

Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Hope you're doing well. If you have a Bible, can you turn to Acts chapter 1?

If you have one of these blue Bibles, it's on page 1092. If you want one of these blue Bibles, they're at the back. Feel free to stand up. Go and get one.

Stretch your legs. And we'll be reading from God's Word, Acts chapter 1, starting at verse 12. So Acts 1, reading from verse 12.

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives. A Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas, son of James.

[1 : 05] They all joined together constantly in prayer along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. In those days, Peter stood up among the believers, a group numbering about 120, and said, Brothers and sisters, the scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.

He was one of our number and shared in our ministry. With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field. There he fell headlong.

His body burst open, and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this. So they called that field in their language, Achil-Damah, that is, field of blood.

For, said Peter, it is written in the book of Psalms, May his place be deserted, and let there be no one to dwell in it. And may another take his place of leadership.

Therefore, it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us.

[2 : 26] For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. So they nominated two men, Joseph called Barsabbas, also known as Justice, and Matthias.

Then they prayed, Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.

Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias, so he was added to the eleven apostles. Let's take a moment to pray as we look at God's Word.

Lord, we thank you for your Word. We pray that you would speak to us by your Spirit. Amen. Amen. I want to think this morning about seeking after God.

Seeking after God. But let me ask you a question. What sort of things do you seek after? What do you pursue? They could be good things. Maybe they're bad things.

[3 : 32] But how do you do it? Do you seek after good health? So if we're seeking that, do we try to eat healthy? We get regular exercise. Maybe avoid sugary snacks.

Get regular health checks. If you're seeking after good health, then there are steps that we might take to do that. We've recently started to seek after something in our house.

We are trying to learn other languages. We were away recently at a conference in Germany, and Grace, who studied German in school, she had loads of words and phrases come flooding back as we were away.

So we're now seeking after language learning. Grace is doing German, and I'm doing Spanish, and we have an app that we use that every day gives us little exercises, reading, listening, speaking, so that we can seek after language learning.

There are steps that we take to get there. Well, what would it mean if we wanted to seek after God? How would we do that?

[4 : 41] Well, we come to a passage today that is all about seeking God, seeking His will, seeking His face, seeking understanding from Him.

And in this passage, it's a very unique and limited time in salvation history. Jesus has died and risen. He's appeared to many witnesses, and as we learned last week, He's ascended to heaven. So Jesus has left the disciples, but the Holy Spirit has not yet been sent. So it's a very unique time in salvation history, and they are waiting, and they are seeking after God.

Jesus had just left the disciples. He had just ascended into heaven. And what will be next for this group of disciples?

They're leaderless. Well, they make their way back to Jerusalem to wait for God's promised gift. We heard last week, earlier in this chapter, in verse 4 and 5, Jesus commanded them, Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

[6 : 02] For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. The apostles had just been commissioned to go to all nations and be witnesses and share this incredible news that the Savior has come.

But they have to wait. Jesus had just told them that they're going to be witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

I don't know if you were told you get to go to the ends of the earth. Would you be itching, ready to go, on your mission? But first, they had to wait. They could not go and continue the ministry of Jesus just yet because they could not do it alone.

They needed the Holy Spirit to be given before they could go and do all that Jesus had said. They had to wait. Do you like to wait?

Are you good at waiting? Do you get impatient or frustrated or bored? Sometimes the Lord's timing isn't what we think it should be. Things should happen faster.

[7 : 18] We think people should come to faith sooner or a relationship that we have or that we see, well, it should be closer. It should be further along. The apostles had to wait.

So what did they do as they were seeking after God? Well, they returned to Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded. They went up to the room they were staying in and they prayed.

There's a familiar list of people present in verse 13. Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, Simon the Zealot, Judah, son of James.

But we're missing one. There were some women, including Mary, Jesus' mother there, and Jesus' brothers.

And what did they do while they were waiting? They all joined together constantly in prayer. They were constant in prayer.

[8 : 23] Seeking after God meant being constant in prayer. They'd been promised the Holy Spirit. They'd been told what to do next. But as they waited, they were constantly in prayer.

Seeking after God, dependent on Him, praising Him, asking for His help. Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit was preceded by constant prayer.

Prayer is essential for our relationship with God. And it's essential if we want to see God moving and working in the lives of those around us.

God has given us an amazing way to participate in His work in this world by speaking to Him, by pleading with Him, by praising Him and by thanking Him as we come to Him in prayer.

If we want to be seeking after God, if we are waiting for Him to be at work, if we want to see Him move by His Spirit, we must be constant in prayer.

[9 : 37] And this isn't an individual task. We see here the group of disciples, they didn't disperse. They didn't go off to their individual hotel rooms.

They were together and united in prayer. As a church, let us value prayer so much that it doesn't get relegated to an optional extra.

That we would value and guard prayer so that we, as a body, would be constant in prayer, constant in our prayer life to God, seeking after Him that He would be at work in our lives and in the community around us.

It's been said that no great spiritual awakening has begun anywhere in the world apart from united prayer. Christians persistently praying for revival.

I read an amazing example of this as I was preparing. I just want to share what I read with you now. In the 1850s, the United States was in a weak spiritual state.

[10:53] And in 1857, a quiet 46-year-old businessman called Jeremiah Lanthier, he felt led to start a noontime weekly prayer meeting in New York in which business people could meet for prayer.

Anyone could attend for a few minutes or the entire hour. The first day, Lanthier prayed alone for half an hour, but by the end of the hour, six from at least four denominational backgrounds had joined him.

20 came the next week and 40 the week after. Soon, they were meeting daily and the group grew to over 100. Pastors who came along started morning prayer meetings in their churches.

Soon, similar meetings were being held across America. Within six months, there were more than 10,000 meeting daily in New York alone. This is the start of what is now termed the Great Awakening in North America.

And it's estimated that in a two-year period from 1857 to 1859, two million people came to Christ out of a population of 30 million.

[12:05] You see, spiritual awakening started with prayer. These people in New York were constant in prayer. So as we are waiting for the Lord to work, as we are seeking after God, let us be constant in prayer.

Maybe we can think how can we do that together more? Not just me on my own in my room, which we need to do, but are there others who I can join with, who I can meet with just to pray?

Pray for God's work in our lives. Well, the familiar list of apostles was mentioned in verse 13, which had one name missing, Judas Iscariot.

Judas Iscariot had turned away from following Jesus and instead had betrayed him. So now the group of apostles who is witness to the risen Jesus was going to be the foundation for the church, they were down to 11.

What should they do? Do we carry on as 11? Do we bring someone new into the group? Well, the number 12 was very significant when it came to the people of Israel.

[13:26] The nation of Israel was founded on 12 tribes. And when beginning his ministry, his public ministry, Jesus called 12 apostles to follow him.

And these apostles were symbolic of the 12 tribes. That as Jesus started this new era of faith, what we call the new covenant, there would be 12 apostles on whose testimony and witness this church would be built.

Well, the apostles saw in Scripture prophecy being fulfilled in relation to Judas' betrayal and death. So in seeking after God, they were looking to Scripture. So if you're seeking after God, be constant in prayer. If you're seeking after God, be looking to Scripture.

and in looking to Scripture, they found guidance from God. We see that in verses 15 to 20 as Peter stands up among the group and he says, Brothers and sisters, Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus.

[14:51] He was one of our number and shared in our ministry. Here, Luke inserts some gory details just for the reader.

What happened to Judas? This terrible ending where he fell and died in this field which became known as the field of blood.

And they saw in this the fulfillment of prophecy because he says, It is written in the book of Psalms, May his place be deserted, let there be no one to dwell in it.

And elsewhere, may another take his place of leadership. They looked to Scripture as they were seeking after God. Peter stands up among these believers which was about 120 people.

Amazing to think all the millions and millions of followers of Jesus today here started as a group not a whole lot bigger than the number of people we have here this morning.

[16:02] They looked to Scripture and they were helped to understand. You might remember after Jesus had written, Luke wrote at the end of his Gospel that Jesus opened their minds so they could understand Scripture.

Jesus had helped them to see all that was written about him in the law and the prophets and Psalms and this helped them to understand what had been prophesied and it provided unique guidance on what to do next.

And that was to choose someone in place of Judas. As they were seeking after God, they were looking to Scripture for help and for guidance and for God's voice.

If you want to seek after God, you need to be looking to Scripture. Maybe for the first time, maybe you don't have a relationship with God, but you want one.

You feel that you need to seek God and you want to know him. Well, God is not hiding. He doesn't play hide and seek.

[17:10] He's not elusive. He wants to be sought by us. And he will make himself known as we do. As we look to Scripture, we'll find the very words and character of God in the Bible.

Maybe you're feeling a little bit lost as a Christian. You're not sure which way to turn in life. Well, let me encourage you, seek after God by looking to Scripture.

as you read his word, we get to know him more and more and understand his will for us. Psalm 119 encourages us that your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

God's word shows us the way we should go, not quite like Google Maps, but in what life is all about. How should we live?

Where have we come from? Where are we going? How do we respond to God and live for him?

Well, let's be people who seek after God by looking to his word as much as we can.

[18:25] So, if you want to seek after God, be constant in prayer. Be looking to Scripture, to God's word. God's word. And thirdly, rely on the Lord's guidance.

If you're seeking after God, if you want to seek after his face and his will and his voice, well, we need to rely on his guidance. Here we come to the final part of this passage where a replacement for Judas is chosen.

And to make this decision, there is a combination of things that happens. And the apostles rely on the Lord's guidance.

To seek after God, we must rely on the Lord's guidance. So, having been directed by Scripture to find a replacement, they firstly nominate two men based on criteria for being a witness.

Peter explains the unique role of an apostle in verse 22. Look at verse 22. Sorry, 21. Therefore, it's necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us.

[19:44] For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. This unique role of an apostle was to be a witness of his resurrection.

The apostles were witnesses of all that Jesus did, of his death and of his resurrection, and it is their testimony about Jesus and teaching that the church is built upon.

God's time. It's interesting to note that they felt they needed to replace Judas because he had walked away from that ministry.

He had turned his back on Jesus in betrayal, betrayal, but yet as the apostles died, they didn't continue to elect new apostles. This was a unique role as their testimony was recorded for us that we have in Scripture today.

So here, whoever was to replace Judas had to have been with the disciples, all of Jesus' public ministry, from the baptism of John right up to when he was taken back into heaven.

[20:53] So there were two men put forward, Joseph, called Barsabbas, also known as Justice, and Matthias. Maybe if it was me, I would have just picked Matthias because I think Joseph had too many names, didn't he?

Who are we talking about, Barsabbas or Justice? Well, no, they pray. The next thing they do is they pray for the Lord's guidance on who should take up this role. Both men qualify because they've been witnesses and now they come to God seeking the one who knows everyone's heart.

Verse 24, they pray, Lord, you know everyone's heart, show us which of these two you've chosen to take over this apostolic ministry which Judas left to go where he belongs.

They pray to God seeking the one who knows our hearts. Ultimately, as we look around at each other, as we see our friends and family or neighbors, we might see what they do, but we don't know their hearts.

Only God knows our hearts. He knows them fully and clearly. We cannot hide from him.

[22:14] As much as we can hide from each other, we cannot hide from God, the one who knows our hearts. Well, then finally they cast lots to see who would be chosen.

Can anyone think what happens at the start of every soccer game before kickoff? What happens at the very, very start? They toss a coin, don't they?

Heads or tails, a coin is flipped to decide who gets to choose the side they start on and who gets the kickoff. Well, this practice of casting lots to make big decisions is a very foreign concept to us today.

Could you imagine hearing the situation about a church who wanted a new pastor? They did some research, they found two suitable men who could be called as pastor, they both been to Bible college, they both had some experience preaching, well then at a members meeting they said, let's flip a coin.

Let's see who we want to be. Heads is one, tails is the other and we'll go with it. I think we think, whoa, they're a bit mad, aren't they? I think if we heard this, that's totally crazy.

[23 : 29] Or in your life, do you make big major decisions, flipping a coin? Maybe you've done that, maybe it's worked out okay. But is that how scripture encourages us to make decisions?

Well, the practice of casting lots would not be too dissimilar from flipping a coin. often they had stones or sticks that they would use which would give them an answer one way or the other.

Except that this was a common practice in the Old Testament. It was a practice that was used for discerning the will of God. They used casting lots to select men for priestly duties.

They also used casting lots in dividing the land. It was commonly regarded as a way to discover the divine will. You might remember in the book of Jonah when the sailors were on the boat in the storm they cast lots to see who was the one causing this trouble.

Well, the Lord allowed this practice and he used it to let his will be discerned. We see in Proverbs chapter 16 says the lot is cast into the lap, but it's every decision is from the Lord.

[24 : 46] The Lord used this practice to guide his people in various times. So, as the apostles come to appoint a new apostle, they used this practice that was used in priestly ministry, in finding God's will.

So, this wasn't unusual for them at all. But do you remember what I mentioned at the start? this is a unique and limited time in the history of salvation.

There are two major differences since this time for us. One is we have the Holy Spirit. He has come and he's in each of us who follow Jesus.

And two, we have the entirety of God's Word. We have his written Word for us. Scripture is complete.

So, we don't have any need of following a practice like casting lots. We have all that we need for understanding God's will in this world and for us.

[25 : 55] Colossians 1 says, we continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will, listen to this, through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.

The Holy Spirit gives us wisdom and understanding so that we would know God's will. So, as we seek after God, as we look to make decisions in life and as a church, we must rely on the Lord's guidance.

guidance. And for us, we have the Holy Spirit to lead us into the truth and to guide us in how God calls us to live.

We have God's Word that he uses by his Spirit to speak to us and change us. And now, when it comes to making decisions that aren't clearly shown in Scripture, like, where should I go for college?

Or what job should I do? Or who should I marry? Or where should I live? We rely on the Lord's guidance by his Spirit in how we should live wisely for him, in prayer, in fellowship, but then actually we have freedom to choose.

[27 : 24] We don't need to flip a coin. We can freely choose these things that are available to us as we are living out God's will for us, being guided by his Spirit.

The Lord is more concerned with how we live our lives for him, and less on the specific details. His will for us is to walk in the steps of Jesus, to fulfill this great commission, and to go and make disciples.

disciples. So if you want to be someone who is seeking after God, pursuing a life-giving relationship with him, we must be constant in prayer, we must be looking to Scripture, and we must rely on his guidance by his Spirit.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your Word that we can read so freely, and we thank you for your Spirit, who you give so freely, that as we come to faith, we have your Spirit living in us, and that as we hear your words, as we read them, as we think about them, your Spirit is working in

us to guide us into your will.

And Lord, we pray that you would do that, that you would guide us deeper and deeper into how you want us to live, into that deep knowledge and understanding of who you are and what you've done.

[29 : 17] We pray that you'd help us to be constant in prayer, to look to your Word, and rely on your Spirit. We pray for help, Father, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.