

Making Godly Choices: the disciples chose Matthias. Acts 1:15:26

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.'

¹⁸ (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. ¹⁹ Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

²⁰ '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," and, "May another take his place of leadership."'

²¹ 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, ²² 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.'

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

Scene 1: Bad choice!

Judas, well that was a very graphic account by Luke! Matthew tells it differently, that Judas went and hanged himself.

Matthew has it that Judas could see no way out from his act of betrayal and, instead of throwing himself on the mercy of God, he again takes matters into his own hands and decides to end his life.

Luke has it as a divine act, a little like that of the couple, Annanias & Sapphira who made the choice to lie to God's Spirit and fell down dead at the apostles' feet.

Either way, Judas made a terrible choice and, while some may say he was fated to do that, Judas had the opportunity to throw himself on God's mercy.

King David had set a precedent for. He made a bad decision to have an affair with the wife of one of his officers, then followed it up with an even worse decision to arrange the murder of that general to try and cover-up his first bad decision. After a challenge by another prophet of the Lord, David opened his heart to the Lord saying,

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

²Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. (Ps.51:1-2)

Wise Advice 1: Be open with God

Sometimes we make very bad choices and sometimes we make matters worse by making other bad decisions to try and correct the first, getting sucked into a downward spiral. But we always have a choice. Do we follow Judas' faith-less example or David's of turning to the Lord?

If only we would be honest before the Lord and, when we've truly asked for forgiveness, that we accept his mercy and don't keep re-visiting or hanging on to that past sin, but let it go, allowing the Lord's transforming of our hearts!

Last week Peter Andoh spoke about the Apostle Peter being reconciled with Jesus after he had denied Jesus not one, not twice but three times. The past is not always pretty, but the Lord calls his people onwards and upwards with him. The Lord can use those bad experiences of our lives for good.

As we move into the choice the disciples make to replace Judas, let this line stand out to you, 'For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.'

Jesus buries the past sin in the act of forgiveness and the sinner again becomes a witness to the resurrection! Let this hope fill you.

Think on it, pray on it and act on it. Live in the resurrection of Jesus and not in the past sin for, as scripture says elsewhere, in Christ we are a new creation.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!" (2Cor.5:17)

It is definitely better to seek the Lord as we make decisions, rather than being filled with regret afterwards and going through the cycle of forgiveness from the Lord.

The Lord forgives – but we should not live in a way that does not treat his forgiveness with the utmost respect and seriousness.

Scene 2: The disciples' example,

In this next scene, the disciples have found reason in scripture, which is God's living Word, to replace Judas, so there will once again be twelve disciples representing the twelve tribes.

How they do it is quite interesting!

One: They understand from scripture that they must choose someone

Two: They bring their decision-making before the Lord and nominate two men who they believe to be faithful of heart.

Three: They cast lots to find out who the Lord has chosen.

'But then they cast lots.' Sound surprising? It might sound as if they are 'leaving it to fate' but it was a scriptural-based practice of the time, and they are not stuck in waiting for a decision from the Lord.

Brief Explanation

Some decisions are difficult to make. Sometimes we wait and wait, saying, 'The Lord has not shown me yet, so I'll carry on as I am until he does.'

What are we waiting for? A big lit-up sign from heaven? A clear, unequivocal message from the Lord that we cannot possibly mistake as being from him?

In the film, 'Bruce Almighty' there are scenes where a tramp is holding up a placard giving a message from God, but he is completely ignored. The film viewer is invited into the space, 'hey just look at the signs and stop being such an idiot Bruce! The answer's right there!'

But of course, it takes various bad decisions and hard lessons before the message finally lands in Bruce's heart.

Sometimes the Lord does provide a message to confirm what we should do,

(own testimony: taking on management of a construction process)

But sometimes he encourages us to narrow down the choices with him, and then to place the decision in his hands in some way.

The apostle James tells us,

'If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.' (James 1:5-7)

Back to the disciples' example:

There will already be requirements for the decision. In the disciples' case it was,

- that the person must have been present during Jesus' earthly ministry, from his baptism by John to his rising up to heaven.
- And that he must have a faithful heart to the Lord.

Through that process they prayerfully narrowed the choice down to two. They then took action and they cast lots believing that the Lord would have control of the decision.

Proverbs 16:33, The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

Wise Advice 2: What to avoid,

Getting stuck: We should not allow ourselves to get stuck and make no decision at all. That way fails to place faith in God, fails the principle of discipleship and fails to allow the Lord's transforming of our hearts and lives.

It is, as the Apostle James put it, 'allowing ourselves to be tossed by the wind.'

Rushing: The caveat to this: Don't rush into a decision, without testing it out with the Lord and, if necessary, finding wise advice from active and faithful disciples.

Wise Advice 3: Example of what to do. Our list might look something like this:

- **Step 1: Narrow down the decision**
 - We have a decision to make, what is the godly choice?
 - 'If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.' (James 1:5)
 - : which ones are Jesus-like in character?
 - It may be that all of the choices seem godly, but it is worth testing. What are the motivations behind each choice? Are they God-led, self-led or other-people-led?
- **Step 2: Involve others.** 'Lord, you know everyone's heart' (Acts 1:24). Who can I involve in my decision-making? It needs to be someone/some people who walk closely with the Lord. What discernment can they bring?
- **Step 3: Make the choice!** 'Show us ... which you have chosen'(Acts 1:24). If there is still more than one choice, we must still do something active to reach the decision:
 - We could write-down the choices, pray over them again asking for the Lord's direction, draw out one, see what it is and go for it.
 - If this has not yet given the decision and there are now two choices that we're really struggling to work out which one, try folding up the two written-out options, mixing them up and drawing one out.
 - While it is not a practice that seems to have been done after the Spirit came at Pentecost,ⁱ it does have that scriptural example of the disciples and Proverbs 16.

Final advice and comfort,

Keep your lives free from the love of [material things] and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So, we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?' (Heb.13:5-6)

ⁱ For fuller explanation see, F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revised edn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), pp.46-47.