

Repent and Believe

Concerning the Eternal Fate
of a Christian Lost to Suicide

By Jake Zabel, BTh

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In memory of my father
Kenneth Zabel
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Concerning the Eternal Fate of a Christian Lost to Suicide

Preface

Can a person who commits suicide receive eternal salvation? This is a question that plagues the minds of many people who have lost a loved one to suicide. I myself witnessed the tragic suicidal death of my father and apart from the general emotional and mental discomfort I faced, I was also spiritually disturbed. I was uncertain of his final resting place, Heaven or Hell? Originally I was convinced that suicide was unforgivable. Luke 13:3,5 says that if you don't repent, you will perish, therefore, my issue was with how a person could repent after they were dead? They couldn't. Hence, suicide was unforgivable because once the sin is committed you're dead and you can't repent. Some have argued this only relates to an instantaneous suicide, and those who suffer a longer death caused by suicide have the time to repent of this act. This answer is incorrect, dangerous and raises a number of issues.

One, instead of providing a troubled mind with comfort, it provides a license to sin for those who are suffering and are considering suicide. A person considering suicide could say to themselves, "I'll do it, but I'll make sure I allow myself time to repent so that I can still receive salvation." No! That is pre-meditated sin; you are not truly repentant. Instead you are using God's grace and the act of repentance as a justification of lawlessness.

Two, this idea of repentance between cause of death and time of death is a fool's dream and is almost nonexistent among suicide victims. I had the unfortunate privilege of discovering my father in such a stage. My father had attempted to burn himself to death. I had found him early that following morning, after the events that would eventually lead to his death but before death had overcome him. In attempts to save his life I had time before the ambulance arrived to listen to his ramblings. He was not repentant. The idea that a person would be willing to repent after committing the act that would later cause their death is foolishness. Once a person has accepted the decision to commit suicide they are no longer with us, they become emotionally, mentally and psychologically lost (hence the subtitle *a Christian Lost to Suicide*). My father did not repent of his sin of suicide and he was in no state to do so. Therefore a person lost to a slow death by suicide has just as much chance to repent of their sins as a person lost to an instantaneous death by suicide. This brought me back to my original issue, that a person killed by suicide was unforgiveable and therefore condemned to eternal condemnation. This answer did not sit well with me and caused me great discomfort. Unable to find any clear Christian teachings on suicide I relied on the opinions of fellow Christians via website comments and responses to those comments. Since no clear doctrine exists I have had to draw on the other clear Christian teachings, such as: Christ has died for our sins, all humans have sinned, all sin is equal in the eyes of the Lord, and justification by grace alone through faith alone. By drawing on these biblical teachings I have been able to come to a conclusion on the eternal fate of a Christian lost to suicide.

Before we enter into the discussion on what my conclusion is concerning the fate of a person lost to suicide, and how I arrived at that conclusion I firstly need to make a few things straight.

Firstly, my final conclusion was not led by a blind search to justify the sin of my father but has been developed by a search for truth to deal with an issue that has no clear teaching. I wish to make this clear, that despite my final conclusion that my father has received forgiveness and is currently enjoying eternal salvation, my decision is not a biased attempt to make myself feel better by rejecting the truth and believing my father is better off. My decision is based on my belief in

Scriptural Truth and the conclusion is rooted in Christian doctrine. I have not sought out salvation for my father, to be truly honest, many a time my attempts were to create the exact opposite outcome. My father's actions caused me and my family a great deal of pain and suffering. My heart had been filled with pure hatred for my father and I will admit that a number of times I wished eternal damnation upon him. I longed to know that he was suffering for the pain and trauma he had caused me and my family when he decided to abandon us. Despite my hate-filled wishes, my decision on the fate of a Christian lost to suicide supports the belief that my father, among numerous other suicide victims, can and has received forgiveness for his suicide and in turn has received eternal happiness.

Secondly, I must clarify the purpose of this writing. I am seeking to bring comfort and support to those who have lost a loved one to suicide and to supply a clear Christian teaching on the fate of a suicide victim for those people who, like me, have struggled with the question, "what is the final fate of a suicide victim?" With this I too must be clear, I am not writing to offer a solution to those considering suicide. I am not providing them with a theological defence so that they can go and kill themselves with a clear conscience. As mentioned above that is pre-mediated sin and will not provide them with repentance. I do not wish for people to read this treatise and think, "hey this guy says that if I commit suicide I can be forgiven and receive salvation, that means I no longer have to stay in this life, I can kill myself now and score a free ticket to heaven." NO! Such thoughts will only land you in Hell. It is Scripturally and theologically incorrect and borders on Universalism. *"God's forgiveness is no excuse, much less justification, for sin. The man who kills himself in the sense of taking the life which does not belong to him violates the commandment and murders as well as kills...Suicide cannot be extenuated, excused or justified. Freedom before this God, the only true God, cannot be freedom for suicide."* (Karl Barth – **Church Dogmatics Vol. III.4**, pg 78-79) The key word that needs to be remembered is **can**. A suicide victim **can** be forgiven, that doesn't necessarily mean they will be. God is always the final judge. *"We take Jesus seriously when he says that there are two paths, one to life and another to destruction, and people will wind up in one of two eternal destinies (Matthew 25:31-46). We live with the reality that there is a Heaven and a Hell, and all of us will someday see one or the other."* (Albert Hsu – **Grieving a Suicide: The Search for Comfort, Answers and Hope**, pg 107)

This treatise is thus written to provide a clear teaching on the issues involved in the fate of a Christian suicide victim and to hopefully provide a comforting answer to those families who have lost a loved one to suicide and are faced with the daunting questions surrounding their spiritual fate. *"Those of us grieving a suicide are already in pain because our loved one is no longer with us. Then we are further tormented with the possibility that she or he is suffering in Hell. We are haunted by terrible questions: What if we will never see our loved ones again? What if they are lost forever? Is suicide the unforgivable sin? Do suicides automatically go to Hell?"* (Albert Hsu, pg 100)

Now in coming to my conclusion on the fate of a suicide victim there were two issues that needed to be looked at: can a person who commits suicide be forgiven? And, if they didn't repent before they died how can they be forgiven? Both are valid questions and pose a lot of struggles when determining the fate of a suicide victim. I have been able to use the teachings from both the Bible and the Christian Church to answer both and show how someone lost to suicide can still receive salvation.

Is Suicide the Unforgivable Sin?

The first question on “can a person who commits suicide be forgiven?” should not be a problematic question for those of the Christian Faith, but for those non-Christians or for those Christians who don’t understand the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone, this may cause some issues.

Before we address the first question there are two further questions that must be addressed first: is suicide a sin? And is suicide the unforgivable sin? *“In considering the wrongfulness of suicide, we can be tempted to make one of two equal and opposite errors. One is to think of suicide as an unforgivable sin. The other is to not consider it a sin at all.”* (Albert Hsu, pg 110) The two greatest shapers of the Christian doctrine concerning suicide are St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Thomas Aquinas. Writing in the 4th Century AD, Augustine gives us the earliest recorded condemnation of suicide as a sin, *“certainly anyone who kills himself is a murderer.”* (**City of God**, pg 27) In Ancient Roman culture suicide was more common and more acceptable, thus Augustine needed to show people why suicide is a sin. Accordingly, he writes that suicide violates the commandment, *“you shall not kill.”* (Exodus 20: 13, Deuteronomy 5:17) And that since it does not add the words ‘your neighbour’, as does *“You shall not bear false witness,”* and *“do not covet”* (Exodus 20:16-17, Deuteronomy 5:20,21), it must also relate to killing oneself, *“for to kill oneself is to kill a human being.”* (pg 32) He also states that true love of one’s neighbour starts with love for oneself, since the Scriptures say *“you shall love your neighbour as yourself.”* (Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:39) There is, however, one issue that I have with Augustine concerning what he says in regards to suicide. That is his following statement, *“certainly anyone who kills himself is a murderer, and is the more guilty in killing himself the more innocent he is of the charge on which he has condemned himself to death.”* (pg 27) There are two problems with this statement. One, there is no such thing as a sinner being more or less guilty than another, at least in the eyes of God. There is no scale for sins, for all sins are equal in Gods eyes. As James said, *“for whoever keeps the whole Law but stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”* (2:10) Two, there is no such thing as an innocent person, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23) But even though Augustine’s wording may be incorrect, his theology is not. Augustine was dealing with people who were arguing that it was okay to commit suicide in order to avoid persecution. Augustine was mainly dealing with rape martyrs, women who were being raped because they were Christian. These women were then committing suicide to avoid being raped. Others were following their example and committing suicide to avoid torture and persecution. Augustine’s argument is that we cannot simply commit suicide to avoid the pain and suffering of this world. We are told that in this world we will suffer (John 16:33) but that we are not to fear those who can harm only our bodies but we are to fear God, who alone has the authority to cast both body and soul into Hell. (Matthew 10:28, Luke 12:4-5) Therefore what Augustine means by his above statement, is that those women who are raped are guilty of no sin, but those who commit suicide are guilty of murder. Thus those who commit suicide to avoid rape, torture or persecution are murdering an innocent person. Thus what Augustine meant by his statement is ‘if Judas who was guilty of betrayal sinned when he committed suicide, then how much more have you sinned when you kill yourself who is innocent.’ Augustine wraps up his discussion on suicide by saying that if there were ever a valid reason to commit to suicide; it would be to commit suicide in order that you would never commit another sin ever again. But since this is not a valid reason, then no valid reason exists. (pg 39)

As for St. Thomas Aquinas, a 13th Century scholastic theologian, he too wrote against people who were attempting to justify suicide and claim that in certain circumstances it wasn't a sin. In his *Summa Theologia* (2-2) he lists the five arguments proposed to justify suicide: (vol 38, pg 31,33)

1. **Nobody can sin by killing himself, because no one can commit an injustice against himself.** Very similar to the Corinthians' argument, "*every sin that a person commits is outside the body.*" (1 Corinthians 6:18)
2. **Those in places of authority have the right to kill guilty criminals, thus they have the right to kill themselves if they are guilty.**
3. **A person can expose himself to a lesser danger in order to avoid a greater danger, just as a person is allowed to cut off one limb in order to save the whole body.** This argument is a twofold excuse. One, following the same issue Augustine faced, the excuse is that a person can kill themselves in order to avoid a sin being committed against them. Two, a person may kill themselves to avoid committing sins against other people. This idea comes from Caiaphas' comment in John 11:50, "*that it is better for one man to die than to destroy a whole nation.*"
4. **Samson killed himself and he is still listed among the saints in Hebrews (11:32), therefore suicide is not a sin.**
5. **In the Second book of the Maccabees (14:42) Razis fell upon his own sword to avoid being captured and suffering the shame of being killed by 'sinners'.** To use an example from the Canonical books of Scripture, King Saul (1 Samuel 31:3-6, 1 Chronicles 10:3-6) fell upon his own sword to avoid being captured and suffering the shame of being killed by the Philistines. **And since no noble or courageous act is a sin, then suicide cannot be a sin.**

Aquinas will directly respond to each of these five arguments in favour of suicide but before he does he gives three reasons why suicide is a sin: (pg 33)

1. **Everything natural loves itself,** "*for no one hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it*" (Ephesians 5:29), **therefore suicide runs against one's natural inclinations and violates Natural Law.**
2. **Everyone is part of a community, and therefore suicide damages the community.** To tweak Paul's statement, "we are all members of Christ's body, should I therefore take a member of Christ's body and commit suicide." (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:15-16)
3. **God alone is master of life and death as he declares in Deuteronomy "I kill and I make alive."** (32:39) Also our bodies do not belong to us but to God (1 Corinthians 6:19), and that our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20)

From these three reasons Aquinas is able to show how the five arguments are incorrect and invalid:

1. Since our bodies belong to God and are part of a community when we sin against ourselves we sin against God, our loved ones and the whole community.
2. People in places of authority may have public authority to kill a criminal (capital punishment is not legal in Australia but does still exist in many parts of the world), but nobody has the authority to be judge of their own case. Therefore no representative of public authority has the right to kill themselves in regard to sin, although they may, of course, hand themselves over to the judgement of others.
3. In this argument Aquinas is dealing with the exact same issue that Augustine was arguing against. Aquinas argues that it is not up to man to decide when he should pass into the next life, "*a man may not, therefore, kill himself in order to pass into the more blessed life.*" (pg 35) But instead if a person inflicts death upon themselves in order to avoid the miseries of this life, they commit a greater sin to avoid a lesser sin. And for the second point, as mentioned

above, Augustine said that killing yourself in order to stop yourself from committing further sins is not a valid reason to commit suicide. Aquinas says that the reason why it is not a valid reason is twofold. One, you deprive yourself of the time of repentance, and two, as we mentioned in the second response; nobody has the authority to be their own judge.

4. Samson killed himself, he is still guilty of the sin of suicide. He is forgiven of his sin because he died a heroic death (I will discuss this in greater depth in my appendix *Suicides in the Bible*).
5. And just as a person does not have the right to commit suicide to avoid physical suffering, neither does a person have the right to commit sin to avoid shame.

Both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas have explained in great detail that suicide is a sin, and have explained how suicide is a sin. As Karl Barth mentioned, when discussing suicide we must start with the unequivocal fact that suicide is a sin and that there is no ground on which to justify or authorize it (**Dogmatics Vol. III.4**, pg 77), but does that mean that suicide is an unforgivable sin? Loren Townsend stated that “*Aquinas concluded that suicide was the worst (and unforgivable) sin because one could not repent of suicide after the fact.*” (**Suicide: Pastoral Responses**, pg 110) Aquinas believed that suicide was depriving oneself of the time of repentance, (**Summa Theologia**, pg 35) and because a person could not repent of their sin, then suicide is the unforgivable sin. However, suicide is not the unforgivable sin. The Bible says that the only unforgivable sin is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:32, Mark 3:29, Luke 12:10), in other words to reject the Holy Spirit. This sin is unforgivable not because it is greater than any other sins but because it rejects God’s free gift of forgiveness. In Walther’s *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel* his Thesis XXIV says that “*the Word of God is not rightly divided when the unforgivable sin against the Holy Ghost is described in a manner as if it could not be forgiven because of its magnitude.*” (pg 393) He goes on to say “*the sin is not unpardonable because of its magnitude...but because the person committing this sin rejects the only means by which he can be brought to repentance, faith and steadfastness in faith.*”(pg 397-398) Lutherans believe that we are saved because of justification by grace alone through faith alone. We also believe that we cannot by our own will or strength save ourselves. We are only able to repent of our sins and believe that they are forgiven by the power of the Holy Spirit (**Book of Concord**, AC. Art. XVIII.2, pg 50, FC Epit. Art. II.2,9,10,17,18,19, pg 491-494). Lutherans also believe in Resistible Grace, meaning that God’s Grace comes to us as a free gift, and that while we can do nothing to earn it or accept it, we do have the Free Will to reject it. As Pless says:

The sin against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable because it rejects the forgiveness that Jesus Christ offers. Troubled consciences terrified by Satan’s tactics find rest and peace in a Saviour whose forgiveness was deep enough to forgive a denier like Peter and a persecutor like Paul. No sin is too big for Calvary, and no sinner is beyond the embrace of Jesus Christ. Those who will not receive the gifts of Christ Jesus are left in their sin and under condemnation not because their sin is too great to be forgiven but because they will not trust in this forgiveness. (Handling the Word of Truth, pg 104)

Pless makes it clear that no sin is too great for the death of Christ, not even suicide. Jesus died for all people, past, present and future, and for all sins, no sin is too great or too small to be forgiven. This is what Lutherans call Objective Justification, that Christ’s death was for all people and therefore God’s gift of grace is universal. But as Lutherans we also hold to the belief of Subjective Justification, that only those who have faith receive this gift of grace. We believe that humans have the ability to reject God’s grace and thus blaspheme the Holy Spirit. It is this rejection of God’s

grace that damns a person to Hell. Thus it is this rejection of God's grace that is the Unforgivable Sin. This leaves us with this question, 'does the person who commits suicide reject God's grace?'

For All Have Sinned

There is no doubt about it that suicide is a sin, the Bible is clear on this (Exodus 20: 13, Deuteronomy 5:17, Ecclesiastes 7:16-17, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19-20, Ephesians 5:29). But Christ's death forgave every person, past, present and future of every sin they have committed and also of all those sins that they are yet to commit, those sins they fully know and understand and those sins that they do not understand nor know they commit. Therefore, "can a person who commits suicide be forgiven?" The answer is a strong, confident Yes! If a person is repentant then all their sins including suicide, suicidal attempts, self-harm and even the thought or desire of suicide can and will be forgiven. "Yes, suicide is a sin, one of the many thousands of kinds of sins that humans commit. But that's why we have a Saviour, so that our sins may be forgiven. Only God is the Judge." (Wayne Blank – **Is Suicide A Sin?**) A suicide victim is no worse a sinner than anyone else. In theology there are two Latin phrase which are commonly used, Corum Deo, which means 'before God', and Corum Mundo, which means 'before the world'. The bible repeatedly confirms that, Corum Deo or before God all sin is considered equal and all people are guilty of sin (Psalms 14:3, 53:3, Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:10-12, 23, James 2:10, 1 John 1:8, 3:4). Therefore a person who commits suicide is just as bad as a person who commits a sin deemed minor in human eyes i.e. lying, swearing or thinking evil thoughts; and also just as bad as a person who commits a sin deemed major in human eyes i.e. rape, murder or theft. So while Corum Mundo, or before the world, sins are placed upon a scale of bad to worse, Corum Deo, or before God, all sins are considered equal and all sinners are considered the same. Even though we humans make distinctions between which sins are unforgivably evil and which are not even considered evil at all. God looks upon all sinners as equals no matter what sins they commit and he sees all sins as evil as the others.

Therefore if God has forgiven every sin (Matthew 12:31, 26:28, Hebrews 10:17, 1 John 1:9, 3:5) then he can also forgive the sin of suicide and the person who committed it. "Even suicide in this sense is not, as such, unforgivable sin... If there is forgiveness of sins at all... there is surely forgiveness for suicide." (Karl Barth – **Dogmatics Vol. III.4**, pg 78) Thus as Christians we need not ask if suicide is able to be forgiven, but whether how a person who commits suicide is able to be forgiven if they were not able to repent of their act of suicide?

Time for Repentance

"Suicide is, in effect, self-murder. The unfortunate thing about it is that the one who commits it cannot repent of it. The damage is permanently done. We can see in the Bible that murderers have been redeemed (Moses, David, etc.), but they had opportunities to confess their sins and repent. With suicide, the person does not." (Matt Slick – **If a Christian commits suicide, is he still forgiven?**)

In the first section, *Is Suicide the Unforgivable Sin?*, we saw how the Bible and Church Fathers confirm that suicide is a sin. In the second section, *For All Have Sinned*, I stated that suicide, like any sin, can be forgiven. However, only through repentance can a person receive forgiveness for their sins. Jesus has forgiven us of all sins, those done and those yet to be committed (Objective Justification), but even though he offers forgiveness we can't receive it unless we're repentant

(Subjective Justification). *“It is only in repentance that a person will apprehend Christ by faith.”* (John Pless, pg 66).

As Slick says, sinners, even murderers, are forgiven if they confess their sins and repent of them. The problem is that, while most sinners have the time to repent of their sins, suicide victims are dead before they are even offered the chance. As mentioned in the preface some people have developed this idea that if a person has a slow death they then have the ability to repent of their sins (I myself have been told this by multiple people attempting to provide an answer concerning the fate of a suicide victim). An example of this idea is a person who decides that they can't go on and that the only answer is to kill themselves. They commit the suicidal act (the sinful part of the suicide) which will eventually cause their death but they are left with an undetermined amount of time between act and death. It is at that moment that they see the error of their ways, they realise that they have made the wrong decision and now they want to live. But now it is too late to save themselves, so they quickly repent of their sin and die free from the guilt of suicide; in other words a fool's dream. The concept is that the act used to cause their death, e.g. stepping off the cliff or pulling the trigger, is the sin. Then, during the freefall the person decides suicide is not the answer but it is already too late to save themselves. So they repent of their suicide and ask God to forgive them. I find three problematic issues with this false idea of a repentant suicide victim.

Firstly, this theology condemns those killed by an instantaneous death, for they are not provided with the time to repent that a person dying from a slow death would receive.

Secondly, it provides those suffering depression and suicidal thoughts with a false ticket to salvation, meaning that if you were to tell this to a person suffering from depression they would simply see an opportunity to receive both a suicidal death and heavenly salvation. Although this is a possible outcome (hence the writing of this treatise), we should not encourage any sin and especially not the sin of suicide. A person suffering from suicidal thoughts should be encouraged with reasons to live and not reasons to die. I myself suffered from thoughts of suicide and in my state of depression my mind would twist Bible verses such as Romans 8:18, *“for I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed to us,”* and would provide me with the idea that life on Earth is terrible but that life in Heaven is great.

Therefore, I should just kill myself so that I can get to Heaven quicker. While it is true that Heaven is glorious and that since we live in a Fallen World, life on Earth is horrible, this verse from Romans is meant to provide comfort, not to drive people further into despair. What Paul means by this verse is that the suffering of this life is temporal but the glory of Heaven is eternal. *“The years of our life are seventy, or eighty if you're strong,”* (Psalm 90:10), but the afterlife is for eternity. Therefore, the suffering of this life is not worth comparing with the eternal riches that we shall receive in Heaven. This verse from Paul is one of comfort not despair, but a person suffering from depression can only see the darkness and often fails to see the light. This is why we need to encourage these people with reasons to live and not reasons to die. This is why I want to make it clear that this treatise is aimed at bringing comfort to the family and friends who have lost a loved one to suicide. I do not want someone reading this treatise and using it as a ticket to commit suicide. Yes, it is possible for a person that commits suicide to go to Heaven but this is not an excuse to commit suicide. The grace of God should never be used as a license to commit sin. (Romans 6:1-2) Thus the false belief that 'just repent of your suicide while you're dying' causes only death. It encourages physical death but the false ideology of it also causes spiritual death. To be forgiven of your sins and receive salvation a person must be truly repentant and if you commit suicide thinking "I'll just repent of this before I die and still get to Heaven," then you are not truly repentant and

therefore you will not be saved. *“If you are contemplating suicide and are relying on God’s grace to get you to Heaven, PLEASE stop for a moment... God’s grace never means that we have a free license to sin!”* (Betty Miller – **The Thief Comes Only to Steal, Kill & Destroy: What the Bible Says about Suicide**)

And thirdly, a person lost to suicide is lost mentally, emotionally and psychologically, long before they are physically lost from this world. Those who question taking their own life are targeted by Satan and offered a “better” solution. During my father’s post-suicidal-act ramblings he openly confessed that Satan had gotten to him and I truly believe that he was telling the truth, whether he fully understood what he was saying or not. Luther wrote a letter to a woman concerning this very issue (Theodore Tappert, translator/editor, – **Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel**, pg 90-91). In his *Letter to Mrs. Jonas Von Stockhausen* Luther counselled the wife of Jonas Von Stockhausen concerning her fears for her suicidal husband. He warned her not to leave her husband *“alone for a single moment and leave nothing lying about with which he might harm himself. Solitude is poison to him. For this reason the devil drives him to it.”* (pg 91) Luther directs her to surround her husband with happiness and to celebrate life because during lonely depression is when Satan will try and convince you to take your own life. I will bear witness to this statement and confess that after my father’s suicide, I myself suffered my own suicidal depression. I had no friends around to offer me support and I secluded myself and my thoughts from my family for numerous reasons, mainly for fear of upsetting them and not wishing to add pain upon pain. In my lonely state of depression I was lost and I considered committing suicide at least once a day, if not more. I can confirm that Satan will target you in these situations and he will twist even the Words of God and the message of the Gospel in attempts to gain control of your mind. Through his mouth the message of hope and salvation provided by Christ’s death on the Cross can be manipulated into a lie that tells you that suicide is okay and that it is the only solution to your current problems. (See above my comments of Romans 8:18)

Therefore, speaking from personal experience and firsthand witnessing, a person who commits suicide has already lost the battle the second that they decide suicide is the answer. Their mind is lost to Satan and they will not repent of their suicide, as long as he has his demonic hands wrapped around their thoughts. Sticking with the above example of jumping off a cliff and repenting during the freefall, the person in the freefall is in a state of mind where they are convinced that death is the only answer and they are not changing their mind in this life. Once Satan has hold of a person he will not let go until they are dead and he can reap his reward. Too bad for Satan though, because he will not always receive his ill-gotten reward, for not every suicide victim goes to Hell. Many have been able to slip out of his grip and still end up in Heaven, and I am about to explain how.

Are They Responsible?

In the 2003 movie “Luther”, a young boy is lost to suicide and the Catholic Church refuses to bury him among the rest of the dead because he had committed suicide. This is a sad and distressing issue that can have long lasting effects on the victim’s family and friends, and the entire community in general. My first encounter with these kinds of burial practices happened when I a young child, around five or six. At my home church there is a single grave separate from the others. The grave was there before I was even born, but one day I asked why it was separate from the others. Being young and not really understanding my father tried to explain to me that he had died of suicide, I think the exact words were “he hanged himself.” Being so young and still not understanding why his grave was separate from the others, I was told that he was buried away from the others because he had committed suicide and had gone to Hell. I am convinced that this partly coloured my original view of suicide as an unforgivable sin. According to Hsu (pg 101) after Aquinas’ condemnation of suicide the Catholic Church began to posthumously excommunicate victims of suicide and forbade Christian funerals for them. As Townsend states (pg 110), the Church Doctrine forbade victims of suicide being buried in cemeteries that had been consecrated by Catholic priests. Luckily, times have changed and so has the Church’s opinion on suicide, allowing my father to be buried alongside everyone else in the cemetery. Sadly this practice continues today in numerous denominations even including some Lutheran churches. (Lutheran Church of Australia’s **Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care**, Suicide/attempted suicide, pg 127)

In the “Luther” movie, the Church had condemned the young boy claiming that as a victim of suicide he was condemned to Hell because no one who commits suicide can receive salvation. In the movie, Luther’s exact response is, “*Some people say that according to God's justice, this boy is damned because he took his life. I say it was overcome by the devil. Is this child any more to blame for the despair that overtook him than an innocent man who is murdered by a robber in the woods?*” (Eric Till’s **Luther**) This scene is based upon a comment Luther made in his *Table Talks* concerning suicide, “*I don't have the opinion that suicides are certainly to be damned. My reason is that they do not wish to kill themselves but are overcome by the power of the devil. They are like a man who is murdered in the woods by a robber.*” (**Luther's Works**, American Edition, Vol. 54, pg 29). Here Luther declares that a person lost to suicide has been tricked by the devil and fallen into his trap of temptation. The first half of his statement is correct in saying that the boy’s life (and mind) was lost to Satan but the second half seems to give Satan too much credit for the sin and removes all human responsibility. Luther suggests that a suicide victim has as much blame for their suicide as a murder victim. This is theologically incorrect, for a murder victim has committed no sin while a suicide victim has committed the sin of “self-murder”. It is correct that a suicide victim has lost control of their mind and fallen into Satan’s snare of temptation but this does not remove their responsibility for their sin. If this was a valid excuse for sinning then Adam and Eve would not have been punished because Eve had been lied to by Satan and fallen into his trap of temptation. In Chuck Smith’s book *Answers for Today* the question is asked, “*Is a person who commits suicide totally lost for eternity?*” To which Smith replies,

“*Definitely not! I believe that a person who is driven to the point of committing suicide no longer has full responsibility for the things he's doing. Driven to a point of such mental extremes, he isn't necessarily responsible for the action of taking his own life.*” (Revised Edition pg 113-114)

Darwin Fish (this is his actual birth name, he is a conservative and not an evolutionist) the author of www.atruechurch.info in his discussion on Chuck Smith & Calvary Chapel, calls this statement a “*damning lie,*” and sights that “*man is held responsible for his actions.*” With this statement by Fish, I wholeheartedly agree, especially in light of Revelation 20:12-13 which says that during the Final Judgement all will be judged according to what they had done. We can’t say suicide is not a sin and we can’t say that a person committing suicide is free from the guilt of sin, for “*if we claim we have not sinned, we make him [God] out to be a liar and his word is not in us*” (1 John 10). Also, if people are convinced suicide is not a sin or doesn’t bring condemnation then they won’t repent even if they are given the chance. Also, just because a person loses control does not mean

that they are not responsible. Is a man responsible if he loses control and kills out of rage, or if he's drunk and kills someone without realising? Yes, of course, such people are still responsible for their sin.

Now before we move on, I would first wish to consider the following statement from A True Church's discussion on Chuck Smith and Calvary Chapel. In response to Chuck's statement that the only unforgivable sin is rejecting Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, Fish says that suicide is rejecting Jesus and that the decision to take one's life is a rebellion against God and that suicide is wicked and a complete lack of faith, "*it is a Satanic lie and a dreadful door to Hell.*" Fish, who obviously doesn't believe in the salvation of a suicide victim, has made a grave mistake in his comment. He is correct that suicide is a rebellion against God but so is every sin. Sin is disobeying God and violating his Law and divine will. "*All sin is against the will of God and condemned by God.*" (Lutheran Church of Australia's **Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care**, Suicide/attempted suicide, pg 126) Suicide is not some special sin where the individual rejects God and disobeys him, for this occurs with every sin that is committed. We reject God in the act of sinning but we are turned back to him in repentance. The difference with suicide, as mentioned above in Slick's quote, a person that commits suicide isn't given the opportunity to repent. How then can they receive forgiveness and in turn salvation if they can't repent? I will now discuss this in the following section.

Repentant without Repenting

The Bible teaches that in order to receive grace, and thus be saved, we need to 'repent and believe' (Mark 1:15). We need to repent of our sins and we need to believe that Jesus Christ has forgiven our sins and redeemed us from the consequences of those sins. The question remains, what about those who are unable to repent or believe? Infants don't understand most of what they do, let alone understand if they sin, therefore how can they repent of their sins? What about people with the mental understanding of a child? Or those suffering amnesia or Alzheimer's who cannot remember their sins or God? "*This points to a larger question: whether God accepts those who do not have the capacity to make a conscious faith decision, such as infants or those with learning difficulties?*" (Albert Hsu, pg 104)

A person needs to be repentant of their sins in order to be forgiven and receive Salvation. Scripture teaches 'repent or perish' (cf. Luke 13:3,5, Acts 20:21, 2 Peter 3:9b), saying that if you don't repent of your sins then you can't be forgiven, and thus cannot receive Salvation.

"Based on such an understanding, many Christians throughout history have considered suicide an unforgivable sin because it allows no possibility of repentance. This reveals a faulty understanding of what the Bible teaches on the nature of sin and repentance." (Albert Hsu, pg 102-103) What does it mean to be repentant? Does it mean that I must verbally confess or mentally remember and acknowledge all my sins?

I ask this question, "who among us can remember every sin we have ever committed or whether we were sorry for it?" The Augsburg Confession states in Article XI, *Confession*, that in confession "*it is not necessary to enumerate all misdeeds and sin, since it is not possible to do so,*" (**Book of Concord**, pg 44) this is said in reference to Psalms 19:12, "*who can discern his errors?*", even the Church Rites of the Lutheran Church of Australia confess that there are sins that, "*I [the confessing sinner] cannot fully know or understand, but which you [God] know completely.*" (Lutheran Church of Australia **Approved Worship Services-Confession of sin and absolution**, From Sing the Feast, Setting 1)

Therefore, as the Psalm, Augsburg Confession and the Rites of the Lutheran Church of Australia confess, there are sins that we do not know we have committed or we have forgotten that we have committed them. The Augsburg Confession says that it is not necessary for a repentant sinner to give account of every sin during confession. Then how are they forgiven if they don't name that sin? This question is generally answered with the concept that even though you don't remember your sins, you are still sorry that you have betrayed God even though you can't name the betrayal

that you committed. “*True repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror about sin, and yet at the same time to believe in the Gospel and absolution that sin is forgiven and grace is obtained through Christ.*”(Book of Concord, AC. Art. XII.4-5, pg 44)

A person needs to believe in Jesus and confess him as their Lord and Saviour to be saved (John 3:18, Romans 10:9-10). Infants and some mentally challenged people don't understand the concept of Jesus, therefore they can't know or confess that Jesus is their Lord and Saviour. However, the Lutheran Church practices infant baptisms and teaches that infants can be saved. I ask then, how can they be saved if they don't have the ability to believe in Jesus or repent of their sins?

These areas of salvation, concerning an infant, mentally disabled person or a person suffering memory loss, are difficult and separate theological discussions than that of a suicide victim, but in many ways related. I do not wish at this time to delve too deeply into those issues. I only mentioned these cases as examples, for I believe that the way in which they receive salvation without the ability to repent and believe is very similar to the way a suicide victim can be redeemed without repenting.

As I have said repeatedly, the issue concerning the salvation of a suicide victim is the issue of how they can be forgiven if they do not repent of their suicide. But how is this any different to anyone else who dies while sinning. Gilbert Meilaender in his book *Bioethics*, on the issue of suicide says, “*The suicide [victim] dies, so to speak, in the moment of sinning, without opportunity to repent. But then, so may I be killed instantly in a car accident while plotting revenge against an enemy of mine.*” (pg 59) As I mentioned above in *Are They Responsible?* that if a person, while drunk or in a rage, kills someone without realizing, he has sinned and needs to repent. But what if during that brawl, after having killed someone he himself was killed without repenting of the murder he had committed. “*What would become of him if there were no forgiveness at this point? Yet if there is forgiveness for him, why not for the suicide?*” (Karl Barth, pg 78)

“*Through sudden death, many Christians have died with unrepented sins,*” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer – **Ethics**, pg 199) therefore the question is not, how can a suicide victim be forgiven without repenting of their suicide? But the question should be, how can anyone be forgiven without repenting all their sins? The answer is that even though you haven't repented, you can still be repentant. You can be **repentant without repenting**.

Repentance is Faith

Now, you may be wondering “how can a person be repentant without repenting?” In this section I wish to explain how. Firstly, I must explain my separation between repenting and repentance and what I mean by each term. To do this I would like to discuss the difference between the narrow and broad sense of repentance.

Walther, in his famous book *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel* states that “*in the Holy Scriptures the term repentance is used in a wide [broad] and a narrow sense.*” (pg. 277)

Walther then goes on to define that the broad (or as he calls it the wide) sense of repentance includes the entirety of conversion. The broad sense of repentance includes the knowledge of sin, contrition and faith. In other words repentance in the broad sense, is the realisation that you are a sinner, having contrition over the fact that you are sinner and believing through faith that Jesus Christ forgives you of your sins. This is what the Augsburg Confession art. XII calls “true repentance”, not the mere act of verbal confession of sins, but “*the terrors that strike the conscience.*” (AC XII Latin, pg. 45) As art. XII declares true repentance is to have contrition, sorrow and terror about sin and at the same time to believe that sin is forgiven and that this forgiveness comes to us by grace. In this sense the call to ‘repent and believe’ (Mark 1:15) does not contain two separate acts, repenting and believing, but one single act. This is because true repentance, is an aspect of faith, to truly believe means to be truly repentant. As Walther says contrition is joined to faith. (pg. 278)

True repentance is not the act of verbally or mentally acknowledging or confessing your sins. This is the narrow sense of repentance. Repentance in the narrow sense is the act of repenting, such as

the naming and confessing of a sin in private confession. While we are called to confess our sins (Psalms 32:5, Proverbs 28:13, 1 John 1:9, James 5:16), it is not the act of verbally (or mentally) confessing our sins that justifies us.

It is faith alone that justifies us. True repentance (that is in the broad sense) is not separate from faith but is an aspect of faith. As Pless says, true repentance “*is the recognition of one’s need for a Saviour.*” (pg.66)

As I have stated the Lutheran Confessions, Walther and Pless teach that true repentance is the entirety of conversion, **repentance is faith**. True repentance includes having one’s conscience struck with contrition, sorrow and terror over sin, recognizing one’s need for a Saviour and believing that one’s sin is truly and fully forgiven by the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Repentance (in the broad sense) is a part of faith and one cannot believe that their sins are forgiven if they do not believe that they are a sinner. This is why Pless can say “*without repentance there is no faith.*” (pg. 66)

We must always remember the distinction between the narrow and broad sense of repentance and remember that it is the broad sense (that is the true repentance) which is an aspect of faith. The narrow sense is merely an outward sign of the inward belief.

It is the broad sense which I have referred to as ‘repentance’ and it is the narrow sense that I have called ‘repenting’. This is why I say that a person can be ‘**repentant without repenting**’. A person is able to inwardly believe and be repentant without outwardly confessing their sins. Just as a person can outwardly confess their sins but not be truly repentant inwardly.

The outward act of repenting should not be confused with the inward belief and repentance of the believer. Just as the outward act of confessing one’s faith should not be confused with the inward faith of the believer. It is true that a person must repent and believe to be saved, but this refers to the inward belief of the Christian and not the outward confessions. A person is saved by repentance, but true repentance is not the verbal or mental act of confession. This is why a suicide victim can be **repentant without repenting**. In the same way, an infant, or a person suffering from a mental disability or memory loss can repent and believe without verbally or mentally confessing.

The Faith of the Suicide Victim

In the above section *Is Suicide the Unforgivable Sin?* I stated that the only unforgivable sin is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, which is rejection of the Holy Spirit and thus rejection of God’s grace. I ended this section by asking the question ‘does the person who commits suicide reject God’s grace?’ You may have already gathered that the answer to this question is, no. A person who commits suicide does not necessarily reject God’s grace (it is possible for a suicide victim to reject God’s grace, just as it is possible for any of us to lose our faith and reject God’s grace, but the act of suicide in and of itself does not equal rejection of God’s grace).

Sin is disobedience and rebellion against God but this does not equal rejection of God’s grace. To reject God and become unrepentant means that a person’s conscience is no longer struck with terror over sin. A person who rejects God is the person who rejects their need for a Saviour, a person who denies that there is sin in them. Sin separates us from God but the death of Jesus healed that separation. This is the beauty of the Lutheran understanding of simultaneously just and sinner (some may know it as saint and sinner). Even though we continue to sin daily, we have been justified by grace through faith and our sin is no longer reckoned to us. In Romans (7:15-20) we read of Paul’s continual struggle with sin. We can read how Paul’s conscience is struck with terror over his sins as he continues to do those things (sins) that he does not wish to do. This is the struggle that we all face. But for those of us who are in Christ, those who truly repent and believe, there is no condemnation (Romans. 8:1). Sin separates, but on account of Christ’s death and resurrection we have been saved and justified and are no longer separated. For those of us who have

been justified, nothing, not even our daily sins (not even the sin of suicide), can separate us from God. For as Paul said, “*neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor heights, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Romans 8:38-39) If you’re a Christian, and you truly believe that Jesus Christ is your Lord and Saviour and has redeemed you of all your sins, then nothing can separate you from the love of God. Bonhoeffer said that not even self-murder will deliver you out of the hand of God (pg 198).

The only thing that can separate us from God is our own rejection of God. Those who lose faith and no longer believe in God are separated from God because they have rejected God and separated themselves from his free grace. This is why we must ask the question ‘does the person who commits suicide reject God’s grace?’ I propose that the answer is no. Suicide, like every sin a person commits, is a temporal loss to the power of the devil and the lure of temptation. Suicide, like every sin, is a stumbling in our daily walk with Christ but it is not a rejection of Christ and the gift of God’s grace.

But for those of us, who like me, have witnessed a suicide and managed to talk to the suicide victim prior to their death, we may be tempted to think otherwise. As I have mentioned, I managed to speak with my father after he had tried to burn himself to death but before his injuries took away his life. During this time, I had the chance to listen to his ramblings. My first impression of these ramblings would have me believe that he was neither repentant nor believing. He was not repentant (at least in the narrow sense) about the act of suicide, and he continually said that the devil had got to him and he truly felt that he had fallen away from God’s grace. At first glance it would seem that he had fallen from grace.

People who commit suicide are generally suffering from a loss of control and of mind. There are numerous reasons why people commit suicide. Some commit suicide for emotional reasons such as depression and anxiety, some suffer mental problems (meaning they are mentally challenged), others commit suicide due to psychological reasons (this is different to mental, as mental deals with the physical organ, while psychological deals with the mind) meaning they are suffering in their thoughts and have lost control of their basic reasoning and in some cases people commit suicide due to spiritual interference caused by demon-possession or oppression, for example, the demon-possessed boy who attempted to drown himself and burn himself to death (Matthew 17:15, Mark 9:22).

However, this loss of mind should not be confused with a loss of faith. “*Some kinds of psychiatric disturbance and imbalance may occur before a suicide. We should not necessarily regard this as evidence of loss of faith in Christ, a fall from grace, or an unforgivable sin.*” (Lutheran Church of Australia’s **Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care**, Suicide/attempted suicide, pg 126)

Believing without Confessing

A person who commits, attempts or even just ponders suicide does not reject God, instead they reject life. The sorrows of this life have become too much for them and they lose the strength to carry on. But a rejection of life is not a rejection of God. Confusing this loss of mind, with a loss of faith comes from a misunderstanding of true faith.

Just as we had to determine what true repentance was in order to understand how a suicide victim could be repentant, so too we must determine what true faith is in order to understand how a suicide victim can believe. In order to do this we must discuss the difference between reflexive faith and directive faith. In Francis Pieper’s Dogmatics (vol. II) he explains the difference between these two forms of faith (pg 443-445).

Reflexive faith is the consciousness of the existence of one’s own faith, in other words, one is able to determine that ‘yes, I believe, I have faith’. Reflexive faith is the knowledge that I am a believing

Christian. The importance of this faith must not be minimized (pg 444). This faith must be cultivated and strengthened for it provides certainty and comfort. When a person doubts their salvation they can be comforted by the fact that ‘yes, I believe, I have faith’. However, it is not the reflexive faith but solely the directive faith which saves.

Directive faith is the faith which clings to Christ. When discussing the faith of infants Pieper states that while infants do not possess a reflexive faith (that is a conscious faith), they do indeed possess a directive faith, “*that is, faith which lays hold of its object, Christ, the Saviour of sinners.*” (pg 449)

Directive faith is true faith; it is not a conscious recognition of faith or a mere knowledge of God. True faith (that is directive faith) is not a verbal confession or a mental acknowledgement of God, but a trust and certainty of one’s salvation (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is not a mere knowledge of God, for even the demons acknowledge that there is a God (James 2:19). As the Formula of Concord teaches, faith is not mere knowledge of Christ but a recognition of Christ as our redeemer and a trust in Him that solely because of His obedience, and by grace, we have the forgiveness of sins and are regarded as godly and righteous by God the father and have eternal life. (Epitome 3.6, pg 495)

Directive faith, and not reflexive faith, is what saves. It is because of this reason that infants, mentally disabled, those suffering memory loss and even suicide victims who have suffered a psychiatric disturbance, can still believe. They may not be able to verbally express their faith or even mentally comprehend it, but they can still cling to their Saviour and trust in their Redeemer.

This is how they can be **believing without confessing**.

As Pieper says in all cases believers accept the promises of the Gospel with a directive faith, whether they are awake or asleep, adult or infant and “*even when in trials and afflictions they fear that they no longer believe.*” (pg 444)

It is this final point which is the most important in the cases of those lost to suicide. For even though a suicide victim, like my father, may reject life and feel that they no longer believe and have fallen from grace. We need to remember that they have not fallen from grace but instead are still desperately clinging to God in hope of salvation, even though they are not able to feel that salvation at that time. Their minds have become corrupted and clouded and even though they doubt their faith, it is still there.

Conclusion

It may not have seemed like it at the time but my father was repentant and believing. Even though he did not repent (narrow sense) of his sin of suicide, he was sorry for failing us and for all the wrongs committed in his lifetime. His conscience was truly stricken with terror over sin. While he was not able to verbally or mentally confess his Lord, I can see that in his heart he still clung to his Saviour in desperation of forgiveness and salvation. And it is the heart that God searches, not the depraved mind. God examines our heart (Psalms 139:1-2, 1 Samuel 16:7, Jeremiah 17:10, Romans 8:27, 10:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:4) to determine whether or not we are truly repentant and whether or not we truly believe.

“It is so important to remember that God judges each of us individually, weighing all the factors of our lives, our beliefs and our motives. Each one of us is so intricate and complex, only God could really judge us in total truth, wisdom, and without favoritism.” (Betty Miller – **The Thief Comes Only to Steal, Kill & Destroy: What the Bible Says about Suicide**)

“Christian salvation is not dependant on whether a person was able to ‘wipe the slate clean’ at the moment of death, but rather whether the person was walking in relationship with God by faith in Jesus in life... The Bible teaches that a person will not be judged on the nature of his or her death but rather on the nature of his or her life...In other words, the single act of suicide does not negate a person’s entire moral identity or faith position.”(Albert Hsu – **Grieving a Suicide: The Search for Comfort, Answers and Hope**, pg 103 & 105)

“Therefore, even if the final act of a believer is the sin of suicide, the redeeming, regenerating work of God in that person’s life cannot be undone. God will not reject anyone who has placed his or her faith in Jesus Christ.”(Brian Leicht – **Still Living: Grieving After a Suicide**)

“To make the last millisecond of a person’s life so supremely important is to misunderstand both the worth of our lives and the forgiveness of God. Our lives aren’t games of high-stakes poker, where one final hand can wipe you out. God judges our lives in their totality.”(John Hewett – **After Suicide**, pg 92)

“The opinion that it [suicide] alone is unforgivable rests on the false view that the last will and act of man in time, because they are the last and take place as it were on the very threshold of eternity, are authoritatively and conclusively decisive for his eternal destiny and God’s verdict on him....God sees and weighs the whole of human life. He judges the heart.”(Karl Barth – **Church Dogmatics Vol III.4**, pg 78)

Therefore, it is clear from the Scriptural and doctrinal evidence that suicide is a sin, but like all sins it can be forgiven. A person who commits suicide can still be redeemed even though they were unable to repent of the sin of suicide, because true repentance is not a verbal or mental acknowledgement of our sin but contrition, sorrow and terror about sin. A person who commits suicide has not rejected God’s grace or lost their faith even though, in a state of psychiatric disturbance, they are unable to verbally confess or mentally acknowledge their Saviour. Their rejection of life should not be seen as a rejection of grace and their loss of mind should not be seen as a loss of faith. For true faith is not a mental acknowledgement of God but a trust that clings to the promises of the Gospel.

The question is not whether a person lost to suicide can be saved but whether or not they died a Christian. All those who repent of their sins and believe that Jesus Christ has redeemed them of their sins will be saved. The fate of a suicide victim, like any Christian, depends not on their mental capabilities about upon justification by grace alone through faith alone. While they may not be able to verbally or mentally repent or confess, they can still repent and believe. They can be: **repentant without repenting** and **believing without confessing**.

“If there is forgiveness of sins at all... there is surely forgiveness for suicide.” (Karl Barth – **Dogmatics Vol. III.4**, pg 78)

Note to the Reader

Before you finish reading this treatise and put it down, I just want to take a moment to speak directly to those to whom this treatise is directed. For those who have lost a friend or relative, or just someone you know, to suicide, firstly my prayers and thoughts go out to you. Suicide is a very serious and tragic event to which I am deeply concerned. I hope that this treatise has been able to assist you in any way possible. However, if you have lost someone you know to suicide I recommend that you speak with your local pastor, doctor, counsellor or even just a close friend, someone that you feel comfortable talking to, to help you through this difficult time.

If you are struggling with the thoughts of suicide I beg you to reconsider and I urge you to seek help. Talk to a pastor, doctor, counsellor or friend, just speak to somebody. Taking your life is never the answer, there is always a better way. Even though you may not think it there are people in this world who care about you and are wanting to help you. Their lives will be scattered if you take your own life.

Believe me, I have had my life scattered by losing a loved one to suicide, I know what your loved ones will face if they lost you. I have also struggled with depression and suicidal thoughts. I know what you're going through and what it feels like to be in that place. I know it doesn't seem like it, but trust me there are people who love you and care for you and will miss you if you're gone. There are a lot of people out there that want to help you.

If you are suffering suicidal thoughts, please seek help. I've listed below numbers for you to contact in order to find help:

- **Lifeline** 13 11 14
- **Beyond Blue** 1300 22 4636
- **Suicide Line** 1300 651 251
- **Reach Out** au.reachout.com
- **Suicide Prevention Foundation** 1800 465 366
- **Suicide Callback** 1300 659 467
- **Men's Line** 1300 78 99 78
- **Veterans Line** 1800 011 046
- **Kids Helpline** 1800 55 1800

Or if anyone would like to talk to me about anything, I am here to help and you can contact me by using the email address from my Lutheran podcast:

- amightyfortresspodcast@yahoo.com.au

I wrote this treatise in order to help people, primarily for those who have lost a loved one to suicide and are left wondering the painful question “is my loved one in Heaven?” But if anyone else was able to find something helpful, I am glad that my treatise could be of some help.

I have a special place in my heart for people affected by suicide and depression, and I want you to know I am here to help.

I hope I have been able to help you, the reader, in anyway.

Below I have provided additional content (Prayers and *Suicides in the Bible*) which I hope may be able to provide further assistance.

May God bless you and keep you, may God make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you, may He look upon you with favour and grant you peace.

Amen

Prayers

In the following section I have arranged a collection of prayers that I believe should be able to provide some guidance and support. These are only a selection of prayers that I came across which I found to be helpful, there is a wide range of prayers out there concerning suicide, both for victims and the family and friends of victims, they can be found in prayer books and all over the internet, below is just a selection of the ones which I found the most supportive.

The following prayers are for people who are considering or have attempted suicide and wish to pray for themselves; friends, family or counsellors (including clergy) to pray for a person who is suffering suicidal thoughts or has attempted suicide; for the friends and family to pray after having lost a friend or family member to suicide; and prayers to be prayed by clergy or friends for the family and friends of a suicide victim. Before each prayer I will indicate who the prayer is intended for and who is intended to pray it.

The following prayer comes from the Lutheran Church of Australia's *Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care* (pg128) and is to be prayed with the victim of attempted suicide by the pastor or a person in the role of a counsellor:

Lord Jesus Christ, you know the distress that (Name of victim) is suffering. You yourself descended to the depths of human suffering and despair.

Be with (Name of victim) in his/her need and sustain him/her with your presence. Thank you for preserving his/her life at the time he/she was near to death.

Lift from him/her the burdens and cares that weigh him/her down. (*If the victim has been through counselling a list of burdens brought out in counselling could be mentioned here.*)

Kindle hope in (Name of victim) and make him/her optimistic about the future.

Forgive us all our sins and failures, heal our sicknesses, strengthen our faith and our bond of union with you. Help (Name of victim) to see that you love him/her and value him/her as your dear child.

Reshape his/her life and the circumstances beyond his/her control, so that he/he may experience the peace and joy that only you can give. Lead him/her into a future full of joy and blessing, and help him/her to live a useful life of service to you and other people. (Help him/her to.... (*Details of failed wishes and realistic possibilities may be added.*))

We put (Name of victim) in your care and protection. Send your holy angel to be with him/her, so that the devil will have no power over him/her. Amen.

The following prayer comes from the Lutheran Church of Australia's *Rites and Resources for Pastoral Care* (pg129) and is to be prayed with the family and/or friends of the victim by the pastor or a person in the role of a counsellor:

Merciful heavenly Father, be with (Names of victim's family and/or friends who are present) in their deep sorrow and distress,

Sustain them in their grief and comfort them.

For Jesus' sake forgive us all our sins and failures. (*You may mention feelings of guilt, sin or failure that may have emerged from counselling.*)

Remove our heavy burden of guilt and regret. Reassure (Names of victim's family and/or friends who are present) (and us all) that you are a loving, compassionate God, and convince

us that through your dear Son you know our weakness, understand our pain, and suffer with us in our troubles.

Do not remember our sins or refuse to hear our prayers. For Jesus' sake remember (Name of victim) and have mercy on him/her. Consider the troubles, pain, and despair that overwhelmed him/her. We entrust him/her to your fatherly care; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The following prayer comes from About.com under the section *Advice for Christian Teens* which is under the section *Christian Teens* which is under the section *About Religion & Spirituality* and is to be prayed by those suffering suicidal thoughts:

Lord, I come before You with a heavy heart. I feel so much and yet sometimes I feel nothing at all. I don't know where to turn, who to talk to, or how to deal with the things going on in my life. You see everything, Lord. You know everything, Lord. Yet when I seek you it is so hard to feel You here with me. Lord, help me through this. I don't see any other way to get out of this. There is no light at the end of my tunnel, yet everyone says You can show it to me. Lord, help me find that light. Let it be Your light. Give me someone to help. Let me feel You with me. Lord, let me see what You provide and see an alternative to taking my life. Let me feel Your blessings and comfort. Amen.

The following prayer comes from About.com under the section *Advice for Christian Teens* which is under the section *Christian Teens* which is under the section *About Religion & Spirituality* and is to be prayed by a friend who knows (or suspects) someone who is thinking of committing suicide:

Lord, I come before You with a heavy heart for my friend. He/She is struggling so much right now with the things happening in his/her life. I know You can be his/her greatest comfort. I know You can step in and make a difference. Show me how I can best help him/her. Give me the words and actions that will keep him/her from taking that ultimate step of suicide, Lord. Let him/her see that there is a light at the end of the tunnel and that suicide is not the route to take. Lord, let Your presence be felt in his/her life and let your comfort be what he/she needs. Amen.

This following prayer comes from Beliefnet. This prayer prays for those lost to suicide, the family and friends left behind, and also for us on the outside that we may be able to guide and support those suffering suicidal thoughts and also to help and comfort those who mourn the loss of a friend or relative lost to suicide:

**Bless, O God of eternal life,
all who have died
by their own hand.
Grant them peace
from their inner turmoil
and the compassion of your love.
Comfort those who mourn
their loved ones.
Strengthen them to face the questions of pain,
the guilt and anger,
the irreparable loss.
Help us to reach out in love**

**to others who prefer death
to the choices of life
and to their families who grieve.
Amen.**

The following prayer comes from Stanley Hauerwas' *Prayers Plainly Spoken* (pg 128). This prayer was written on the occasion of the suicide of a divinity school student. The first part of the prayer prays for strength over fear, and the ability to reach out and seek help, and also to offer help where needed. The second half of the prayer prays for the victim and their loved ones:

**Dear God, we do not desire to know the terror in our neighbours' lives. We do not desire to know the terror in our own lives. We live as if we have nothing to fear, and thus we are captivated by fear. May your love overcome our fears so that we can reach out to one another, fearing neither ourselves, others, nor you. We pray for your mercy for those who have killed themselves. We know not their fears, and we thus fear they died alone. They are now yours: in that is our comfort. Comfort all who love them and who will miss their presence. We feel helpless, but praying helps. Thank you for the gift of prayer.
Amen.**

The following is an Anniversary Memorial Service order, provided from John Hewett's book *After Suicide* (pg 113-116). In the back of his book he has provided a service order adapted from *The Worshipbook* (Westminster press 1970) for a memorial service to be performed on the anniversary of the death of a suicide victim: (My adjustments will appear in normal text in [] brackets)

Call to Worship (Pastor): Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die... And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (John 11:25-26, Matthew 22:31-32)

Prayer (Pastor): God of mercy and compassion; you have watched over this family in the past year. [or years, depending on what anniversary this is]. Out of terrible tragedy you have brought goodness and grace to their lives. You have surrounded them with a sense of your present love, and held them in faith. Though they were lost in grief, they found you and were comforted. They have come today to close their wounds and bind up their broken hearts. Guide them and all of us as we worship you today through Christ Jesus our Lord, who was dead, but lives and rules this world with you. Amen

Hymn: [Select a hymn to be played here, Hewett suggests either] **"O God, Our Help In Ages Past"** or **"There Is a Balm in Gilead"** or **"God Will Take Care of You"**

Litany of Thanksgiving (Family)

Leader [Hewett suggests that a selected member of the family acts as the leader, but the role can be performed by a pastor]: **Give thanks to the Lord for he has been good to us.**

Family: His love is everlasting.

Leader: Come, let us praise our God of mercy and compassion.

Family: Let us come to him with thanksgiving.

Leader: For helping us survive the tragedy of suicide,

Family: We thank you, Lord.

Leader: For forgiving, loving, and watching over our loved one, (Name of victim),

Family: We thank you, Lord.

Leader: For our friends who helped us through the aftermath,

Family: We thank you, Lord.

Leader: For the love and concern that we share as family, and for our unity,

Family: We thank you, Lord.

Leader: Above all, O God, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ, who lived and died and lives again for our salvation; for our hope in him, for the joy of serving him, for the promise of a future with you.

Family: We thank and praise you, God our Father, for all your goodness to us in the past year. [or years]

Leader: Give thanks to our God, for he has been good to us.

Family: And his love is everlasting.

Sharing of Memories (Family members and others) [Here the family and friends of the deceased are given a chance to share the joyful memories of the deceased]

Committal of the Memory:

Pastor: Thank God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that in his great mercy we have been born again into a life full of hope, through Christ's rising from the dead. "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the living one; for I was dead and now I am alive for evermore. Because I live, you shall live also."

Family: Almighty God, we commend to you our grief in the death of (Name of victim), trusting your love and mercy toward our loved one. Remove from us all our remaining guilt, our anger, our depression, and our blame. Cast out our fear with your perfect love. Heal our wounds, O God, and give us hope for the living of these days, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Pastor: All thanks to God, who gives us victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Closing Hymn: [Again a selected hymn should be played to end the service, Hewett suggests] "My Faith Looks Up to Thee"

Benediction (Everyone): Now to him who is able to keep us from falling and to present us without blemish before the presence of this glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen (Jude 24-25)

Appendix

Suicides in the Bible

The subtitle of this treatise is *Concerning the Eternal Fate of a Christian Lost to Suicide*. As Albert Hsu said, “*We take Jesus seriously when he says that there are two paths, one to life and another to destruction, and people will wind up in one of two eternal destinies (Matthew 25:31-46). We live with the reality that there is a Heaven and a Hell, and all of us will someday see one or the other.*” (**Grieving a Suicide: The Search for Comfort, Answers and Hope**, pg 107)

This treatise was not written to determine the fate of an unbeliever, but the fate of a believer who commits suicide.

To demonstrate the differences between a believing person (hence a Christian) who commits suicide and an unbelieving person (hence not a Christian) who commits suicide I am going to examine each suicide case in the Bible.

Most people believe that there are seven cases of suicide in the bible. These seven cases do not include the cases of suicidal thoughts or depression: King David (Psalm 13:2-4), Job (Job 7:15-16), the prophets Moses (Numbers 11:15), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:14-18), Elijah (1 Kings 19:40), and Jonah (Jonah 4:3,9), and also possibly: Rebekah (Genesis 27:46), Rachel (Genesis 30:1), King Solomon (Ecclesiastes 4:2-3), and the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 1:8, Philippians 1:23); or the attempted suicides: the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:27-28), and the demon-possessed boy (Matthew 17:15, Mark 9:22).

The seven people who are considered to be victims of suicide are, Abimelech (Judges 9:54), Samson (Judges 16:30), Saul and his armour bearer (1 Samuel 31:3-6, 1 Chronicles 10:3-6), Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23), Zimri (1 Kings 16:18), and Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27:5). However, only six of these cases are actual suicide, Abimelech technically died from euthanasia, he was dying from a head injury and begged his armour bearer to quickly kill him so that no one could say that a woman had killed him. (2 Samuel 1:6-10 would also suggest that Saul died from euthanasia, I will discuss this below) Euthanasia, also called ‘assisted-suicide’, is very similar to suicide in the way that the person that is killed seeks to end their life, however, it is different in the way that it isn’t self-murder because they are getting someone else to murder them. Also unless, like Abimelech, the euthanasia is a spur-of-the-moment killing, like on a battle field, then both parties have had time to contemplate the killing. Therefore, since this act is premeditated, it is most likely that they are not considering it a sin. So even though these situations are similar, suicide and euthanasia are still very different and to consider the eternal fate of a person who died by euthanasia will require a separate treatise devoted entirely to that topic.

As for the other six cases of suicide in the Bible, they include a mix of righteous and wicked suicide victims, the righteous ones received salvation after their death while the wicked were condemned to Hell. Before I continue on, I wish to point out that it is not up to me to judge and in the end it is God’s decision which of them went to Heaven and which of them went to Hell. I am simply giving my opinion on their final fate based upon my conclusion concerning how a person lost to suicide can be saved without repenting of the sin of suicide.

Since Abimelech died via euthanasia, the first account of a suicide in the Bible is Samson (Judges 16:29-30). Samson died a righteous death. His suicide was indirect and sacrificial. He knew his death was coming, possibly only after a long and painful torture. He knew his actions were going to kill himself, he even said to God, “*Let me die with the Philistines.*” (Judges 16:30), but the intent of his actions were to kill the oppressive enemies of his people. According to Hewett (**After Suicide**, pg 90) modern Catholic doctrine makes a distinction between ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ suicide. ‘Direct’ suicide is desired self-murder, when a person is lost to the temptation to take their own life. ‘Indirect’ suicide is when death is not desired, but you know that your actions will lead to your own death. ‘Indirect’ suicides are acts such as, giving up your place on a life-boat to someone else and going down with the ship, or using your own body to shield someone else from a bullet. These acts are not only noble but Bonhoeffer considered it our Christian duty to sacrifice ourselves for others (pg 201) (see John 15:13). These incidences are called ‘indirect’ because, even though you do them willingly, knowing you are going to die, unlike ‘direct’ self-inflicted suicide you are not killed by your own hand. With ‘direct’ suicide, it is you who pulls the trigger, but with ‘indirect’ suicide the bullet was fired by someone else and you are killed by their hand, all you did was direct the murder away from someone else and placed their death upon yourself. Samson’s case is different since he did die by his own hand, as it was him who knocked down the building. His death is still ‘indirect’ suicide because even though he knew that his actions would lead to his own death (Judges 16:30), his intent was not to commit suicide but to fulfil his God given duty to deliver the Israelites out of the hands of the Philistines (Judges 13:5). His death occurred with a good intent and a righteous heart. It is clear that Samson received salvation after his death, as he is recorded in Hebrews among the heroes of the Old Testament, and said to have lived by faith (Hebrews 11:32-33).

Saul and his armour bearer died in a very different way to Samson. During a war with the Philistines, Saul and his armour bearer were surrounded. To avoid capture they both fall upon their own sword. The life and faith of the armour bearer is unknown, but Saul on the other hand lived a wicked life. Saul was constantly turning his back on God, he disobeyed and was renounced by God’s prophet (1 Samuel 12 & 13), he repeatedly tried to kill God’s anointed one (David) (1 Samuel 19, 23 & 26), he killed priests (1 Samuel 22) and he used a medium (the Witch of Endor) to disturb the spirit of Samuel (1 Samuel 28). Saul would most likely not be saved after his death. God would search his heart and find only evil and wickedness. Even his suicide was done in a wicked fashion. Following the fall-on-your-sword rules of honour, Saul didn’t wish to be killed by the enemy and so pleaded for euthanasia to be performed by his armour bearer. After the armour bearer refused, Saul took his own life. There is the account in 2 Samuel 1:6-10, where Saul was wounded but not killed and pleaded to an Amalekite to kill him, thus dying from euthanasia. If the Amalekite’s story were true it would conflict with the accounts 1 Samuel 31:4-6 and 1 Chronicle 10:4-6, which states that the armour bearer saw Saul die before falling on his sword, verse 5 of the Samuel account states that the armour bearer died with Saul, and verse 6 of both accounts state that ‘thus Saul died.’ It is mostly likely that the Amalekite’s story was a fabrication, created in order to earn a reward for Saul’s murder. Ironically, however, his story led to his own death. Even if the Amalekite’s story were true, it wouldn’t change much as Saul still lived and died a wicked man and most likely received condemnation.

The armour bearer, is a difficult case, he fell on his own sword after witnessing Saul’s suicide. The Bible said he was terrified and his suicide may simply have been out of fear and distress, he had just been in a fierce battle and witnessed his king and master commit suicide. The stress he was going

through must have been unbearable. Without knowing his life and his faith it is unclear to judge if he was redeemed from his suicide or not, this is left up to God and his divine wisdom.

The fourth case of suicide in the Bible is Ahithophel, Absalom's strategist. After he was disgraced and rejected by Absalom he went home, put his affairs in order and hanged himself. Due to the fact that his only response to his disgrace was suicide and that before killing himself he arranged for his household to be able to run without him I suspect that he was suffering from depression. His reaction to Absalom's refusal to follow his advice implies that he was suffering from the guilt of failure. From my own experiences this kind of guilt is usually an effect of depression. Taking that into account I believe Ahithophel was suffering from depression. Once again, his life and faith are not known to us and thus his final fate is unable to be determined by us for certain.

The last suicide victim of the Old Testament is Zimri king of Israel. He was a royal official who usurped the throne by killing his king and the king's entire family. After he took the throne for himself the Israelites rebelled against him and named their army commander (Omri) the new king. Not wishing to be taken prisoner he decided to fall-upon-his-own-sword by setting fire to the palace and allowing the flames to take his life. After his death is recorded, the author confirms for us the wickedness in Zimri's heart, "*So he died, because of the sins he had committed, doing evil in the eyes of the Lord and walking in the ways of Jeroboam and in the sin he had committed and caused Israel to commit.*" (1 Kings 16:19) Verse 19 makes it clear that he lived a wicked life, died a wicked death and is suffering eternal damnation.

The one case of suicide recorded in the New Testament is the most famous suicide recorded in the Bible, the death of Judas Iscariot.

The fate of Judas Iscariot is an interesting one which I wish to delve into a little further. For most of Church history the fate of Judas Iscariot was agreed upon. It was widely believed that Judas went to Hell. There has, however, been some who have attempted to argue for Judas' salvation and declare him St. Judas Iscariot. I have looked at these arguments and for a time was swayed in that direction. Therefore, I would like to take a deeper look at Judas' case.

Firstly, I would like to remind the reader that it is not up to me to judge, for judgement belongs to God alone. The final fate of Judas rests in God's hands, however, I would like to give my opinion on the matter and explain what I believe Judas' fate to be and why.

In order to do this, five points must be considered:

1. Is Judas a worse sinner?
2. Was Judas repentant?
3. Was Judas accountable?
4. Did Judas believe?
5. Does Scripture say anything concerning the eternal fate of Judas?

Point one, it is wise to remember that Judas was not the only one of the Twelve to betray Jesus, all of the disciples deserted Jesus when he was arrested in the garden (Matthew 26:56b, Mark 14:50) with only John returning to witness the Crucifixion (John 19:26). Simon Peter also denied him three times (Matthew 26:69-75, Mark 14:66-72, Luke 22:54-62, John 18:15-17,25-27). "*He [Judas] certainly can bear no greater burden of guilt with regard to his betrayal than can Simon Peter, who three times denied knowing Jesus.*" (John Hewett, pg 89)

Also both Judas and Peter are called a devil or Satan. Judas is called a devil in John 6:70, and Peter is called Satan in Matthew 16:23. Judas was not the only person to betray Jesus. We are all guilty of sin (Romans 3:23), this is why we all need a Saviour.

Judas is no greater sinner than the rest of us. What sins are credited to Judas in the Bible? Theft (John 12:4-6), betrayal (Matt 10:4, 26:14-16, 25, 47-49, 27:3-4, Mark 3:19, 14:10-11, 43-45, Luke 6:16, 22:3-6, 47-48, John 6:70-71, 12:4, 13:2, 25-30, 17:12, 18:2-5, Acts 1:16-17) and suicide (Matthew 27:5, Acts 1:18). Are these sins really unforgivable?

No, as we touched on in the Treatise the only unforgivable sin is rejection of the Holy Spirit, and thus rejection of grace and forgiveness. So the issue is not 'was Judas a worse sinner?' but whether he repented and believed.

This leads to point two. Many who support the idea of St. Judas Iscariot would argue that Judas was repentant of his betrayal. "*We have clear evidence that he repented of his betrayal and presumably completed suicide as an act of restitution.*" (John Hewett, pg 89)

Matthew 27:3 states, "*he [Judas] repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver.*" (KJV) Not only does Judas' repent but we have a physical act of penance in the returning of the coins.

It would seem from the King James Version (KJV) translation of Matthew 27:3 that Judas repented. However, it is important to analysis this word before we rush to conclusions. The English Standard Version (ESV) translates this verse "*he changed his mind,*" while the New International Version (NIV) translates the verse "*he was seized with remorse.*"

The word used here is not 'metanoéo' which is the Greek word for repent, the word used in Mark 1:15 for the command to "*repent and believe.*" Instead the word used here for Judas is 'metamelomai', the Greek word meaning to feel remorse.

'Metanoéo' literally means to change the way you think, while 'metamelomai' means to change your concern. 'Metanoéo' has the sense of godly repentance and contrition over sin (i.e. true repentance), while 'metamelomai' has more of a sense of worldly grief and sorrow.

As Paul says "*godly sorrow produces repentance [metanoéo] that leads to salvation without regret [without metamelomai], worldly sorrow produces death.*" (2 Corinthians 7:10) The sorrow experienced by Peter was godly sorrow that lead to repentance (that is true repentance), while the sorrow of Judas was a worldly sorrow that lead to death, in this case death through suicide. Therefore, Judas was not truly repentant in the way that Article XII speaks of repentance.

Another issue that arises in the discussion concerning the salvation of Judas Iscariot is the discussion on Judas' accountability. The third point that must be discussed is the question of Judas' accountability in regards to his betrayal of Christ.

There is some confusion concerning Judas' accountability. Some people have wrongly tried to justify Judas by claiming he had not committed any sin in betraying Jesus because he was possessed by Satan (Luke 22:3,4, John 13:27) or that his betrayal had been predestined and was done in fulfilment of the Scripture (Matthew 26:24, Mark 14:21, John 13:18, 17:12, Acts 1:16, 2:23).

Both of these suggestions are false and only seek to justify Judas' salvation by claiming he isn't guilty. This removes the blame from Judas and shifts it somewhere else, either to Satan or God the Father, whom, they claim, forced Judas to betray Jesus. Both accounts reject the will of Judas. This is false doctrine, for the will of man allows him to sin and therefore makes him accountable for sin. If this were not the case then Adam and Eve wouldn't be held accountable for eating the Forbidden

Fruit because their sin would be justified either because God predestined them to eat the fruit or Satan tricked them into eating it.

Wayne Jackson a writer for the Christian Courier gives an excellent explanation to these conflicting excuses for Judas in his article "*Was Judas "Predestined" to Betray Christ?*" Concerning the possession of Satan he says: "*Some would suggest that Judas was but a helpless pawn, unable to resist the invasion of Satan into his life. That certainly is not the case, as even Judas himself conceded. He never pled: "I could not help myself; Satan made me do it!" Rather, he confessed: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood"*"

Judas was not some puppet controlled by Satan 'the Puppeteer of Mankind,' otherwise he would be free from the guilt of his sin. Judas, however, was a victim of Satan's temptation and trickery. Satan is able to control people, not by messing with their will but by tempting them to do evil by offering them what they most desire.

How did Satan tempt Judas? The answer is money. Judas was a greedy, sinful being who loved money. The Church Father Origen said that it was Judas' love of money which was the root of all the evils that he committed against Jesus (**Commentary on Matthew Book XI Chapter 9**)(see 1 Timothy 6:10). Scripture clearly shows Judas' money lust, he stole from the common treasury (John 12:4-6), and when offering to betray Jesus he asked the chief priests "*what are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?*" (Matthew 26:15), and he accepted thirty silver coins in exchange for handing over Jesus. It was Judas' lust for money that caused him to betray Jesus and not the demonic possession of Satan.

Returning to the issue of predestination ridding Judas of any guilt, Wayne Jackson says in his article that Judas was not compelled by God to betray Jesus but was able to act under his free will. God is not some 'divine puppet master' that dictates every moment of our lives. If He was, then sin (disobedience of God's Will) would not be sin because it would not be disobedience but God's Will.

Judas' betrayal may have been done to fulfil Scripture but that does not remove Judas' responsibility from the matter. On the Last Days he, like everyone else, will have to give an account of what he has done and will be judged accordingly (Romans 14:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 20:12-13).

The fourth point is the question of Judas' faith, 'did Judas believe?'

St. Augustine rejected the notion of the salvation of Judas Iscariot stating that by committing suicide Judas did not atone for the guilt of his detestable betrayal but instead added to his guilt, that he despaired God's mercy and that his act of suicide left himself no chance of saving repentance (**City of God**, pg 27). Augustine is right in the fact that Judas' suicide did not make atonement for his betrayal. Judas' blood could not cover his sins. It is the blood of Jesus alone that makes atonement. It was Christ's blood that made atonement for all sins, including Judas' betrayal. Jesus' death paid the debt for all our sins, including the sins of Judas. The question is not, 'did Christ die for Judas?' but 'did Judas repent and believe?'

As mentioned above, Judas felt worldly remorse for what he had done but he was not truly repentant.

As for belief, it is most likely that Judas did not believe that Christ died for his sin. Judas did not repent and turn to his Saviour for mercy, he did not cry out to God in repentance or for mercy. Instead, Judas sought the help of man. The ESV translates 'metamelomai' as "*he changed his mind*" (Matthew 27:3). Having seen Jesus carried off to Pilate to be judged and crucified Judas is filled

with remorse and wishes to change the deal. He no longer wishes to sell his Lord for money and does not wish to see Jesus killed. He does not realise that Jesus must suffer and died in order to save us (Matthew 16:21, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22, 17:25, 18:31-33, 24:7,46). Judas did not repent and turn to Christ for forgiveness, instead he tried to save himself by his own works and return the money (Matthew 27:3-5). *“Before this he had loved the money, the thirty pieces of silver, so dearly that it seemed a small matter to him to betray and to sell Christ the Lord; but now he is changed: If he had the money and goods of the whole world, he would give it all in return for the assurance that the life of Christ the Lord might be saved.”* (Martin Luther quoted by Paul Kretzmann in **Popular Commentary of the Bible: New Testament, volume 1**, pg 154)

Judas did not believe that Christ’s death was for the salvation of all who repent and believe. The Thief on the cross, in his final moments, turned to Christ and received mercy, forgiveness, grace and eternal life (Luke 23:41-43). Unlike the Thief, Judas did not turn to Jesus and thus Judas did not receive mercy or forgiveness. Judas rejected grace and thus rejected eternal life.

The fifth and most important point in this discussion is ‘what does Scripture say?’

There is no direct verse that says *“Judas Iscariot is in Hell”* but then again there is no verse that explicitly tells us who is in Hell (excluding the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:23)). There are, however, five verses that, I believe, give us a clear indication that Judas went to Hell:

The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man [Judas Iscariot] who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born. (Matthew 26:24 & Mark 14:21).

Have not I chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you [Judas Iscariot] is a devil? (John 6:70)

While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction [son of perdition (KJV)] so that Scripture would be fulfilled. (John 17:12).

This ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place [where he belongs (NIV)]. (Acts 1:25b)

In Matthew 26:24 and Mark 14:21, Jesus is speaking rhetorically as he does in Matthew 18:6, Mark 9:42 and Luke 17:2 regarding false teachers having milestones tied around their necks and thrown into the sea. Surely Jesus does not mean that we should actually tie milestones around the necks of false teachers and throw them into the sea, this is rhetorical language. What is meant by the statement in Matthew 18:6, Mark 9:42 and Luke 17:2 is that on the Day of Judgement, the judgement on these false teachers will be so great that it would have been better for them to be thrown into the sea, for that would have been a lesser punishment.

Jesus uses similar language when talking here about Judas Iscariot. *“Woe to that man,”* this is a cry of denunciation. The one who betrays the Son of Man will be rejected. For whoever rejects Christ rejects God and will be condemned on the Last Day (Luke 10:16, John 12:48). The one who betrays the Son of Man will incur such a terrible judgement that it would have been better if he had never been born.

Jesus’ comment in John 6:70 is similar to that in John 8:44 where He calls the Pharisees the sons of the devil. Jesus declares that the Pharisees do the will of their father, which is to lie. Similarly Judas is called a devil for he is the one who will betray him. The word in Greek is ‘diabolos’, which comes from two ‘dia’ meaning through and ‘balló’ meaning to cast away. ‘Diabolos’ literally means to cast through but is used to mean slanderer, false accuser, backbiter. This is a very harsh term to

be called and should not be taken lightly. Whether used for Judas or the Pharisees this term is meant to be a harsh word of judgement.

The term '*Son of Perdition*' (Son of Destruction in the ESV) in the King James Version of John 17:12 is more accurate to the Greek than the New International Version's '*one doomed to destruction*'. The Greek is 'ho huios tēs apōleias' (ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας), literally 'the son the destruction (loss/perdition)' or better translated 'the son of destruction'. The English word 'perdition' means utter loss or ruin, damnation, eternal punishment, which clearly shows what the translator had in mind when translating 'apōleia' into English. The Greek word 'apōleia' means destruction, loss, ruin. 'Apōleia' is the noun form of the verb 'apollumi' which means to destroy, perish, lose and is formed from two words 'apo' meaning away from, and 'ollumi' meaning to destroy. The 'apo' in 'apōleia' intensifies the word meaning that 'apōleia' means to completely destroy, completely sever or cut off. The Greek word is perfectly translated by the English word 'perdition' as 'apōleia' has a sense of eternal damnation and complete separation.

Thus, to say that Judas was the 'Son of Perdition' means that he was lost to eternal damnation and separation from God.

And lastly the statement from Acts 1:25b says that '*Judas turned aside to go to his own place*'. The Greek for this verse means something along the lines of 'Judas transgressed (turned aside/departed) to go to his place of belonging'. This verse shows that Judas departed from his place as an apostle to go to the place where he rightfully belonged, Hell.

In closing, it is not for me to judge, but for God alone. I am not in a place to declare who is and isn't in Heaven but based upon my own research regarding the six suicides in the Bible; I believe that it is clear from Scripture that Samson is saved, and that Saul, Zimri and Judas were condemned. As for Saul's armour bearer and Ahithophel, there isn't enough Scriptural evidence to say either way and so I do not wish to speculate there.

I hope you, the reader, have enjoyed this additional study on the different suicides in the Bible and have learnt a little more about the difference between a believer (Christian) and a non-believer (non-Christian) who commits suicide. I hope that you've learnt from this study that it is not the act of suicide that determines a person's fate but whether or not they were justified by grace alone through faith alone.

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