



**WESTLAKE HILLS**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## "The Other Apostle" Sermon Series: "The Way of the Spirit"

Acts 1:12-26

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### Acts 1:12-26 Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

(New International Version)

<sup>12</sup>Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk<sup>[a]</sup> from the city.

<sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

<sup>15</sup>In those days Peter stood up among the believers<sup>[b]</sup> (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) <sup>16</sup>and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus— <sup>17</sup>he was one of our number and shared in this ministry."

<sup>18</sup>(With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. <sup>19</sup>Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

<sup>20</sup>"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,<sup>[c]</sup> and,

" 'May another take his place of leadership.<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>21</sup>Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

<sup>23</sup>So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. <sup>24</sup>Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup>to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." <sup>26</sup>Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

#### Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 1:12](#) That is, about 3/4 mile (about 1,100 meters)
- b. [Acts 1:15](#) Greek brothers
- c. [Acts 1:20](#) Psalm 69:25
- d. [Acts 1:20](#) Psalm 109:8

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#### Introduction.

In July Pastor Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center outside Gainesville, FL announced to the world through a tweet that God told him to organize an International Burn a Koran Day on the 9<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. The action was to protest the plans to build a mosque near Ground Zero in New York City. Throughout this whole ordeal over the last two months, Jones reported that he and his small congregation were praying and they sensed God was telling them this was His will, and for much of the time they remained steadfastly committed to carrying out their plans. However, thankfully, Pastor Jones and his church changed their minds as pressure



mounted and people helped them see just how counterproductive this would be and the danger, in fact, it presented to our own troops overseas. Pastor Jones and his church canceled their plans, and we all breathed a sigh of relief.

Making decisions is a part of our everyday lives. We may not face many choices that have the high stakes and the national attention as the one Pastor Jones did, but we have to make important decisions nevertheless on a regular basis, which have profound and lasting consequences. What should I major in at college? Whom should I marry? What job should I take? Where should we send our kids to school? And what should I do about this relationship? These are all important decisions, and we should use everything God has put at our disposal in trying to make the best choices. This includes seeking God's will. If you want to make the best decision possible, you will want to discern the Lord's will in the matter. He made us, He knows us better than anyone else, and He can be trusted to lead us.

This morning we turn to a passage which talks about discerning the will of God in making a decision. It's found in Acts 1 where the early church chose a man named Matthias to succeed Judas as the other apostle.

## **I. The Death of Judas.**<sup>i</sup>

After recording Jesus' words to His disciples regarding the Great Commission and His ascension to heaven, Luke now draws our attention to the disciples after they returned to Jerusalem while they waited for the gift of the Holy Spirit. He also describes one further incident that took place before Pentecost, namely the appointment of another apostle to replace Judas.

Notice what Luke says about the man who betrayed Jesus and the case the disciples made for replacing him. Luke called Judas' betrayal an "act of wickedness." Elsewhere in the Bible, the Greek word is translated as an act of "infamy," "villainy," and "a crime." Some people have expressed sympathy for Judas because his role was predicted and therefore, it is thought, foreordained by God. But as John Calvin wrote, "Judas may not be excused on the ground that what befell him was prophesied, since he fell away not through the compulsion of prophecy but through the evil of his own heart."<sup>iii</sup>

Have you ever wondered why Judas betrayed Jesus? A variety of answers have been suggested over the years. Some say that the last part of his name, *Iscaiot*, means *man of Kerioth*. If it does, then Judas was the only one of the apostles who wasn't from Galilee, and maybe he felt he was the odd man out. Others suggest that Judas betrayed Jesus to save his own skin and later realized the enormity of what he had done. Still others have said he did it simply out of greed for the money, or that Judas had come to despise Jesus because of His love for the poor. A final suggestion is that Judas never meant for Jesus to die, but he betrayed Christ with the intention of forcing the Lord's hand. This is the theory which the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* presents. We really don't know the answer to this question, but we do know that Judas was so overcome with remorse because of what he had done he took his own life without ever asking forgiveness for his betrayal.

From the beginning of the book of Genesis to the end of Revelation, people experienced feelings of guilt in the Bible. That is the result of disobedience to God. We've all felt the pangs of guilt for the things we have done, and we know what it's like to feel remorse. But the purpose of guilt is not to leave us in a state of remorse but to lead us to repentance. Sadly, Judas never understood this truth.

In contrast, the Prodigal Son did. You remember he took his inheritance and traveled to the far country, he left his family, and he spent everything he had on a wild lifestyle. But then the Bible says he came to his senses. He realized his sin, and he went home to ask forgiveness from his father. There he found grace waiting for him.

Judas heard Jesus tell that parable, but he never understood its truth or its power. The tragedy of Judas is that he never sought the forgiveness of Christ when he was overcome with his guilt. Instead, he preferred to bear the punishment of God's wrath himself rather than experience the grace the Lord offers everyone.

Are you suffering from the pangs of guilt this morning? Is the Holy Spirit convicting your heart regarding a matter of sin in your life? Are you struggling to forgive yourself just like Judas? Don't be like him and remain only at the stage of remorse. Go to Jesus and cling to His grace. Ask for His forgiveness and learn to forgive yourself.



God wants to extend His mercy to anyone who desires it. It is a free gift, but it must be received. Sadly, Judas never acted on this offer of love.

## **II. The Fulfillment of Scripture.**

As the apostles and about 120 other people gathered in an upper room, they joined together in prayer. We are told that as they prayed Peter stood up, and he urged his friends to replace Judas with another apostle. Peter said the warrant for replacing Judas was found in the Old Testament Scriptures. He expressed his conviction like this, *"Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas" (1:16).*

Peter went on to quote from two psalms, Psalm 69 and 109. The first explained what happened in the betrayal by Judas, and the second spoke to what they should do about it, namely replace the betrayer. These early Christians had an awareness that the apostles were to be a 12-fold witness which represented the culmination of Israel's hope and replaced the 12 tribes of Israel. The two passages seemed to them general guidance for the need to replace the betrayer. However, it is interesting to note that later, when James the son of Zebedee was executed by Herod the king in the first wave of persecution against the church a few chapters later, it was not considered necessary then to replace James, for he had not defected or betrayed the Lord. Rather, he had been faithful unto death.

This passage demonstrates the importance of using Scripture to guide us in making decisions and discerning God's will for our lives. The Bible is to be our guide, and it gives us direction as we seek to follow the Lord in this life. It is a model you and I should follow. Are you facing a hard decision in your life this morning? Do you need the wisdom of God? Then seek answers in the Bible, and ask for the advice of godly people you respect as you seek to make the right decision. It is the way people have sought God's will throughout history.

## **III. The Choice of Matthias.**

*"So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) 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" (1:24-26).*

**A. The Qualifications.** Two qualifications were established for the apostolic replacement. First, *the candidate must have been with the other apostles the whole time of Jesus' ministry beginning with His baptism.* He had to have been a part of Christ's public ministry from the very beginning. Second, *the candidate must be an eye witness to the resurrection.* This way the new apostle could be a guarantor of the gospel tradition having personally seen the risen Lord Himself.

**B. The Method.** It may seem strange to us that the disciples used the method of casting lots in choosing the replacement. But the casting of lots was widely practiced in the Old Testament and throughout antiquity. For example, Proverbs 16:33 says, *"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."* On the Day of Atonement, Aaron chose a scapegoat by lot to bear the sins of the people in the wilderness (Lev. 16:7-10, 21-22). After the conquest of the Promised Land, Palestine was divided by casting lots (Josh. 14:2). And the rotation of the priests serving in the Temple in Jerusalem was regulated by casting lots (Neh. 10:34ff.). In these instances various kinds of marked objects were thrown down to determine God's will.

We also read in the Old Testament that on a number of occasions that the people of Israel consulted the Lord to discern His will during a national crisis by using what was called the Urim and the Thumim. It is believed that these were perhaps black and white sided dice or coins which the High Priest would throw to seek God's will. If they both came up white, the answer was "yes." If they both came up black, the answer was "no." If they came up mixed, then roll again! It was a form of casting lots to seek God's will. The method the disciples used that day is unknown to us. It may have been drawing straws, some other method was employed. We don't know.



**C. The Choice.** Two men who met the qualifications were Joseph, who was called Barsabbas, and Matthias. Apparently only these 2 individuals met both qualifications completely. Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias. And he was added to the number of the apostles.

Have you ever wondered how Barsabbas must have felt? “Hey, how about we go two out of three? Let’s do it one more time!” But none of this happened. They all accepted the choice as God’s will, and Matthias was appointed an apostle.

**D. The Silence.** For me, the most interesting thing to note about the choice of Matthias is that nothing more is heard from or about him again in the entire New Testament after this incident. Some have suggested that the early church was hasty in finding Judas' replacement, and that they should have waited for the Lord to raise up Paul as the 12<sup>th</sup> apostle. However, there is no need to conclude this as Paul would not have met the qualifications, and Paul himself described his apostleship as a unique one in line with the 12 but resting on a somewhat different basis (see 1Cor. 15:7-8).

What is also fascinating to note is that this is the last time the casting of lots is ever mentioned in the Bible. From the Day of Pentecost in in the next chapter and the giving of the Holy Spirit, we never read of casting lots again. Instead, we read of the apostles praying and seeking God’s guidance and it being given directly by the Holy Spirit. A new method of discernment replaced the old one, and today you and I have that same Holy Spirit to help lead us in making good decisions, too.

### Conclusion/Application.

So how do we discover God's will in making decisions? What are the keys to deciding what to do? I can remember in college reading this passage when I was trying to figure out whom to ask out for a date on a Friday night. There were several young women that I was interested in, and I couldn’t make up my mind. When I read about the casting of lots to choose Matthias, I wrote out the names of the women on pieces of paper, folded them up, put them into a hat, and I had my roommate draw one of the names out of the hat. I called her up and asked her if she wanted to go out on a date with me. And she did!

But is this a good way to go about decision-making as followers of Jesus? I don’t think so, and I look back now and realize that while I was zealous in seeking God’s will with the names in the hat, I was also naive and frankly a bit silly. I would like to propose a better way of decision-making. There are 6 steps in the process, and each step in listed in order of priority.

- 1. What does God's Word say?** What are the clear mandates in Scripture that should guide us? In this passage Peter quoted two psalms to find a warrant for their actions.
- 2. What does God's Word suggest?** What are the principles of Scripture that can guide us and direct our decisions? It may not be a clear command or prohibition, but the biblical principle is applicable nonetheless.
- 3. What does God's Spirit confirm?** What is the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit as I look at my options? In what direction does it seem the Spirit is nudging me, and do I have a peace about the decision?
- 4. What do God's people confirm?** What is the counsel of other brothers and sisters in Christ, and what is the universal voice of the Church throughout the centuries on a particular matter?
- 5. What does God's providence indicate?** In what direction are circumstances leading me? How has God opened one door and closed another? In what direction is He nudging me?
- 6. What does my sanctified common sense suggest?** God has given me a brain, and I can use it for His glory in making good decisions.

I believe that if you and I apply these questions to the decisions we face, things will become more and more clear to us. It doesn't mean we will see the handwriting of God in the sky for us to read His will. More often than not we will still need to step out in faith and trust Him. However, as you walk by faith you will sense God’s hand on you, you will have a greater confidence that you are seeking God's will for your life, and you will experience a



greater peace in your heart that you are in the center of the Lord's will. God has an amazing way of guiding us if we seek His will.

At various times in my life, God has revealed His will in different ways. Sometimes He has given crystal clear guidance, and other times I have had to step out in faith. For example, when Lorie and I made the decision to accept the call of the search committee of this church to come and candidate to become your senior pastor a year and a half ago, God gave Lorie and me an unshakable certainty and confidence that this was His call for our lives. There was a conference call on a Thursday night in October that was remarkably moving. All of us on that phone call experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit, and I think it surprised everyone. It was a sacred and tearful moment.

However, when I was making the decision to ask Lorie to marry me, things were not so obvious. Lorie and I had been dating for a year and a half, and I knew I loved her very much, but I had heard from a number of Christian couples that before they got married they just “knew” that was what God wanted them to do. I kept waiting for God to knock me over the head, and the longer I waited the more Lorie was the one who wanted to knock me over the head!

Things came to a point when she and I agreed to take two weeks away from each other to pray about our future. I even fasted for three days during that time trying to seek God's will. Over the course of those two weeks, it became clear that God wasn't going to knock me over the head. Rather, I sensed that He wanted me to step out in faith and trust Him, just as I had done when I gave my life to Christ in the first place. It was only after I proposed to Lorie that the feelings of confidence and assurance came. (Of course, when Lorie gave me the “play me or trade me” speech, it didn't hurt!) I searched the Scriptures, I prayed with all my heart, I asked the advice of godly people, but in the end, eventually I had to step out in faith and trust the Lord to show me the way. And He did.

What decision do you face today? Where do you need guidance from God? How does the Lord want you to seek His will as you make up your mind regarding an important matter? We don't have to do this on our own. God has given us His Word, His Holy Spirit, and His people. May we honor God which say with all our hearts, “Your will be done.” Amen.

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<sup>i</sup>The outline for this sermon was adapted from John R.W. Stott.

<sup>ii</sup>John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. I, p.40.

