

Acts 1:15-16, Jerry Arnold, Mar 25, 2006

The captains came out to the middle of the stadium and gathered at the 50 yard marker. They did the cordials. They shook each other's hands knowing that in a few moments they're going to try to knock each others heads off. But that's what they did. They were shaking each others hands and then the referee started doing this, started reaching in his pocket, reaching in this one, reaching in this one, reaching in his back pocket. He whispered something to somebody, and they did the same thing. Then the other ref that was out there, he did that.

It became obvious that nobody had a coin for the coin toss. So they hollered, and you could see the camera was going along the sidelines, and you could see all these people going like this real quick. One guy goes like this. He had a quarter or dime or whatever it was, and he ran out there. Everybody clapped. They were able to have the coin toss so that they could determine who got to choose whether they received the ball or kicked it off.

Coin toss—is there much difference in a coin toss or casting lots? How do you make a choice that you are confident is God's will? How do you do that? I heard a sermon one time when I was in college and the speaker was talking about this subject, making a choice for God. He said that someone was on a bridge, and they were deciding that if the 5<sup>th</sup> Volkswagen they saw was yellow they would know they were suppose to do what it was they were thinking about. We can come up with these things, and sometimes we look at them as being fleece like the story of Gideon back in the Bible. Other times we can manipulate it to be a little more.

I found a coin. It is quite fitting for a pastor. It's a penny. You can flip a coin to make decisions. I don't think anyone here would deny that the enemies of our soul could manipulate that. So that becomes a little scary. I'll tell you another thing. Let's say you are trying to decide between Suzie or Joanne. Heads will be Joanne and tails will be Suzie. (flipping coin) "Well, maybe two out of three." You know, you can manipulate that. So it becomes very difficult. How do you decide God's will? Is there a use of lots today that God would bless?

I'd like to study Acts 1:15-26 with you. This takes place in between the ascension of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Sometime during the ten day time period this story takes place. As we go through it, I'll make a few comments and then we'll study it. Verse 15: "And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples." Now when you see a parenthesis, that will be an insert from Luke who is the author. He's writing something to help feather out the story so that those of us who weren't there and those to whom he was writing to who weren't there, they would understand. So he inserts this. "(altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty),..."

So now we go back to Peter. Peter said, "Men and brethren, this scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and

obtained a part in this ministry.” Now, an insert from Luke. “(Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) End of Luke’s comment.

Now back to Peter. Here’s Peter speaking again. ‘For it is written in the book of Psalms: ‘Let his habitation be desolate and let no one live in it. Let another take his office.’ Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when he was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Mathias. And they prayed and said, ‘You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Mathias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.’”

I have pondered this story for a couple weeks. Last week I was in another conference sharing in a seminar, so I knew I didn’t have to continue the series. So I’ve had two weeks to think about this. I think, wow, eleven verses dedicated to this story. So what? What’s the big deal? Why, in the economy of words in the Word of God, why would the Lord include this story? It’s not very exciting. It’s not very determinative. Although it does help us to understand how the eleven became twelve.

But when you’re done you never hear of Mathias again the rest of the Bible. There’s no information about him. You don’t know if he was a good twelve or a bad twelve. You have no idea. There’s a legend about him going to Ethiopia. But that’s not in the Bible. We don’t know that that’s true. And so when you read a passage like this you can just kind of shrug your shoulders and say, “Well, okay,” and then go on. You can’t do that if you’re preaching a series. You have to get in there and say what does it mean?

One of the things that is helpful when trying to really understand a story, trying to understand a passage of scripture, is to look at the people who are involved. Peter is identified. There’s a group of about one hundred twenty that are identified. David is mentioned. Judas is mentioned. Then you have Joseph Barsabas and Mathias. So those are the people there.

So when you begin looking at it through the people you can readily discover that this is a story that in many ways is a contrast between Peter and Judas. Think about it. On that weekend when Jesus died for us, Thursday night when Judas left the upper room, if something had happened to Judas and he had died, we would think of him as a great man. He was a wonderful guy. Everything was okay. Well, he didn’t die, and he went on, and he is now a symbol of evil.

Think about Peter. Peter does not fare any better that weekend. In fact, with curses he denies he even knows the Lord, and as we have studied in previous studies, his curses

were against the Lord. He wasn't just using bad language to demonstrate he didn't know the Lord. He was actually cursing the Lord. So Peter doesn't fare any better. But yet, here you are, Peter standing up, a leader in the church and Judas is dead with his intestines poured out. What's the difference? Well, we have a clue in the story.

If you look at Acts 1:18, it says, "Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity." If you would like a living story about the wages of sin, Judas is your story. And it even goes on farther as Peter's describing it when you go to verse 25, here it is said, "...to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place."

You see, Judas went to his own place. I'm telling you, Brothers and Sisters, it's okay to make plans for our lives. God wants us to make plans for our lives, but never apart from His plan for our life. Judas had his own plan. He ended up fulfilling his own plan. He went to his own place. Where we want to go is not our own place. But we want to go to a place prepared by God, a place that we can't even imagine what it's like. But, if you're determined, you, like Judas, can be successful and go to your own place. And your own place will not be one bit prettier than his was.

What about Peter? Look at John chapter 21. Jesus has risen from the dead. He has appeared to the apostles on a number of occasions. They have this occasion at a breakfast starting with verse 15. "So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?' Peter said to Jesus, 'Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.' So Jesus said to him, 'Feed My lambs.' Jesus said to Peter again the second time. 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' Peter said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.' Jesus said to him a third time, 'Simon, Son of Jonah, do you love Me?' Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me? And he said to Him, 'Lord, you know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed My sheep.' (Now note what happens.) 'Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.' (it goes on) "This Jesus spoke signifying by what death Peter would glorify God. And when Jesus had spoken this He said to him, 'Follow me.'"

The difference between Peter and Judas is Peter decided to go with Jesus. He followed Jesus. And Peter, because he repented, is a hero to us. Judas could have repented, and he would be a hero to us as well. But he went his own way, to his own place. You have to hand it to Peter. Even in the midst of the hot spot light of interrogation from God himself, and even if it's just this warm intimate moment where Jesus and Peter are being reconciled, it doesn't matter either way, you've got to admit Peter is pretty fast, because when you read the story any farther, you discover Peter says, 'Wow, what's going to happen to John?' Jesus says, "What does that matter? You follow me." He repeats it again.

So, Brothers and Sister, when you read this story in Acts 1:15-26, one of the things that jumps out to us is Judas' life is a life that demonstrates the wages of iniquity. And Judas went to his own place. Peter would follow Jesus and by God's grace so will we. And we can go to a place prepared by God for us.

We look at the one hundred twenty, no more mention of them. You come to Acts chapter 2. It says 'Now when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord...' We don't know who they are. At least I don't yet. Next week that will be our passage. Maybe we can find out. Is it the twelve? Is it one hundred twenty? Is it a fraction of them? We don't know. So we don't know about the one hundred twenty. They are not mentioned again. David is mentioned and as I mentioned earlier, Judas is as well.

David is quoted in Psalm 69 and Psalm 109. I'd like to say something about those Psalms. We're not going to turn there. But if you have somebody really eating at you in life, somebody that's really gnawing at you and making life miserable, these Psalms are filled with wonderful phrases you may want to pray. It's about your enemies being destroyed. They are called the imprecatory Psalms. They are part of a collection of hard sayings. "Lord, may they not be satisfied at their table." "Give them diseases in their loins." It gives you a whole new language of prayer, if you are interested. If any of you are pastors, in particular you will be blessed by Psalm 109, because it's a description of what it's like to be a spiritual leader. "I gave them my love and they hate me." That's what it says.

Now, David has been a study for people, these Psalms. How can they be in there? How does that mesh with Jesus? Yet, Peter comes along and Peter quotes from those Psalms. I'm telling you, Brothers and Sisters, when you look at those Psalms in the light of Judas, it makes sense. Judas was reprehensible in his actions. These Psalms will reflect the experience of those people who with clenched teeth, clenched fists, hard hearted, they will do anything against God and anything against God's people, and they kind of portray a Judas like mentality that will be prevalent in the last days of earth's history.

If you haven't experienced it yet, I've got news for you, you're going to. They are going to come at us. They are going to seek to destroy us. When Jesus comes, it won't bother us one whit that he destroys our enemies. Now some of you may be shocked. But that's the truth. When we see it in the context of Calvary and realize that rebellion against God is more of a heinous crime than we've ever imagined, it begins to make sense.

Let's go to Acts 1:23. They have two people that they are going to propose. It says they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, that means Joseph, son of the Sabbath, and he had a surname Justus, and then this fellow named Mathias. Joseph Barsabas has a brother. He's found in Acts 15:22. He's mentioned. It says, "Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren." So that's all we know about Joseph called Barsabas. He has a

brother named Judas also called Barsabas. Then there's the mention of Mathias. No more information about him is given, nothing before, nothing after.

Then we look at the process of casting lots. How could they determine between these two men which one God had chosen? You remember that they say in verse 24, "And they prayed and said, 'You, oh Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two you have chosen.'"

Before they have that prayer, they determine what the qualifications for office are. Acts 1:21 & 22. "Therefore these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to the day that He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." There were two qualifications. They had to accompany Jesus from the time of His baptism, and they had to be a witness of His resurrection.

Now, this is an interesting thing, because none of them had walked with Jesus that entire time. In fact, it's only the last year and a half of Jesus' life that people are with Him full time. So it must mean kind of in a broad brush stroke that they were there to witness the baptism of Jesus, they agreed with it, they were excited about it. They were with Jesus from time to time, and then they are witnesses of the resurrection. These men know Jesus. That's the qualification. They know Jesus, and they are witnesses of the things He did and of the things He said.

Then in Verse 26 it says, "And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Mathias." Again we don't know who they are. Is it one hundred twenty people each having a lot with the name of one of those on it, and they all did something? Or was it the two men who did something? We are not told.

One of the ways they use to cast lots was they would inscribe something on stones, put them in a container and shake them around, shake them around, shake them enough so that those stones began to jump, and when one came out, boom. that was it. Now, it seems a little bit hokey, but did you know there's Biblical precedence for doing this?

Look at Leviticus chapter 16. Some of you know that this chapter is about the Day of Atonement, the most sacred and holy day in the calendar year of the Israelites. Look what happens. We'll begin with verse 6. "Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which is for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house. He shall take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat."—casting lots on the Day of Atonement to determine which goat was sacrificed and which goat became the scapegoat.

Numbers chapter 26 talks about the Children of Israel before they entered into the Promised Land. In verses 55 and 56 it says, "But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. According to the lot

their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller.” Who decided that? It was God.

We don't have time to look at the story of Achan who was chosen by lot, or the story of Jonah who was chosen by lot, or the story of Saul, the first King of Israel, who was chosen by lot. We don't have time to look at the story of Zacharias in Luke chapter 1 who was chosen by lot to offer incense that day when Gabriel come and spoke to him about his wife Eliza becoming pregnant.

Look at Proverbs chapter 16, an interesting verse. Proverbs 16:33. This is an amazing text. It says, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.” People in Bible times had a lot of confidence in casting lots. In fact, all people's did. You can read in Matthew 27 where the soldiers cast lots for the robe of Jesus. Remember that? It was not just religious people. It was not just servants of God but heathen people as well.

Now that confuses the issue a little bit. In fact, I read in one commentary that said because heathen people did it, we shouldn't do it. Now that's kind of a stale and empty shallow argument. You see, in the world, truth started first and paganism is an aberration of what truth is. From time to time there will be debates about things, and people will say, “We shouldn't do it because the pagans did it.” Listen, God predated the pagans.

How many of you have ever shaken a pastor's hand at the end of the service? Have you? Do you know where that originated? It's not a Jewish custom. That did originate in the pagan temples. Because as the priest got close to the god that they are worshipping, and you wanted to have a piece of that action yourself, you couldn't be there with the priest, so afterwards when you shook his hand you were getting a piece of that power from the god. Do you think that's what's happening at the end of the service today when you come out? No, all you're getting is a little sweat from me, that's it. We just do it because that's a nice thing to do and Karen and I like greeting people.

So it's kind of a tired argument. People pagan this and pagan than. I didn't like what that commentary said, so I set it aside. You can't just say, “Heathen people did it.” Well, heathen people had children. And they actually ate every day that they could. They ate. That's a heathen custom, to eat. Did you know that? So we've got to be careful. It is fascinating that there's not another reference in the Word of God to casting lots, but they did do it in the church. Some 500 years after this they'll do this to choose one of the cardinals to serve in some place. I don't know whether that's significant.

What I do know is that the condition of these men's hearts determined the ability of God to answer their request for wisdom. #1, they were humble before God. Were they not humble before God? #2. They were scriptural. They were looking for the Word of God for guidance. #3. They were needful. They had to replace that 12<sup>th</sup> person, Judas. They were needful. They had a need. #4. They asked God for help. They asked Him for help.

So they were humble, they were scriptural, they were needful and they asked God for help. In that posture, God answered their prayer. Now you may try to invent all kinds of

ways that you can manipulate to try to figure out God's will. But I trust, Brothers and Sisters, that if we'll be humble, scriptural, needful and ask for help, God will get us in the right place.

A number of years ago my wife wrote a play about Jesus and His ministry to people. The earliteens of the church were going to act it out for a program for the church. All of them had their parts kind of chosen according to their ability. They are all involved. It came down to who was going to portray Jesus. My wife was allowing people to have input into what they wanted to do.

Two young men, two earliteens, both wanted to portray Jesus in this play. Both of the young men had very positive traits, nothing wrong with either one doing that. It was not a case of, "Oh brother, if he does it," you know. It was not that. They were both good kids. They were both quality kids. How do you decide? She humbled herself before God. She prayed about it. She took their names, put them in a container. She drew one out. When the name came out, immediately she recognized that it's not the one she would have chosen. But she stayed with it. Here's what happened.

During the practicing and during the play, that young man that had been chosen was so affected by playing the role of Jesus, he gave his heart to Jesus. God knew what that experience would do. When that young man gets to heaven, part of the spiritual journey that he'll remember for eternity will be that one Saturday evening when he portrayed Jesus in a play written by my wife and he was chosen by lot.

Now Brother and Sisters, this doesn't answer all the questions about lots. But it tells me that if we'll be humble if we'll be scriptural, if we're needful and ask God for help, if we will do that, God will give us direction in our lives and we'll be okay. And today I want to ask you a question. Would you like to experience Jesus in a way that affects you for eternity? Would you like to say to Jesus again or maybe for the first time, "Lord, I want you as my Savior." If you would like to say that, I'm going to ask you to stand right where you're at.

Father in Heaven, please Lord, may we have an experience with Jesus that changes us. Come into our hearts now Lord, fill us with Your presence and teach us to follow You and not to seek for our own place, we pray in Jesus name, Amen.