

## INTRODUCTION

It is a marvellous and reassuring truth to know that our God is sovereign and works out his purposes in our world. His providential control over events takes into consideration all the actions of human beings even those, which are opposed to him, and He uses them to accomplish his own purposes in our world.

It is amazing that God uses ordinary people like you and me to accomplish his divine purposes and He does so in such away that we are responsible for our own decisions yet at the same time He is ordaining and using every decision to fulfil his set purposes.

This point is clearly illustrated for us in the passage that we are looking at today where God uses the betrayal of Jesus as fulfilment of Scripture and then He uses the casting of lots in order to appoint his man to the task of being an apostle.

### 1. THE SUBMISSION OF THE DISCIPLES (vs. 12-15)

Jesus had commanded his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the coming of the Holy Spirit (v 4), they had to wait because the Spirit could not come until the Lord Jesus had finally finished his work on earth and had ascended into heaven. So the apostles obeyed their master and returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives to wait.

This waiting period would last another ten days, and during this ten-day period the disciples would learn to practise obedience and submission to their Lord through waiting and through prayer. Now it is never easy to wait especially if you are the sort of person who is naturally impatient.

The apostles had witnessed the resurrection of Jesus they had been given the great commission so there were lots of things to do and people to reach but they must wait. This is because they cannot do any of those tasks until they are empowered by the Holy Spirit so they simply must wait.

Surely this waiting time was important time for the disciples it was through this time that they would learn to submit to their master; they would learn to obey their Lord. It is the same with us. There are times when God puts us into situations that try our patience greatly. It may be times of illness and disability or simply old age that means that we physically cannot do what we long to do. We see so much to do in the church and in our communities but we cannot physically do it. Well it is during those times that God is calling upon us to submit to Him in obedience to wait on Him. He has brought the situation upon us to teach us certain lessons and one of those lessons is the need to learn submission to God's will and plan for our lives.

At other times we see no reason why we are doing what we are doing. We know that the job we are in is the right one but we cannot see what God is doing through our lives and witness in that place of work. Perhaps its open hostility all day or total indifference and you long to see God break into the lives of those we work with.

It could be our family that we long to see saved or as a church it could be in the future that our church gets smaller in number and influence and we simply ask what is the point of us being here. Perhaps for some of us it will be a time of unemployment and we cannot work out the point in it. You desire to work, do all you can but no doors open up for you.

Well it's during all those times that we must wait and submit to our Lord and obey Him in the situation and circumstances that He has brought us into. God has given us our situation and circumstances in order to teach us submissiveness and obedience.

But waiting for the apostles did not mean inactivity they were not to do nothing as they wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit and we learn in this section what the apostles did as they waited. When they arrived at Jerusalem they went upstairs to the room where they were staying.

Some people think this was the Upper room where Jesus met with his disciples before and after his death but we have no way of knowing if it is the same room or not. Luke names those who were present on this occasion for us (v 13-14), and the reason he does so is because the teaching of these men would be the foundation on which the church would be built so it was important to know who they were.

The women joined the 11 remaining disciples; we are not told who they were although we could speculate plus Mary, Jesus' mother and his brothers. His brothers were not believers at first (Mark 3:21, 31-34) but clearly after Jesus death and resurrection they turned in faith to Him. This group of 120 all gathered together to wait but as they waited they prayed and we are told that they were united in prayer (v 14). The words translated "They all joined together" expresses something of the strong unity that was evident in the early church and the word "constantly" means that they persisted in prayer. Why were they constantly praying? Well these disciples had been separated from their ascended Saviour and they knew that their only way of communicating with Him is through prayer.

They were used to speaking with him face to face but from now on they would speak to him through prayer, prayer was vital for them for it was their way of communicating with the one they loved.

Now we are not told what they prayed for, perhaps they prayed that the Lord would give them patience to wait on the coming of the Spirit. Perhaps they prayed that the Lord would help them to remain faithful, perhaps they prayed that the Holy Spirit would come soon.

We simply do not know but for our purpose a pattern is being established here that will continue down through the generations and will be true of every true church. That principle is that churches gather together in unity to pray to their God. There is private prayer and that is an important part of our Christian lives but there is corporate prayer, which is a vital part of the life of the church. A church that does not meet to pray is a church that is not doing what it ought to do. When a church gathers to pray it should come with a united heart, we should all come wanting the same thing, and notice that the leaders and both men and women were present.

It was not just the task of the leaders, the apostles to pray but every believer was present to pray. This was an open prayer meeting, where everyone was expected to come and pray together for the things that were on their hearts. Sadly in many of our churches we have people who never come to pray with the gathered church.

Work or family or something else keeps them away but surely we should do all that we can to follow the example of the early church and gather together, leaders and people, men and women to pray with one heart for God's blessing and His work.

Prayer is a sign of a submissive heart, for when God's people gather to pray they are gathering in order to seek God's blessing because they know that His work depends on his blessing. A failure to pray is really a sign of arrogance, for we must think that we are able to do God's work without his help, wisdom or blessing. The early disciples knew the necessity of prayer, they were submissive to their Lord, let us be submissive and regularly pray together as a church for this church for its future depends on the Lord's blessing. Therefore let us seek Him for that blessing.

I want you to notice something else about this early group of believers. Notice how small they were, there was only 120 of them. I want you to notice that from a very tiny beginning, the church is already beginning to grow and these 120 have gathered to pray.

Now 120 seems a large number to us today but let us remember that these were the only known believers there were and from this very small beginning the church would grow and flourish and mature. By the end of the book of Acts the gospel has spread from Jerusalem to Judah and Samaria and was beginning to make an impact in the rest of the world.

We must never assume that a small church cannot grow or that it cannot grow quickly. The early church grew at a very fast rate as we will see as we go through this book but the amazing thing is that no one knows what can be accomplished and how quick it can be accomplished when you have 120 dedicated people praying to the Lord. I say dedicated because they were obediently in Jerusalem as commanded waiting for the coming of the Spirit and praying with one heart constantly. A clear sign of dedication in the Lord's work is whether people obediently turn up to pray, for prayer tells us that we are weak and helpless and that we are dependant upon God to bless us.

All church growth will start in prayer, and every revival ever recorded has started with a small number of dedicated people who prayed unitedly. A small faithful band of believers can accomplish great things in the purposes of God. Therefore we need to give our time to prayer within this church.

Our prayer meetings have been well attended recently but there is always room for more, and it is clear that any blessing that this church has known in its history has come as a result of those who meet consistently to pray for God's blessing upon our church.

I know of Christians who seem to think that the Members Meeting is the most important meeting in the life of the church, after all that is where the decisions are made we are told. But in truth the most important meeting and the place where decisions are made is the prayer meeting. Perhaps we have neglected this area recently and have let other things eat up our time so that we no longer meet to pray at our church prayer meetings. Then let me encourage you to get back into the habit for a praying church is a growing church as the book of Acts will clearly show.

## 2. THE SUICIDE OF JUDAS AND THE APPOINTMENT OF MATTHIAS (vs. 15-26)

The joy of that prayer gathering was interrupted by Peter who wanted to explain how Judas betrayal of their Saviour fitted into God's overall plan. They knew Judas, they had trusted him as their treasurer and never suspected him as a traitor and no doubt they were looking for answers to many questions that were going round in their head.

Peter explains that what Judas did was actually fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy (vs. 16, & 20). The Scripture in mind is the one written by David in Psalm 65:25 and Psalm 109:8. God was not caught out or surprised by Judas actions but God in his sovereign purposes had already ordained the betrayal of his Son yet that truth does not make Judas less guilty.

He was totally responsible for his actions he knew what he was doing yet God's sovereign purposes is such that even evil actions fulfil the good purposes of God. Judas was one of the disciples and considered by everyone to be a faithful member of the band of disciples. But Judas had managed to fool everyone that he was a believing person even though he wasn't (John 6:64).

Judas was never forced into betraying Jesus; he willing did so for his own purposes yet amazingly God used Judas evil action to accomplish his own predetermined purposes, which he had revealed many years earlier through David (v 20). Now Judas for me represents the greatest

example of a wasted opportunity in all of history. He had the rare privilege of being included in the 12 men who ministered with Jesus.

For more than three years he had the wonderful opportunity of listening and watching Jesus and the opportunity of coming to trust in Jesus Christ like the other 11 disciples. Yet he failed to do so, for his motives for following Jesus were purely selfish he was in it for what he could get out of it. But sadly Judas' life ended with him taking his own life, another selfish act (v 18).

Judas no doubt felt guilty and remorse for his actions although he was never repentant, he decided he could bear it no longer and killed himself, but in doing so he was actually fulfilling Scripture spoken by David many years before (v 20).

Now this incident sends out warning bells to us. You know it is possible to be accepted by everyone as a Christian and yet remain an unbelieving person. It is possible to have all the privileges of belonging to a church and of hearing God's word and of receiving Pastoral care and yet remain outside of Christ. It is possible to fool others about your spiritual state but we cannot fool God.

That is why we must ask the Lord to examine our hearts and reveal to us something of their true condition. Then if necessary we must repent and believe. What a tragedy to enjoy many of the benefits of belonging to a church and yet miss out in the end on salvation. Don't let that happen turn to Jesus today and believe.

With Judas now gone the need to choose a 12<sup>th</sup> disciple has arisen but how would they go about doing so. With the original 12 Jesus personally chose them but now that Jesus has ascended into heaven how are they going to do it now. Well first of all they list the qualifications necessary for the role (vs. 21-22). He must be a man who has witnessed Jesus entire ministry from his baptism until his ascension. Secondly he had to be a witness of the resurrection (v 22). He must have seen the resurrected Christ because the key qualification for the apostles was that they had witnessed the resurrection.

Their preaching was to focus on the resurrection of Christ therefore they had to be convinced of that truth by having witnessed the resurrected Jesus with their own eyes. Then they could tell people that it is true Jesus has been raised from the dead because they personally have seen the risen Christ.

Having laid out the qualification two men were identified, Joseph called Barsabbas also known as Justus (which was his Roman name) and Matthias. We know nothing of either of these two individuals apart from what we are told here. However having identified the men who met the qualifications they knew that the qualification for an apostle was that the Lord must choose them.

Therefore they prayed and asked the Lord to show the church, which one of the two men he had chosen to take over the apostolic role from Judas. (v 24). Having prayed about the situation they drew lots, which was an accepted Old Testament method for determining God's mind on a matter (Leviticus 16:8; Josh 7:14 cf. Proverbs 16:33). This however is the last occurrence of casting lots to determine God's will for as soon the Holy Spirit comes, this method is no longer needed for He will direct the church and reveal the Lord's mind in matters unknown.

The lot fell to Matthias and he was appointed an apostle along with the other 11. Matthias' name means "gift of God" and so he was to the apostles and the church God's gift to them.

With Matthias in place the final preparation for the church was complete, everything was ready now, the church had to wait for the coming of the Spirit who would come and empower these apostles to go forth and proclaim the wonderful message of salvation to sinners. Through these 12

the church would be established, they would be the foundation on which God would build His church.

Now although the appointment of Matthias is unique because he was an apostle and we do not have apostles today. In case you are asking why we do not have apostles today, an apostle has to have seen the resurrected Christ, which of course is impossible, as He has ascended into heaven. Apostles were foundational upon whose teaching the church of Jesus Christ would be built. The foundation has been built therefore there is no longer any need for apostles.

But although this incident is therefore unique there are some principles that can be used in the appointment of leaders within the church of Jesus Christ and principles that are useful for guidance in general. If there is a need for an Elder or Deacon then surely it is wise to do what the apostles did and think about what qualifications such a person needs to demonstrate.

If you consider 1 Timothy 3:1-13 you will see the necessary qualifications for being an Elder or Deacon. You must be a man for leadership in God's church is male because God's has established male leadership from the very beginning of time. Therefore God's church models the family unit and in the family the man is the one who is the leader within his home.

He is responsible for all that goes on in his home and likewise in the church, the Elders are responsible for all that goes on in the church. So when we are looking for future leaders let us look at the men of our church and see if there are any that have the necessary gifts to be Elders or Deacons. Now God expects us to use our mind and to think He does not drop a name out of the sky, we are expected to apply God's word and then come up with names of those that we believe have the necessary qualifications.

That is what the apostles did or perhaps it was the apostles along with the other believers but it is clear that there were two men who had the necessary qualification (v 23). But they only needed one more Apostle. So how are they to decide? They prayed about the matter (v 24) for they knew that only the Lord can read hearts and so they wanted to know his mind on the matter.

Having prayed they cast lots, which as I said was an Old Testament way to decide God's will on a matter. Of course today we have the Holy Spirit to guide us and we have the complete Scriptures to guide us so we do not need such a method today. But the principle is the same. To know God's mind on a matter as important as leadership we should pray and then expect God to guide us by His Spirit through the use of the word of God.

So there are three aspects to knowing God's will that I think is true not just of leadership positions in the church but concerning all matters that we need guided on. First we must think using Scripture to help us work out the principles and the best options in a matter. Secondly and this should be done from the beginning we should pray that the Lord will guide us and reveal his will to us.

Finally we should expect God to guide us through the Scriptures and through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In seeking Guidance there is always a human element and a divine element and we need to implement both in order to know the Lord's mind on any matter. God's expects us to think things through and do our homework when a decision needs to be made. Then he expects us to pray, pray and pray and then he expects us to exercise faith as we wait in expectation on Him to reveal his will to us.

Therefore as I conclude let us learn these lessons. Let us be submissive, let us examine ourselves before God so that we do not turn out like Judas and finally let apply these principles when we need the Lord's guidance on any matter.

Amen