ever to be re-made, "broken so it cannot be mended." But shattered it turns back to clay, and then the Potter can make a new pot.

Maybe that happens to Judas.

And even if the clay is fired in a kiln and then shattered, in the presence of water, the

ceramics will eventually turn back to clay.

It just takes aions.

Perhaps Judas is still trapped in Hades in this aion.

Perhaps Judas is forever destroyed in this aion.

But I cannot say God cannot make Him eternally new in the next.

God makes us new at the cross. He destroys us and recreates us. He shapes us and seals us with His fire which is judgment.

If Judas is a thing made new, he is made new through the cross, even if it's at the end of time... the end of time when he passes through the fire, the judgment. No longer a vessel of wrath, but remade a vessel of mercy. (Paul writes that at one time we were all "children of wrath." Ephesians 2:3)

Well, Gehenna is a place where Hades meets the fire and a field where the Potter fires His clay.

Whatever that means you do NOT want to be shattered like Judas in the Potter's Field. Jesus said it is better to cut off a limb than for your whole body to be cast into Gehenna.

Well, I'm just saying we don't understand judgment, and

8) We cannot fathom the extent of God's mercy, that is, the power of the cross.

I don't exactly know what that means for Judas, nor for Bill Baldrige, Aunt Joycie, and Tim Brewer. Like Judas, they were being shaped and emptied of themselves, but terrified, they despised the emptying. They didn't surrender their emptiness to God (like Peter). They broke their vessels (like Judas).

They murdered themselves with themselves which is only more self, more clay, more nothing, more evil, for which Christ dearly pays. And yet, I expect to see them in eternity for Jesus bought the Potter's Field, and Jeremiah said, "Nothing is too hard for the Potter."

I'm not God, so I don't know, but that's what I eagerly expect for He said, "I make all things new," and Billy Baldrige, Aunt Joycie, and Tim Brewer were not no thing but some thing.

Whatever the case, with Jesus' blood, God purchased the Potter's Field in the Valley of Gehenna. It was outside the walls of old Jerusalem, but now eternally inside the walls of the new Jerusalem.

What exactly that means, I don't know, but it at least means this:

1) God is good. I mean He's like way, way, way good, and so you can entrust judgment to God. And you must stop living in fear of death, hell, and the Potter's Field. There's One you are to fear, and He's your Daddy, and He's very fond of you.

So all you Peter Hiatt's,
preach the Gospel,
constrained not by fear but love.

All you Dan Hiatt's,
speak the truth,
not in terror but in faith.

All you Tim Brewer's,
 surrender your weakness,
 not in shame but in hope.

For God is good.

- 2) You are, like... not good. Don't worry, you're being made to contain the good, and that makes you good.
- 3) You are an earthen vessel, a vessel of mercy. Your maker hasn't gone away. He is the Potter; you are the clay.

Remember Clay, the teapot? We preached on him a bunch last year. This is Clay [Peter holds up the teapot]. He's come from the Potter's Field. This is what he's made for [Peter pours the communion wine into Clay]. This is what you are being made for.

In the name of Jesus, believe that your Father, the Potter, is good.

So on the night that He was betrayed, Jesus, from the bosom of the Father, took bread, and He broke it saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat." And in the same manner after supper and having given thanks, He took the cup, and He said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, the new covenant [eternal covenant] in my blood."

We invite you to come to the table, tear off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup. The black cups are wine; the purple cups are juice. They're both fire, blood, mercy, substance.

And now, pray with me. In fact, if you would, say these words after me:

Lord Jesus, in Your name and under Your authority, I renounce the spirit of death and suicide. I surrender my death to You. I surrender my emptiness to You. Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus! Fill me, Your earthen vessel. So be it.

So, Lord Jesus, we bless Your name, and we thank You for this sixth day in which You make us and shape us in Your image, but we thank You that this sixth day comes to an end, and we'll walk into the seventh day. We'll enter Your rest into perfection, and then we'll see with new eyes. We'll look around, and we'll see a new heaven and a new earth. And, oh Lord God, I think we'll cry out to You, "You did it! You did it!" And You'll say, "Told you so."

Oh, God, we only begin to see now, and we don't understand now, and so we doubt. Oh, Jesus, You know I doubt, but when I begin to see just a little bit how good You are, oh God, it's like this freaky, weird desire in me, I almost want to die for You, to tell people about You, not because it's my job but because You're good. And I want to surrender my emptiness and my heart to You saying, "Oh, God, fill me for You are good. I want You."

Oh, God, sometimes I just begin to believe. And so we pray that You would open the eyes of our hearts that in this land, in this Potter's Field, in this place we're being shaped and made, we would trust You, and we would declare Your name, and we would be the first fruits of that new creation, declaring that You have done it, and You are good, and You are Jesus our savior from the bosom of the Father, and so we can trust God's heart. It's in Your name we pray, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Now listen, if some of you are confused, it's because you're empty pot-heads. That's normal. I don't understand everything. However, the Potter has given us some incredible gifts. He's given us scripture that is true, but even more than that, He's given us His heart, Jesus, who is the Truth. So you can look at scripture, and you can call upon the Truth and ask Him to help you.

A great place to do that, especially in regard to this sermon is Romans 9-11. In Romans 9-11 Paul asks the question, "Is there injustice on God's part?" And then he talks about vessels of wrath, and he talks about vessels of mercy. The vessels of wrath are like unrepentant Israel and Pharaoh and stuff like that, and then he goes on to say, "And so all Israel will be saved." And then he goes on and he says this in verse 32, let this be the benediction. "For God has consigned all to disobedience that He may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. [Can't figure it out? Listen to this next line.] How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever, amen."

If you would like prayer, members of the prayer ministry team will be down front. In Jesus' name, believe God is good. Amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

Then 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." 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.

Matthew 27:3-5 (ESV)

(Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

Acts 1:18-19 (ESV)

But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

Matthew 27:6-10 (ESV)

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.

Jeremiah 18:1-4 (ESV)

Thus says the LORD, “Go, buy a potter’s earthenware flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests, and go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. You shall 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 bringing such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. . . . “Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, and shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter’s vessel, so that it can never be mended. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury. Thus will I do to this place, declares the LORD, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth.’”

Jeremiah 19:1-3, 19:10-12 (ESV)

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. . . . “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah. The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be sacred to the LORD. It shall not be uprooted or overthrown anymore forever.”

Jeremiah 31:31-32, 31:38-40 (ESV)

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah. . . . Jeremiah said, “The word of the LORD came to me: ‘Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you and say, ‘Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.’ . . . And I bought the field at Anathoth from Hanamel my cousin, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales. . . . Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware vessel, that they may last for a long time.’ For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.’ After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD, saying: “Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.”

Jeremiah 32:1-2, 32:6-7, 32:9-10, 32:14-17 (ESV)

Thus said the Lord my God: “Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. . . . And I took my staff Favor, and I broke it, annulling the covenant that I had made with all the peoples. So it was annulled on that day, and the sheep traders, who were watching me, knew that it was the word of the Lord. Then I said to them, “If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter. [If the ox gores a slave, male or female, the owner shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned. (Exodus 21:32)]

Zechariah 11:4, 11:10-13 (ESV)

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. . . . You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” [Isaiah 29:16, 45:9, 25:16] Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? . . . Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” . . . For

God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Romans 9:14-16, 9:19-24, 11:25-27, 11:32-36 (ESV)

Your hands fashioned and made me, and now you have destroyed me altogether. Remember that you have made me like clay; and will you return me to the dust?

Job 10:8-9 (ESV)

Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. . . . By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Genesis 2:7, 3:19 (ESV)

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth [in Hebrew “dust”]. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.

Job 19:25-26 (ESV)

They will suffer the punishment of eternal [aionios] destruction, away from [Or destruction that comes from] the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. . . . “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment.”

Revelation 20:14-15, 21:4-6 (RSV)

Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary, and deliver Jacob to utter destruction and Israel to reviling.

Isaiah 43:28 (ESV)

And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal [aionios] chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal [aionios] fire.

Jude 1:6-7 (ESV)

Therefore, O prostitute [Jerusalem], hear the word of the LORD. . . . “As I live, declares the Lord GOD, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. . . . Bear your disgrace, you also, for you have intervened on behalf of your sisters. Because of your sins in which you acted more abominably than they, they are more in the right than you. So be ashamed, you also, and bear your disgrace, for you have made your sisters appear righteous. I will restore their fortunes, both the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters, and the fortunes of Samaria and her daughters, and I will restore your own fortunes in their midst, that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all that you have done, becoming a consolation to them. As for your sisters, Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former state, and you and your daughters shall return to your former state.”

Ezekiel 16:35, 16:48-49, 16:52-55 (ESV)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. . . .

And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Revelation 21:1-3, 21:14 (ESV)

He gave me insight into these things, along with all pains that ever were and ever shall be; and compared with these I realize that Christ's Passion was the greatest pain and went beyond them all. And all this was shown in a flash, and quickly changed into comfort; for our good Lord did not want the soul to be afraid of this ugly sight. But I did not see sin; for I believe it has no sort of substance nor portion of being, nor could it be recognized were it not for the suffering which it causes. And this suffering seems to me to be something transient, for it purges us and makes us know ourselves and pray for mercy; for the Passion of our Lord supports us against all this, and that is his blessed will. And because of the tender love which our good Lord feels for all who shall be saved, he supports us willingly and sweetly, meaning this: It is true that sin is the cause of all this suffering, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well. . . . And I wondered greatly at this revelation, and considered our faith, wondering as follows: our faith is grounded in God's word, and it is part of our faith that we should believe that God's word will be kept in all things; and one point of our faith is that many shall be damned—like the angels who fell out of heaven from pride, who are now fiends, and men on earth who die outside the faith of Holy Church, that is, those who are heathens, and also any man who has received Christianity and lives an unChristian life and so dies excluded from the love of God. Holy Church teaches me to believe that all these shall be condemned everlastingly to hell. And given all this, I thought it impossible that all manner of things should be well, as our Lord revealed at this time. And I received no other answer in showing from our Lord God but this: "What is impossible to you is not impossible to me. I shall keep my word in all things and I shall make all things well."

Julian of Norwich, Revelations of Divine Love, p. 79-80, 86

On this shadow side the creature is contiguous to nothingness for this "not" is at once the expression and frontier of the positive will, election and activity of God. When the creature crosses the frontier from the one side, and it is invaded from the other, nothingness achieves actuality in the creaturely world. . . . Nothingness is that which God does not will. . . . This being which is alien and adverse to grace and therefore without it, is that of nothingness. . . . And this is evil in the Christian sense, namely what is alien and adverse to grace, and therefore without it. . . . The grace of God is the basis and norm of all being, the source and criterion of all good. Measured by this standard, as the negation of God's grace, nothingness is intrinsically evil. . . . He [God] knows nothingness. He knows that which He did not elect or will as the Creator. He knows chaos and its terror. He knows its advantage over His creature. He knows how inevitably it imperils His creature. Yet He is Lord over that which imperils His creature. Against Him, nothingness has no power of its own. And He has sworn fidelity to His threatened creature. In creating it He has covenanted and identified Himself with it. . . . And therefore it is He as the first and true and indeed the only man, and the Helper who really takes the creature's place, lifting from it all its need and labour and problem and placing them upon Himself as the Warrior who assumes the full responsibility of a substitute and suffers and does everything on its behalf. In the light of this merciful action of God, the arrogant delusion of the creature that it is called and qualified to help and save and maintain itself in its infinite peril is shown to be evil as well as foolish and unnecessary. . . . As God takes action on its behalf, the creature itself is summoned and empowered. It has no arrogant illusion as to its own authority or competence. It really trusts in God, perseveres in His covenant and chooses His help as the only effective good. But if it does this it can and will take action in the conflict with nothingness.

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics