

TAKING COUNSEL **(Matthew 27:1-10)**

Where do you go and to whom do you turn when you need advice? When you are unsure as to the next step to take, how do you get direction and sound guidance?

In just about every town in America, there is a group of retired men who get up early, go to a local café or restaurant, visit with each other, drink coffee, and solve the world's problems. Unfortunately, their collective wisdom rarely gets beyond the walls of the place they meet each morning.

In Salt Lake City, however, there was a group of seven retired men who decided there were others who might benefit from their knowledge, experience, and hard-won wisdom, and they did something about it. They set up a card table at the nearby farmer's market and told people they were dispensing free advice. They made a large banner that read: "Old Coots Giving Advice—It's Probably Bad Advice, But It's Free."

To their surprise, people started showing up and sharing their problems. A lot of them. They fielded such questions as:

- "Where can I find someone to love?"
- "Have I put in enough time at my new job to take a one-week vacation?"
- "How do you keep the romance alive?"

Each Saturday, the "Old Coots" talk with about 30 to 40 people who come by seeking their counsel. Tony Caputo, one of the Old Coots explained, "It's a way for a person to get an outside opinion from somebody who has nothing to gain." He added, "Somebody told us the other day that we're the most popular attraction at the market."

John Lesnan, age 69, confessed, "To be truthful, I'm not sure that any of us can claim to have much wisdom, but it sure has been a lot of fun. Maybe all of us coots really do have more to offer than we thought."

I recently read that personal coaching has grown to become a one-billion-dollar a year industry in the United States. Just 20 years ago it was practically non-existent, but today you can hire a sleep coach, a financial coach, a vocational coach, a life coach, and I have known people who have hired a spiritual advisor to coach them on how to have a closer walk with God.

Believe it or not, there was actually day when people used to call or visit their grandparents and asked them how to do this or that. Older generations have always been the repository of great wisdom concerning how to live life, but for whatever reason, people are willing to pay \$150 an hour or more for an expert to tell them what grandpa and grandma could've told them for free.

The Bible has a lot to say about wise counsel. King Solomon, for instance, wrote: "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22). In the very next verse, the wise king adds, ". . . a word in season, how good it is!"

Haven't you had the experience of hearing someone say something of relevance and importance and you responded, "Wow! I needed to hear that"?

King Solomon expounded on that thought. He wrote in Proverbs 25:11, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver."

The secret to becoming a wise counselor is listening to and heeding wise counsel.

The word *counsel* is used over 120 times in the Bible. The phrase *take* or *taken counsel* is used 10 times, and the past tense, *took counsel*, appears 13 times in Scripture. The last two times those words *took counsel* show up in the Bible happens to be in today's text—Matthew 27:1-10. This morning, I want to emphasize that it matters where you get your counsel. It matters to whom you give your ear. Be careful as to the authors you read and as to those who command and capture your attention.

I submit for your consideration two questions.

Question #1: From Which Source Will You Take Counsel?

In the passage we read, we find several sources from which people routinely take counsel.

1. Some Take Counsel from Their Peers.

Look back at 27:1. I have a number of different versions and paraphrases of the Bible on the book case above the computer in my office. When I prepare a message, I normally read the passage in multiple versions. Not surprisingly, I discovered that the KJV, the NASB, and the ESV all translated the two Greek words of v. 1 that describe what the religious leaders did the same way: *took counsel*. Various other translations sought to give the sense of the meaning.

- The NIV: “came to the decision”
- The Good News Bible: “made their plans”
- The NLT: “met again to discuss”
- The Message: “met and put the finishing touches on their plot to kill Jesus”

No matter how you render it, the point is that these religious leaders consulted with one another and talked and strategized how to accomplish their goal of getting rid of Jesus, this upstart Rabbi who was a proverbial thorn in their collective side. They met as peers who had a common goal.

I usually work four afternoons a week as the Grief Care Coordinator for the Hospice Circle of Love here in Enid. Every other Tuesday at Noon we have an Interdisciplinary Team Meeting. We call it IDT. At that meeting, we have nurses, bath aides, the chaplain, the Grief Care Coordinator, the Director of Nursing, and sometimes a local physician. As peers, we discuss each of our patients, including the new admits and those who just recently passed. We have common goals for our patients. So, we discuss our patients and strategize. We take counsel with one another for the benefit of our patients.

That is a work example of taking counsel with your peers, but it happens in your life in many other ways. Moms consult with moms on child raising concerns. Friends talk with friends to get a recommendation on a doctor to use, or a restaurant to try, or a place to vacation.

Now, if your friend likes sushi and you don't care for sushi, you're probably going to disregard his or her recommendation for that restaurant that serves really, great sushi.

Likewise, when it comes to spiritual matters and moral dilemmas, you want to make sure that your peer shares your values and your convictions before you accept their counsel.

It is said that in an old, Moravian cemetery, there is an epitaph that reads:

*Remember, friend, as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I;
As I am now thus you must be,
So be prepared to follow me.*

The story goes that a passerby noticed the epitaph, and he penned a response:

*To follow you I'm not content
Until I know which way you went.*

Be careful! Don't adopt the values and concerns of those who do not follow the Lord. The Bible offers clear guidance in 1 Corinthians 15:33 where Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.'"

2. Some Take Counsel from Authorities.

When Judas learned that the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to die, he was heart-broken at what he had done. Some conjecture that Judas did what he did so as to force Jesus' hand. Maybe he thought that if he got Jesus arrested, then Jesus would use His miraculous power to turn the tables on the bad guys. Regardless, when Judas finally realized what wasn't going to happen, he deeply and profoundly regretted what he had done, what he had set in motion.

Judas went to the religious authorities, the very ones he had made a deal with to betray Jesus. I'm not exactly sure what he expected to happen, but it seems that Judas wanted to undo what he had done. Judas may have remembered a policy that was supposed to govern how the Sanhedrin handled criminal cases. They had a three-day rule. On the first day, the sentence would be handed down. On the third day, the sentence would be carried out. But on the second day, there was a waiting period. Maybe, someone would come in with new testimony that would exonerate the accused. Maybe, new evidence would be discovered that would show the accused person wasn't guilty after all. Thus, the sentence could be overturned.

So, Judas shows up and says, "Hey, I've made a mistake. Jesus is innocent." Judas doesn't realize they are not waiting for further testimony. They are not open to new evidence. As far as they are concerned, the case is closed. "Let's be done with it," is their sentiment.

Those religious authorities listen to Judas with arms folded. When he confesses his wrong-doing, they say with cold-blooded indifference, "That's your problem, not ours."

Authorities, whether they are civil, political, medical, judicial, educational, financial, scientific, religious, or whatever the arena, are human. And like all of us other humans, they are fallible. Sometimes they get it wrong, and often times they disagree. How many different answers and protocols have we been given in regard to protecting ourselves

from COVID-19? The authorities don't always agree. Sometimes they are dead wrong. They are kind of like the weatherman.

I once had a church member named Ted Franklin. More than once he told me about the time that he shoveled four inches of partly cloudy off of his driveway.

You can't always trust the authorities. Do you know the definition of an *expert*? An *expert* is a former drip under pressure. Think about it.

There is one authority, however, you can trust. You can trust Him fully and completely. He is the One who said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" (Matthew 28:18). He has never made a mistake. He has never erred nor ever been taken surprise by an unexpected event.

While some take counsel from peer and some from authorities . . .

3. Some Take Counsel from Themselves.

This is what Judas did. Look at v. 5. It is no accident that Matthew tells us about Judas right after giving us the story of Peter's failure. He is drawing a contrast between the two. How is that Peter recovered from denying Jesus while Judas was unable to come back after having betrayed Jesus? Was one sin worse than the other? Isn't denial simply another form of betrayal? Sure, it is.

In some ways both men were alike.

- Both had been chosen by Jesus to be one of His Twelve disciples.
- Both had standing among the Twelve. Peter seems to have been somewhat of a spokesman for the disciples. Judas was the Treasurer.
- Both made huge blunders, colossal errors.
- Both felt terrible about what they had done.

But Peter made His way back while Judas did not. What made the difference? The difference is explained by Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:9-10. Both Peter and Judas grieved over their sin, but Peter had a godly grief that led him to repentance while Judas only had worldly grief. His grief was focused on himself.

I can think of four suicides recorded in the Bible. Two, however, took place after being on the losing side of a battle. King Saul intentionally fell on his sword so that he would not be mistreated by his approaching enemies. When his armor-bearer saw what the king did, he the same.

Thus, I only know of two suicides in the Bible when death was not imminent anyway. One was Judas, and the other was a man named Ahitophel. His story is found in 2 Samuel 16 & 17. There are some similarities between the two. Both men served someone they thought would become King. Judas served Jesus, and Ahitophel served Absalom, the Son of King David. Both men were traitors. Judas betrayed Jesus, and Ahitophel betrayed David whom he used to serve. When Absalom sought to wrest the kingship from his father, Ahitophel switched sides.

Interestingly, Ahitophel served both men as a counselor. We read in 2 Samuel 16:23, "Now in those days, the counsel that Ahitophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel Ahitophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom."

Wily, old King David, however, was able to insert a double agent into Absalom's

inner circle. It was another counselor named Hushai. Hushai was able to frustrate the counsel of wise Ahitophel by giving Absalom advice that, unknown to the would-be king, was not in his best interest. When Absalom chose to accept the counsel of Hushai, Ahitophel could read the writing on the wall, and like Judas would do 900 years later, he hung himself.

Suicide is never the answer. It is the coward's way out. It is also the most selfish act a person can take. The person who takes his own life is so consumed with his own hurt that he cannot see beyond himself to recognize the hurt he is going to inflict upon family and friends and those who knew him and loved him.

Last month, Ruth Ann, Lance, Sarah, Gemma, and I attended a funeral for a 14-year old boy who the kids knew. Tragically, for reasons unknown to us, he chose to take his own life. It is probably the saddest funeral I have ever attended, and I have been to a lot of funerals since I became a pastor back in 1987.

Had that boy known the depth of sorrow he would visit upon so many, I have to believe he would have made a different choice.

When faced with that choice or, really, any choice, seek the Lord. Listen for His voice. Seek His counsel.

Earlier in the message, I told you that I wanted to submit two questions for your consideration. We have considered the first question: "From which source will you take counsel?" With the little time that is left, let's go on to . . .

Question #2: On What Subjects Will You Take Counsel?

Our text suggests two, specific subjects on which we need wise counsel. The first answers the question . . .

1. What Are We to Do with Jesus?

The religious leaders knew what they wanted to do with Jesus, but they had to figure out a way to accomplish what they wanted to do. To that end, they consulted, and discussed, and planned. They took counsel with one another.

Interestingly, not many verses later, there is another man who is in a quandary. Look at v. 22. Unfortunately, Pilate is asking the wrong people. He is asking the enemies of Jesus what he should do with Jesus.

The Bible offers us a different approach to take when we are trying to figure things out. Isaiah 1:18 offers a wonderful invitation: "Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD." I like the way that verse is rendered in the Voice Bible. It reads, "Come on now, let's walk and talk; let's work this out." That's what it means to take counsel with God.

God will show you what to do with Jesus. He will make it unmistakably clear, and when you do what He says, "though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white as snow."

There is something else on which we need to take counsel, another question which we need to answer.

2. How Are We to Deal with Our Guilt.

That is the very thing with which Judas struggled. He knew he had done the wrong thing, but he didn't know how to get rid of his guilt and shame.

Have you ever been there?

I don't know how many times I have talked with people who said or thought, "God could never forgive me. I am too far gone. There is no hope for me."

Yes, there is. Come to Him and experience the truth of the hymn which exclaims:

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt! Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured—There where the love of the Lamb was spilt. Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that will pardon and cleans within, Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that is greater than all our sin!

That hymn is a poetic exposition of the truth found in Romans 5:20, ". . . Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

In order to deal with your guilt, you have to own it. It is your guilt. It does no good to blame someone else, a parent, a partner, a friend, the world. We are responsible for our own sin and our own guilt. While we are responsible for incurring the guilt; we are not responsible for taking the guilt away. Only Jesus can do that, and He will only do that if we ask Him to do so.

John gave us a wonderful promise in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Forgiveness is ours for the asking.

As cold and as uncaring as the later part of v. 4 sounds, it is really true. There was nothing the religious leaders could do for Judas. He had to take responsibility for his own sin and guilt. The sad thing is that they failed to recognize their own sin and guilt.

When Judas returned the 30 pieces of silver, they were left to decide what to do with it. It is almost comical. They referred to the money as blood money which they took out of the treasury to pay Judas to betray Judas. Now that he has returned it, they say they can't put it back into the treasury because it is blood money. It was okay take it out to see that Jesus was killed, but it is not okay to put it back in. They saw blood, symbolically, on the money, but they failed to see it on their own hands. You can't deal with your guilt until you recognize your guilt.

Since the money was unclean, they used it to purchase land to be made into a cemetery, an unclean place, for unclean people—Gentiles.

We are told in v. 7 that those religious leaders *took counsel* with one another to make that decision.

There is a saying that none of us are as stupid as all of us. Sometimes, we are less likely to do a stupid thing alone, but we are emboldened to do that stupid thing when it is covered by the fact that the whole group is doing it.

I only know of one sure fire way of not doing stupid things, and that is getting and following wise, godly counsel.

When I was the senior pastor of a church that had multiple staff members serving in various capacities, I would tell them in staff meeting, "One of your chief duties is to keep me from doing something stupid."

God may have given you a wife, or a husband, or a parent, or a friend to keep from doing something stupid. Look for and listen to wise counsel.

For that reason, let me give you three take-aways, three things for you to do:

- 1) Cultivate a friendship with a godly person.
- 2) Regularly read the word of God.
- 3) Ask God to grow you into a person of prayer.

If you will do those three things, you will obtain the counsel you need to enjoy a well-lived life.