

God is in Control of Jesus' Mission

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[0 : 00] I'm going to start with a question and here it is. What qualities would a candidate need to have to win your vote at the next general election? So what qualities would a candidate need to have to win your vote?

What qualifications do you look for in their resume? Do they need to just belong to the right party? No pun intended. Or perhaps it's someone who presents well, who seems genuine and who speaks sort of plainly.

I wonder what the job application for the Prime Minister would look like. I tried to find it this week online. It doesn't exist, I don't think. But it would probably look something like this. So must be able to handle big numbers.

Must have experience running small republics. Must be able to kiss babies and have no skeletons in the closets. Now I guess a lot of us are fed up with politics.

And it's probably because we look back at some politicians and wonder if they're qualified to do anything. Maybe you look back at some of the people you've elected and wish you could get your money back.

[1 : 04] You see we need to be certain that we elect the right leaders because of the influence they have over our lives. Today in our passage is basically like an election day.

But today we're a million miles away from sausage sizzles at the local primary school. Because the election in our passage I think is the most important election that's ever been run or won.

You see today Jesus is electing the leaders of his church. Remember last week he ascended into heaven. And until he returns again he's appointed these leaders, verse 8, to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

You see Jesus needs to be certain that he elects the right people. Because they're going to represent him down here on earth to the ends of the earth. The stakes couldn't be higher for him. You only need to think about all the scandals and all the damage done by bad church leaders in the past. We need to be certain that we can trust these men to lead us.

[2 : 12] You see when the opposition party wants to discredit the Christian party, they very easily point to all those scandals and bad church leaders. But if they really want to undo the church, they should focus on discrediting these 12 men.

Because if you can do that, if you can discredit the apostles, you can remove any certainty that Christianity is reliable. You can make a sort of a break between the Jesus of history and the Jesus they believe in.

Acts is the story of the continuing saga of Jesus in the world. Doug said that. Today is the foundation of organized Christian religion.

Which in chapter 1 is an election day at the polls. Where Jesus is voting for his leaders. So we're at point 1 in your handout. I'm going to read just up a little bit from verse 12.

Let me just read verse 12. So, Now, as we keep reading, there's already a big awkwardness in the room.

[3 : 25] And I want to know if you can spot it for yourselves. So I'm going to read verse 13. And I want you to do the math. And tell me what's wrong. Do you notice what's wrong?

There's only 11. Do you notice that? There's only 11. 11. All the way through Luke's gospel, they were 12. In fact, they were actually called the 12. 11 sounds awkward.

Imagine having, I guess, only three beetles. Or, you know, having a famous four instead of the... Do you remember the famous five? Do you remember that? I'm showing my age. But that's all right.

12 is a really significant number in the Old Testament of the Bible. The family of God, they were made up of the 12 tribes of Israel. The 12 sons of Israel, in fact.

They were the daddies of the family. At all the key moments of Israel's history, the 12 tribes were gathered. When they coronated King David, when they dedicated the temple and the tabernacle, the 12 tribes were there.

[4 : 35] Actually, the high priest, when he went into the holiest of holies, his jacket had 12 precious stones on them. And on each of the stones was written one of the 12 tribes.

See, when he went in to make atonement for you, if you were attached to one of the 12 names, he was making atonement for you. The point is, a sign that you are in God's family is whether or not you're attached to one of the daddies.

Similarly, in the New Testament, a sign that you are in the family of God depends on what you do with the 12 apostles. See, that's why it's so radical when Jesus stood up in Luke 6 and chose 12 men again, 12 apostles in the church, to replace 12 tribes in Israel.

That's why 11 apostles is so awkward. That's why, even though in verse 23, the party sort of pre-selected two candidates, Jesus only chose one of them.

He wants to get to the special number 12. Of course, we know why there are 11 in the first place, don't we? We know what Judas did, how he famously betrayed Jesus.

[5 : 50] Peter's quite upfront about it. There's no political spin. Have a look at verse 17. He says, in verse 17, he was one of our number and shared in our ministry.

Yep, we put our hands up. He was one of us. Verse 18, that's Judas' death. It's pretty graphic. I think verse 25 puts it more politely.

Verse 25 says that Judas left to go where he belongs. Our theme today is being certain about your leaders, but Judas causes lots of doubts.

He was meant to be a guide to the nations, but instead, verse 16, he served as a guide to those who betrayed Jesus. Now, it's not that Judas slipped through the interview process.

It's not that the Russians had rigged the election. This passage tells us that God was always in control. Verse 16, have a look, verse 16.

[6 : 47] Brothers and sisters, the scriptures had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Jesus. Verse 20 shows us which part of the scriptures.

For, said Peter, it is written in the book of Psalms. May his place be deserted. Let there be no one to dwell in it. That's Psalm 69. And may another take his place of leadership.

That's Psalm 109. Now, it's not that Peter is plucking random bits of the Old Testament and just sort of using them to match this embarrassing moment with Judas.

Jesus regularly quoted King David's Psalms about himself. You see, King David is a mini Jesus. He's a mini me. The Psalms are about David's highs and lows.

Jesus says, when you see David's Psalms, you can see the pattern of highs and lows in my life as well. Psalm 69, which Jillian gave us, that's our Old Testament reading.

[7 : 44] It talks about a king who was betrayed by his friend. And so that friend is condemned. That's what all the blood and the intestines is about in verse 18.

It's fulfilling that condemnation. Psalm 109, that's about a king whose friend treats him wickedly. And so the king replaces that wicked friend. Both of these Psalms are a shadow or a pattern of the Judas and Jesus interaction.

The point is that Judas' betrayal was not plan B. It was always weaved into the Jesus story. God is always in control.

Now, that is a really important lesson for us to learn from Acts because again and again we're going to see the church suffer setbacks and suffer wicked things.

But like Judas, we're going to see that they had to be. The story had to unfold precisely as God wanted it to. He is in control.

[8 : 49] Pastorally, that will be really important for us as well. Think about the darker times in your lives when there are setbacks and wicked things happening to you.

You will doubt, where is God in all my setbacks? You'll need to know there's a sovereign God on those days, that he is in control.

For now, the point is we can be certain that plan A was to bring this precise 12 together in this precise moment in this precise way.

They are his 12 and that means you can trust them. And as we move to point two, we're going to see that they're also uniquely qualified. So this is point two.

This past week, I dug out my job application for this role here and here are the top three qualifications that Holy Trinity is looking for. Top three.

[9 : 47] Someone whose primary goal is to seek the honour of the Lord Jesus Christ. Someone who's committed to biblical truth. Someone who's an example of Christian faith, life, leadership, as outlined in the New Testament.

Notice that these three qualifications have nothing to do with Ridley College or preaching and teaching gifts just yet. I'm not going to make eye contact with Doug, who's one of the wardens, in case he wanted his money back.

Anyway, the same goes in our passage. It's not just that Jesus wanted the symbolism of 12 to continue. The 12 had to actually do the job as well.

They're not like the royals who just be royal. They've got to actually do a job as well. And so on your handout, what I've done is I've put a ballot paper. A ballot paper for which qualities you would vote for if you were selecting an apostle.

Obviously, my ballot paper is officially sanctioned by the Australian Electoral Commission. But I wonder, what would you vote for in an apostle? Mr. Brave?

[10 : 54] What about Mr. Social Justice? Ms. Personable? Mr. Good Preacher? Mr. Religion? That sounds pretty good. Mr. Jewish? Maybe they are the things that you look for.

I wonder what the job application for an apostle would be. Maybe it would sound something like this. Apostle wanted. No previous experience required. Must be good with all that Jew-Gentile business.

Completed course at Ridley Bible College. Essential. Expert at using Jesus 2.0. I wonder if that's what apostles should look like.

But in verse 21 and 22, Luke describes the qualifications. So verse 21 is the first one. It has to be someone who, it says, was with the disciples the whole time Jesus was living amongst them from his first baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from them.

So it's not that the apostles attended the Ridley Bible course, but that they were on the Jesus course the whole time of his public ministry. That's qualification one. Number two, it's at the end of verse 22.

[12 : 01] For one of these must become a witness of his resurrection. They must have seen Jesus alive again. And the third qualification I think is the most important one.

This is the one that safeguards against anyone who thinks too highly of themselves. The end of verse 24 has it. Show us which of these two you have chosen.

This means you can't decide that you want to be an apostle. You have to be personally chosen by Jesus. See, that's what's going on in verse 26 when they're casting lots and the lots fell to Matthias so he was added to the eleven apostles.

It seems odd, doesn't it? It seems like gambling, like a dodgy way to decide such an important role. But actually, casting lots is a way of making sure that Jesus has the final decision.

You see, the apostles, they've pre-selected their candidates. They've got a short list of two, but they want Jesus to have the final say. They know that Jesus is Lord of all, even over the casting of lots.

[13 : 13] It shows that while Jesus is not physically present, he's up in heaven, he's still directing things from his throne. So someone who saw Jesus' ministry, someone who witnessed his resurrection, someone personally chosen by him.

And actually, you can see those same three qualifications for the original eleven. So just as a short aside, look over the page to verse two. So verse two at the end talks about being chosen.

It says, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles, he had chosen. Verse three talks about witnessing the resurrection. It says, after suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.

And the qualification about being with Jesus, verse three, it says, he appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. So it's not just that they were eyewitnesses, they were ear witnesses too.

They heard Jesus explain all about the signs and wonders and prophecies of the kingdom of God. They've done the full Jesus Bible course. You see, that is the definition of an apostle.

[14 : 27] No pope, no church leader can ever claim to be that anymore. If the HTD job application asked for these three qualifications, the position would still be vacant.

Or at least you'd have someone who thinks pretty highly of themselves. Choosing the twelve this way gives Jesus certainty that his message will reach the ends of the earth without being twisted and corrupted, that it'll be the pure source material.

This is why books such as the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Thomas, this is why those books aren't in the Bible because those authors weren't personally chosen by Jesus. They never met those three qualifications.

Now, maybe you think all of this is only slightly less boring than election night coverage on the ABC. What I'm going to do is show you why this is so much more.

And here's the question. What do you love about Jesus? What do you love about Jesus? Is it his death for your sins?

[15:36] His certain resurrection? Your certain resurrection on the last day? That your name is certainly written in that book of life? That you are certainly on your way to a new creation, part of the new tribe, the new family of God?

What do you love about Jesus? And now let me ask you, how do you know if any of those things are true? How do you know? What if it wasn't written down by reliable, trustworthy eyewitness leaders?

What if it wasn't written in the Bible for us? Where would the certainty for your faith come? See, at this church, we love the Bible, not because we love books per se, but because the Bible reveals to us the glory of Jesus.

It's like Jesus is the glory of the stars in the sky, and the apostles are the telescope that allows us to see him clearly as he is. The upshot of all of this today is point number three.

Don't drift from the daddies. Don't drift from the daddies. You see, today, when we talk about certainty and God in the same sentence, the opposition party out there, they come with the doubts.

[16:58] They say, how can you know anything for certain about God? The only certainty is that there is no certainty. You should just throw all your religion out. But Luke says that we can do better.

If we humble ourselves before the apostles' teaching, we can move from a doubt to a certainty. A certainty that will give us security about all the things we love about Jesus.

You see, again and again and again in the book of Acts, the defining symbol of the true church is that they gather around the apostles' teaching. There are other signs of the authentic church, to be sure, but the apostles' witness is the main one.

In fact, in Acts, you see the sovereign hand of the Father, the empowering work of the Spirit, the signs and wonders of the Son, all three of those things, follow these twelve men wherever they are testifying about Jesus, even to the ends of the earth.

And actually, even for your own personal salvation, a sure sign that you are in the family depends on what you do with the daddies, what you do with the apostles' teaching.

[18:13] thing. The point is, don't drift away from them. Maybe you find all this too restrictive. Maybe you don't like the idea that it has to be this twelve.

Maybe you might say, surely there are other equally valid ways to encounter Jesus. I think that attitude, it plays to our sort of rebellious spirits, doesn't it?

The problem is, if you can reject this twelve, you can reject any truth. Moving away from the apostles' teaching, like getting rid of the telescope, it gives you a blurry picture of Jesus at best, until one day you're not looking at the real Jesus at all.

Moving away from the apostles breeds disunity. Of course it does. If you move away from the tribal daddies, you move away from the tribe. But sadly, I think that is what a lot of churches have done, especially in Melbourne.

They're never going to publicly say, yeah, we've moved away from the apostles' teaching, but in their priorities, in the way they organise their church life, in their preaching and teaching, they show who it is and what it is they're really listening to.

[19:25] We're not saying this to judge other churches, we're not saying this so you would gather the pitchforks and go on a witch hunt. The point is we here need to watch ourselves. This passage helps us prioritise our church life, what we preach and teach whether our small groups study the Bible or a book kind of related to Bible things.

This passage means that our church here is allowed to look less impressive than other churches in the area. It means that sometimes we might be out of step with the Anglican Diocese. It means that

a different style of worship is okay with different gifts of the Spirit.

That's fine as well as long as the foundation of the apostolic testimony is there. We can be certain that it is a true church, that we're part of the true family of God.

That is equally true for us personally. We've all got truth sources, don't we? We've all got people and voices we listen to that help us organise our lives, that tell us what's important.

But can we do better than whatever grabs our emotions or affirms what we really want to believe or whatever our personal opinions are. Luke says don't drift from the daddies.

[20 : 45] Drifting is about priorities. It's about organising who and what you listen to. Our own Nicene Creed famously says this, we believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church.

See the true church is the one built on the foundation of the apostles witness. The true believer is one who doesn't drift from the daddies.

Should I pray that we would do that? Let's do that. Father God, thank you that you have preserved your word from the prophets of old and the apostles in the New Testament.

Thank you that we can be sure we have a certain, clear picture of Jesus and of you. And Father, there are so many voices which pull us away, which make us want to drift.

Please, would our foundation always be the apostolic testimony of Jesus? Please, would we not drift away? Especially when the word is tough for us to listen to.

[21 : 56] Please, Father, help us trust in the leaders which Jesus has elected. We ask this for his glory. Amen.