



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 1:12-26

“Biblical Apostolic Succession”

TRANSCRIPT

Our Scripture reading for today is Acts chapter 1, verse 12 through verse 26. The message, however, will be devoted primarily to verse 15 through verse 26, so if you have your New Testaments, turn and listen as I read beginning at verse 12 of Acts chapter 1.

“Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”

Very interesting that the brethren now, who were not believers, have now evidently come to a faith in Jesus Christ.

“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty). Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas,

which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.”

It’s hard to beat that rendering of the Authorized Version for vividness. There is an interesting comparison of this text with the account in Matthew chapter 27 in verse 3 through about verse 5, because there it is stated that Judas brought the thirty pieces of silver back to the chief priests, threw down the thirty pieces of silver, and the chief priests, thinking that it was unlawful for them to use money that was the price of blood—the betrayal—took it and bought a field, and that field was called “Aceldama; the field of blood.”

Now, one can see from this here, that we have something that is very similar.

Some years ago, a well-known Bible teacher who is still living, who at one time was pastor of a church in Edinburgh, Scotland, commenting upon this particular passage said that, “In Edinburgh on Princess Street”—which is—for those of you’ve been there, is one of probably is as fine a street in all of Europe; regarded as just an outstanding scene. If you walked up and down Princess Street with the old town on the south side, and then the new town on the other side of the street, it makes a very vivid impression upon you. Well, in Edinburgh even today on Sunday afternoons, there will be individuals who will come out and preach the gospel at one of the corners there where the Scottish National Gallery is, and just a place where people gather together—big crowds—and there will be people standing up and preaching the gospel. And this was happening in the day that this man was pastor of the Charlotte Street Chapel, a well-known Baptist church in the center of Edinburgh.

And often on the meetings there, there would come along a man who used to pipe out sarcastically in the meeting, “The Bible has big blunders in it. And you can’t deny it. It contradicts itself. In Matthew it says that Judas went and hanged himself, and that the priests bought a field with the thirty pieces of silver. In Acts it says that it was Judas himself, and not the priests who bought the field, and that instead of hanging himself, he fell headlong, and his insides fell out. How can you get

over that? You can't get over that.” And he would say that week after week whenever he appeared, in the midst of the messages that were given. So some of the people who'd been conducting the meetings—they were mainly laymen who were preaching—went back to the minister of their church and said, “Can you help us out?”

And he said, “That caused me to a little bit of study,” and he came up with this rather interesting solution. I'm not sure it's right—and I'll mention another one that is more common in a moment—but he pointed out from his study, that both Judas and the priests in his opinion, bought fields. Judas bought one from his stolen moneys. John chapter 12 tells how he was constantly stealing from the common treasury of the apostles, and the word that is used in Matthew is a different word from the word in Acts chapter 1, of what was bought. Judas bought a *chorion*, which is a word that could indicate something like a farm. So he bought a farm with the money he had been stealing. The priests, on the other hand, bought—and the word that is used is word that we would say is appropriate for a field. So they bought a field. And furthermore, the priests bought their field in the open market; he felt was suggested by the Greek term that was used for buying, and Judas acquired a field for himself. The word—again, a different word for “buying” which could be understood in that way. And finally he said, “Judas had purchased his field beforehand; before he received the thirty pieces of silver, and the priests using the thirty pieces of silver, bought a field afterwards. It just so happened, that they both came to be known as “the field of blood,” because in both cases, it was a field, or a farm that was bought by blood. So he felt that that was a very good harmonization of these two accounts.

Others have said more simply, that in the case of Judas' coming back, and giving the money to the high priests, that when they went out and bought the field or the farm, it was bought with the money that was really Judas' money, and so it was bought in his name. And since it was bought in his name, it could be said that he bought the field. Those of you who like simple explanations, you would like the second explanation. That's the explanation of leading New Testament interpreters. The other may be right. When we get to heaven, we will discover what is right.

At any rate, one might ask, “Well, what about Judas?” Well, in one case, the reference is to the fact that he went out on his own property—his farm—and there he hanged himself, and since it was his own farm, there were very few people that would come to it, and so his body was hanging upon the tree for a lengthy period of time, and incid—that ultimately it disintegrated and—I like that rendering, “All his bowels gushed out.” Now, some people don’t like that, but that’s very vivid to me. The other explanation is, that simply, Judas contracted a disease which caused his stomach to expand, and in fact tradition—which often is attached to apostolic things—tradition—some tradition said that his stomach came to be so big, that he was unable to walk down some streets, because his stomach—sto—stomach was too big to get down those streets. Well, one can think of some of the streets in Damascus which are very small, and understand something like that, but that’s purely tradition.

Isn’t it interesting? These things that have arisen about the word of God. There is no book in all of literature that can compare with the Scriptures, in the attention devoted to it. That in itself is one of the evidences of the greatness of this book.

Now, in verse 19 after Luke has just written, “all of his bowels gushed out.” That was very realistic, you know. Very realistic. It’s very true to life. We read these words:

“And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem, insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is, the field of blood. For it is written in the book of the Psalms; Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein, and his bishopric let another take. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us. Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Mathias. And they prayed and said; Thou Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen. That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his

own place. And they gave forth their lots, and the lot fell upon Mathias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the Scriptures, and for the way in which they reveal to us so wonderfully, the message and the ministry of our lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And we’re grateful for men like Luke, the evangelist and historian of the Christian church, who spent days and months and possibly years in the giving to us of two magnificent accounts; first, of the gospel message of the Lord Jesus, in his life and death and burial and resurrection, and then in the continued ministry of the Lord Jesus through the church, which was founded upon the great confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

We are grateful, that so many hundreds of years later, we meet in Jesus’ name, and we worship Thee through him. And, Lord, we thank Thee for the privilege of preaching the gospel in our day. We pray that Thy hand of spiritual blessing may be upon the ministry of the Word of God wherever it goes forth, all over the face of this globe. We thank Thee for the little part Thou hast given to us. We pray that it may be fruitful, blessed, and watered by the spirit of God in heaven, and, Lord, we pray, that through the ministry of the Word, our hearts may be touched and drawn closer to Thee.

If there are some in this audience who have never made the commitment to Jesus Christ through the Spirit, bring them to him. We pray for this church, its leaders, its elders and deacons, its members and friends, those mentioned particularly in the Calendar of Concern. We pray for the whole Church, and we pray for this country in which we minister the Word of God. May Thy blessing be upon us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] As you can tell from reading our bulletin, the subject for this morning is “Biblical Apostolic Succession.” Apostolic Succession is a theory of ministry advocated by the Roman Catholic Church, and with modifications by the Anglican Church. Rome’s view is along these lines; the Lord appointed Peter the prince of the apostles. Peter was to have successors. Peter came ultimately to be the Bishop of Rome, and therefore, the Roman bishops are successors of Peter, and since Peter is the appointed successor of Jesus Christ, they are the earthly representatives of him. This theory did not arise before the years 170 to 200 A.D. It owed a great deal to the advocacy of Cyprian, who was the bishop of Carthage during the middle part of the third century, and, strictly speaking, it leads to certain doctrinal implications that are very unacceptable to many within the church of Christ.

For example, ultimately it leads to the idea that the Bishop of Rome is ex-officio nailed to the cross, and therefore, the one to whom we owe our redemption, because he is the representative of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the things that pertain to him, pertain to his earthly representative. Actually, all succession lists were compiled in the late second century, and, consequently, there is no authority for any list of bishops that may be traceable back to the Apostle Peter. In fact, there have been no more apostles, in the original sense of the word. You notice here, that when a successor was chosen, it was specifically stated that, “of the men who companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us. Beginning from the baptism of John, until the day that he was taken up from us,” that was the one, or ones, from whom the successor is to be selected. And so anyone who was not with our Lord from the beginning, from the baptism of John, and with him until the Ascension, is not qualified to be an apostle, according to those qualifications.

Now one might say, “Well does not the New Testament say that Barnabas was an apostle?” Well, yes, it does, but the term “apostle” is a term that may be used in more than one sense. It simply means, “one sent forth,” and, consequently, an individual sent out by a local church for a particular task might be called an apostle. But when we speak of the “apostle of Jesus Christ,” we’re talking about something that is very special; something that is very technical. And in that technical sense of

the word, the person who is sent forth by a local church for a particular task does not qualify.

Barnabas was not an apostle in the sense that the twelve were apostles. He was an apostle of the churches, but the apostles of Jesus Christ form a different category.

So there are no more apostles in the original sense of the word. Now, we will see later on, that as we discuss spiritual gifts in the book of Acts, for our general subject, remember, is the “Church of the—Today in the Light of the Church—of the Early Church.” We will notice that there are people today who claim to have apostles, and claim to be apostles.

There is a well-known religious man in the state of Oklahoma who just decreed that there are five additional apostles, including himself among them, of course. Now, surprisingly, many evangelical church—many evangelical men believe these things; I mean, men that are in evangelical churches, and so, therefore, we must say something about them from time to time. There are no more apostles, in the sense of the apostles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Their office was incommunicable.

If one thinks about this for a moment, only three kinds of submission are possible, it would seem. We could have ecclesiastical succession; that is, continuing churches from the beginning. But we know from history, that churches apostatized, and as a matter of fact, in the history of all of the churches that we know of, there is a history of apostasy from truth, and one surely cannot speak of such churches as being churches within the succession of the apostles. The other possibility is to have a line of bishops traceable from early times, but we have no evidence of apostles that go back to the original days, as all of the lists that have been submitted, are subapostolical; that is, they are lists that terminate in the second century, and not in the first century. And, again, men apostatized from the truth.

There is one kind of succession that is possible, and that is doctrinal succession. In other words, the continuation within the Christian community of the teaching of the apostles. Now, that is the real successor of the apostles; the word of the apostles. We have in the New Testament, generally speaking, the word of the apostles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If you study how these books

of the New Testament came to be gathered into a canon, the key term in the early Church that explains the selection of the true from the false, is the term “apostolicity”; that is, those books that were either written by apostles, or related to apostles, or clearly had apostolic harmony; that is, harmony with what the apostles taught; these are the books that the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, ultimately came to recognize as our New Testament. These twenty-seven books have a harmony in the harmon—in the fact, that they agree in the teaching of the apostles. So it’s in the ministry of the apostles that the Church continues. That kind of apostolic succession is the only kind of succession that is worthwhile, and that is recognized by our God in heaven. The Holy Spirit, teaching the Word of God as it is found in the apostles is what is carried on today in the spiritual things of the church of Jesus Christ.

So far as “apostolic succession” as a term is concerned, in chapter 1 of the book of Acts, we have the only case of apostolic succession in the Bible, and it was not the result of a death; that is, one apostle succeeding another by virtue of one dying; such as a bishop might die, and another bishop of Rome succeed that bishop, and so on down to the present day. This apostolic succession was not due to death. It was due to defection from the faith. Judas was never really an apostle in truth, but an apostle in office alone, and consequently, there was need ultimately for a successor for Judas.

Now, one might say, “Well, that’s a special case.” True. James also was an apostle, and he was slain, but if you read Acts chapter 12 you will notice—and nowhere else in Acts is any indication given of this—there was no successor for James. So the idea of apostolic succession itself is an idea that is not really found in the Scriptures in the sense in which it is proclaimed today. So when a person says, “We have apostolic succession in our church, and, therefore, authority,” well, on the authority of the New Testament, that is a false claim of authority.

Well, as we look at the passage that we have before us today, two lessons emerge. First, the church is to be guided now by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Remember, we are still in the period of time before the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit—the promise given by God to the Son—has not

yet been given, because the Day of Pentecost has not yet come, and, therefore, the apostles themselves may cast lots to discover the will of God.

Now, we do not have any casting of lots. We are guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the remainder of the book of Acts will indicate that. There is no more casting of lots, and furthermore, direction is in the hands of God through the Spirit.

Another lesson that appears—and probably the most practical one in this particular passage—is the fact, that it is possible to be very, very close to our Lord Jesus Christ, and yet lost. That message comes home with full authority and appeal and warning when we think about Judas, an apostle of Jesus Christ who ultimately went, as Luke says, “to his own place.”

Well, there is an interesting thing that Luke tells us here, right in the beginning of this account. Evidently, the early church expected a successor for Judas. One might ask the question, “How did they know that there was to be a successor to Judas?” And so Peter, who is the “chairman of the meeting by general consent”—to use the expression of R. C. H. Linsky, the well-known Lutheran interpreter—stands up in the meeting of the apostles and says, “Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of his ministry.” Now, in verse 18 and 19 there’s a little parenthesis. We’ll talk about that in a moment, but let’s go on to verse 20, because this is that to which he is referring. “For it is written in the book of the Psalms; Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein, and his bishopric let another take.”

So as the apostles are gathered together in meeting, Peter stands and says, “Men, Judas has defected from the faith. It’s now our duty to select a successor.” I can imagine one of the apostles saying, “But Peter, what authority is there for the selection of a successor? How do you know that we are to select a successor?” Now, I think that Peter might have approached this from several different directions. He does approach it from one direction, but there is another possibility not mentioned here. He might, for example, have said something like this, “Don’t you remember that when the

Lord Jesus was speaking to us at one—on one occasion, he spoke about the fact, that there were to be apostles who would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel? Now, how is that going to take place if there are not twelve apostles?” And he would be referring to Luke chapter 22, verse 28 through 30, where we read—the Lord Jesus speaking to the apostles—“Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father hath appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” In another case it said, “On twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” So if you are going to sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, you have to have twelve apostles, and so Peter might have known from that that it was necessary for them to select a successor.

He doesn't follow that approach, however. He goes back to the Old Testament, and you might think, “Well, it seems strange, doesn't it, to go all the way back to the book of Psalms to find justification for a successor for Judas?” Well, remember this; that the apostles are our authoritative interpreters of the word of God. They have been taught personally by the Lord Jesus Christ, and he was with them for forty days teaching them—Luke says in the first chapter—“the things concerning the kingdom of God.” So they learned how to interpret the Old Testament as it appears in the New Testament, and they also had an example, for Jesus around the Last Supper—the last Passover and the first Lord's Supper—said, “One of you shall betray me,” referring to Judas. And then he cited a passage from the Psalms—Psalm 41 in verse 9, “The person who sits at the table with him has lifted up his heel against him.” In other words—and then he added, or prefaced it with, “that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” So our Lord found the betrayal of Judas in Psalm 41. He found actually, the text that said that Judas would betray him, in the Old Testament. I know many Old Testament professors—believing men—who think that's an incredible kind of way to treat the Old Testament, but it's not. There is a whole lot of good logic back of it.

Now, the two texts to which Peter appeals are different; Psalm 69, verse 25, and Psalm 109 in verse 8, and I'm going to read them, because I think it's very interesting, and it will help us, I

believe, in reading the Bible. In Psalm 69—this, by the way, is an imprecatory Psalm. I sometimes hear people call them imprecatory Psalms. Well, they’re still imprecatory Psalms even though they mispronounce the word, but it’s possible to understand it the other way. Both of these pronunciations are acceptable, but an “imprecatory” Psalm, is a Psalm which deals with curses; that is, a person prays that God bring curse upon individuals. Strange kind of praying, isn't it? We all normally think of that kind of praying as being a valid spirit-lead kind of praying, but it was, and it is. In Psalm 69 and verse 25. David is praying, and he says in the twenty-fourth verse:

“Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate, and let none dwell in their tents.”

Now, that’s the passage to which Peter refers.

Then in Psalm 109 and verse 8, David waxes eloquent concerning his adversaries, and specifically his adversary. If you’re a careful student of this Psalm, you’ll notice he speaks of his adversaries in the plural in the first part of the Psalm, and then in verse 6 he begins to speak of his adversary—adversary in the singular number. Listen to some of his words.

“Set thou a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand.”

Verse 7, Psalm 109:

“When he shall be judged, let him be condemned, and let his prayer become sin.”

Can you imagine someone in the 20th century saying that it would be proper to pray that an individual’s prayer become sin? That would violate all the conceptions of love that our generation

has, but then our generation has a conception of love that is almost entirely sentimental and not real. And so therefore, you can see how they might be offended, but the Bible is truth, and therefore, the conception of love is a different kind of conception of love, and we'll never understand the Bible if we don't understand what love is truthfully. He continues,

“When he shall be judged, let him be condemned, and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few, and let another take his office.”

That's where Peter found justification for the selection of Judas.

One might say, “Well, I don't really see how that is very good justification.” But Peter says, “Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas.” You see, this is a question of apostolic authority in the interpretation of Scripture. Peter said that, “David spoke concerning Judas” there. Well, you might say, “I don't find Judas there.” Of course, you won't find the name “Judas,” and so you must examine your principles of interpretation. Are they biblical? You see, if we learn doctrine from the Bible, we have to learn the principles of interpretation from the Bible also. The Bible is its own interpreter. Scripture is to interpreted by Scripture, through the analogy of faith. How is it, that there is logic behind this statement? Well, let me suggest to you simply this; one of the clearest examples of the types of the Old Testament, is the example of David the king of Israel. He is so much like our Lord, that our Lord is called the Son of David. And as a matter of fact, the kingly line through Judah comes through the family of David. Our Lord is Son of David. David is a “type” of the Lord Jesus; many ways. We don't have time to talk about that, but he is an Old Testament illustration of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let me ask you a question. If David is a “type” of the Lord Jesus—and even people who might puzzle over this passage would acknowledge that—then is it an irrational thing to suggest, that if David is an example of the Lord Jesus Christ, David's enemies might be examples of the

enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ? If David is a “type” of Christ, is it not reasonable to think that his enemies would also be “types” of the enemies of Christ? That’s reasonable and logical to me.

Furthermore, when you read the Old Testament, what do you read about David’s enemies?

Well, one of them was a man by the name of Ahithophel. Do you remember him? Ahithophel. Some at the break—break—breakfast table afterward said, “What’s the name of that man?” Ahithophel. Now, readers of the Bible would know Ahithophel. You’re a reader of the Bible. You know Ahithophel, don’t you? Some of you are not willing to shake your head. In the eight-thirty service they’re very honest. Some of them said, “No, I don’t know Ahithophel.” No, no, no wonder you’d be puzzled by this then. How did Ahithophel die? My mind is a blank. Explain to me why my mind is such a blank, when I’ve read the Bible through. Well, Ahithophel committed suicide. Remember that? How did Ahithophel commit suicide? I see the seminary students up here. They’re smugly sitting back. I’m not going to ask them, because they might not know, even though they look smug, because you learn to look smug in theological seminary. You learn to look smug for a different reason from what you think. It’s really to make the professor think you know, when you really don’t, and are puzzled. So you hope he will not ask you a question. Well, anyway, Ahithophel hanged himself. Now, Judas hanged himself. Judas committed suicide. Ahithophel was the enemy of David the king. Judas has become the enemy of David’s greater Son, the king, the great king.

Ah, it’s no wonder that Peter, looking through the Old Testament, and remembering that Jesus taught him to use this principle in the Upper Room Discourse, finding Judas in Psalm 41 in verse 9, found Judas in these texts as well. And on the authority of the Holy Spirit said, “The Holy Spirit spoke by the mouth of David concerning Judas.” In other words, in understanding the Scriptures, we must recognize the principle, that God works through the ages in ways that are similar; in fact, in immutable ways, because he is an immutable God, and the kinds of things he did in the Old Testament, he does in the New Testament days, and he does today, for that matter. And so the correspondences of the Word of God instruct us in our great sovereign God. So Peter was not wrong. He was absolutely right. He has told us how we should read the Old Testament. Judas was

guide to them that took Jesus. Judas did fall. He did commit suicide, just as Ahitophel did. These passages in the Old Testament include the statement, “Let another take his bishopric,” or “Let another take his office,” and so the Scripture has indicated, that he was to have a successor. “Let another take his office.” So plain. So clear, when we ponder it. And then we begin to think like the apostles, and, you know, it’s very helpful to think like the apostles. We learn how to read the Bible, and in learning how to read the Bible, the message that God has for us becomes much more meaningful, and we also come to understand it much better.

Now, there is a parenthesis about Judas’ death in verse 18 and 19. We don’t have time to give a message on Judas, because that would take us too long. This Psalm—Psalm 109—is one of the great imprecatory Psalms, of course, and it has to do with the character Judas in the sight of God. Judas was not an unfortunate man who was caught in a web of circumstances over which he had no control, and we should therefore feel extremely sorry for him, because he was so caught in this web of circumstances. Some have even suggested, that Judas is the only one of the apostles that understood that Jesus must die, and therefore, he sought by his betrayal to provoke him to proclaim who he was before his death, in order that he might not have to die on the cross.

Well, all of these attempts at the reclamation of Judas fail, because the Scriptures have already told us what kind of man he was, and Jesus himself in the Upper Room said, “The Son of Man goeth as it is written concerning him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed.” He was an apostle of Jesus Christ. Think of it. Chosen by our Lord. Our Lord doesn’t make mistakes. He was chosen. And before he was chosen, our Lord went out on the mountain and prayed all night. These choices were divinely determined by the Lord God. Our Lord chose properly. His character—Jesus called him two years into his ministry—a devil. Never once do we hear any word in Holy Scripture of Judas’ spiritual ambitions, spiritual urges, spiritual desires to know the Lord; no indication whatsoever. He was there in the meetings where our Lord preached. He was with our Lord constantly. He was at his side. As a matter of fact, he was the treasurer of the apostolic company; a man obviously appreciated. He was the only Judean it seems among the twelve, and

Judeans with Galileans, were like Charlestonians and Texans. The Judeans were the men of culture and the men of position. [Laughter] Why do you laugh? And so he was the only Judean. Evidently, they thought so much of him that—Matthew was a man who handled large sums of money, but they chose Judas for their treasurer. That would indicate they had no idea whatsoever of the kind of man this cultured Charlestonian—I mean, Judean was.

So this is the kind of man he was. His crime, of course, is obviously a different kind of crime. It's a crime of spiritual refusal of the claims of Christ. Even though he may have appeared to be one of the outstanding men in the company, he was the kind of man that you find in a local congregation—not in the congregation sitting out in the congregation Sunday after Sunday, but more likely among the body of elders or deacons, or among the Bible teachers; those who stand out for spiritual influence in the congregation. So he was not a leering, sneering, sinister, satanic-looking Mephistopheles. I imagine that you would have thought immediately, “Isn't that Judas an impressive kind of man? It's encouraging to know that there are some noble men among the apostles as well, and not those Galileans.” Well, we know the course of the betrayal of our Lord. Finally, it's Judas who comes and kisses him. Isn't that striking? In the Old Testament we are told, “Kiss the Son, lest ye perish in the way. When his wrath is kindled by the little. Blessed are all they who put their trust in him.” We don't read of any man in the New Testament ever kissing our Lord, but Judas. There's something rather striking about that.

Well, finally he betrays our Lord, and then because the “fires of hell are working in his soul,” he becomes so disturbed, that he brings back the money to the chief priests, throws it into the treasury and says, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” Matthew prefaces that with, “Judas repented himself” in the Authorized Version. It's really the term for “regret.” It was remorse he felt. It was the consequences of what he had done; not what he had done. He did not go to our Lord, and confess his sin, and ask forgiveness, but feeling the effects of separation from him, and the judgment of God beginning in his soul in a special way, he couldn't finally live with himself,

and finally this man, who had one of the greatest of all opportunities, became the greatest failure because of the greatness of his opportunity which he rejected. Remorse is not enough.

We are inclined to think sometimes, that this kind of message is a message for the unbelievers. No, it's not a message for the unbelievers. It's a message for professing believers. The message of Judas is not for outsiders. It may do them some good. It's really for insiders; people like you and me. Judas, one of the twelve, who had no real relationship to the Lord God; no personal relationship with him. Judas did not get up in the morning and commit his life to the Lord. At night, lying upon his bed, he did not give thanks to the Lord God for what Jesus Christ would do for him. He did not have any relationship with him during the day. He did not commit his life to the Lord as he lived out his day. He did not seek the Lord's help. He did not seek the Lord's comfort, and consolation. He didn't seek his strength, but he went through all the motions of association with our Lord, and also with those who were associated with him. Amazing, when you think about it.

Clarence McCartney was one of the great Presbyterian preachers of a generation or so ago, and in one of his messages on Judas, he makes reference to the Battlefield of Saratoga. If you go to the Battlefield of Saratoga today, you will see an obelisk; tall obelisk; four sides; at the top a little pyramid. You've seen them. Each side of the obelisk has at the bottom, place for a figure of a man. And there are at the bottom of the obelisk, the figures of General Morgan, General Schuyler, and then General Horatio Gates. As you walk around the monument, you will see their figures, and then their name down at the bottom. And then when you come to the fourth side of the obelisk, you look and there is no figure there, but down underneath, there is a name. You know the name. It's Benedict Arnold. He was the general who was the traitor. His name is there, but his figure is not.

Now, in the New Testament when you turn to the book of Revelation—well, I need not turn to it—but you know, of course, about it. In the New Testament it is stated, “When the city of Jerusalem is constructed, there are going to be twelve foundations, and those twelve foundations correspond to the names of the apostles.” And there will be the name of Pete, and Andrew and James and John and Matthew and Philip and Thomas and Bartholemew and James the son of

Alphaeus and Thaddeus and Simon the Canaanite, but there is one name of the original twelve missing on the twelve foundations, and it's the name of Judas Iscariot. What a fall from what a height. Judas. That's a message for insiders, not outsiders.

Well, the last part of the chapter records the choice of Mathias. It's a lesson on dispensational change as well, because we read here that, “They appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Mathias,” as candidates for apostleship. “And then they prayed.” Now, I suggest to you that Peter is the one who led in this common prayer, and it is said that they prayed. The reason I say this; it's speculation to some extent. The term that is used here, “They prayed and said; Thou Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men.” That term is one word in the Greek text, *kardiognostes*, one that knows the hearts. That term is used later by Peter in Acts chapter 15. It seems to be one of those terms that was associated with him. So it's not a serious thing. I just suggest that Peter led in this first recorded common prayer, and this is the way he prayed. You'll notice it's not a long prayer. It's very brief. It's very much to the point. “They prayed and said; Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen.” He had chosen. Peter knew that. What he needed to know was whom the Lord had chosen. And so of these two men he asks, “Tell us the one you have chosen.”

Incidentally, this prayer is addressed to our Lord Jesus. That's evident if you will compare verse 2 of Acts chapter 1 with this verse, because it is stated there, it's the Lord Jesus who had chosen the twelve, and so when he says, “Show whether of these two thou hast chosen,” this is justification for praying to our Lord Jesus Christ, though as we said when we were going through John, the normal Scriptural way to pray is to the Father, in the name of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. But we mustn't use that in such a strong way, that we say prayers that are addressed directly to our Lord cannot be answered. By the way, you will notice that they do not pray that the Lord alter his choice. They did not pray, that the Lord make a choice now, but simply to tell them the ones that they—the one—the one that he had already chosen.

So often we pray foolishly. We pray, not realizing that God has determined things that are going to come to pass by virtue of his sovereignty. It's one of the great things that we learn when we study the Scriptures; truth concerning the decree of God. One often asks, when he learns about the decree, “Why pray?” Because God decrees not only the ends, but the means to the ends as well, and therefore, it's very important for us to pray, because he has determined that certain people respond through the prayers and witnessing and encouragement or whatever from individuals.

I read a story not too long ago about an individual who was caught in a flood. So as the waters rose, he got into—naturally, he got finally upon the top of his house, and the waters were still rising, and someone swam over to the house, thinking he couldn't swim and said, “Jump in and I'll take you back to safety.” And he said, “No, the Lord will save me.” And so then some people came by in a boat. They saw him over there. He looked stranded. They went over to him with a boat and said, “Jump in. We'll save you.” He said, “No, the Lord is going to save me.” And finally some policemen came on a helicopter, and they hovered over him, and they said, “Grab the cord, and we'll take you to safety.” He said, “No, the Lord is going to save me.” Well, the waters finally came up, and he drowned. And so he appeared before the Lord God in heaven, and he said, “I was expecting you to deliver me. I was counting upon it, and you let me drown.” And the Lord said, “Look, I sent you a man who swam to you, a boat, and a helicopter. What do you expect me to do?”

You see, it is true. God does do things for us, but generally speaking, he does things through means, and the means also are determined in the word of God. That's why we pray, when we believe also in the sovereign determination of the Lord God. That's why we witness. That's why we preach. I do not expect that I will bring one person into heaven through my preaching that the Lord God does not know is going to be there and will be there. But I know that I may be the instrumentality, the determined instrumentality. And so in responsiveness to the message of the word of the gospel, preach the gospel. We preach the gospel counting upon the Lord God to save his people, and we have the encouragement, because he is a sovereign God, that he will do just that. How discouraging

it would be to preach if everything depended upon men who are sinners, and whose thoughts are negative; negative always to—toward the Lord God.

So Judas—he’s a message for the church, the people in the church, and may God help us to respond to it. You may be in this assembly this morning, and your parents may be believers, and you may for some reason think, because you’ve grown up in a Christian environment that that’s sufficient. It’s not. Or you may be a member of a church—a member of this church—and think, “That’s enough.” Or you may have a general association with Christianity. You may even give ascent to the great doctrines of Christianity, but never have really entered into relationship to the Lord God. It’s never really made a difference in your life. The message of Judas may be for you. It’s for us. It’s for us who’ve made great claims. It’s for us who’ve made a great impression upon people as being associated with the Lord God. This message is for us.

May God help us to search our hearts, and by his grace, come to the personal relationship to him who loved us, and gave himself for us. Salvation, ultimately, comes through the merits of the Savior who died upon the cross for sinners. We’re sinners. We’re all as sinners. The message of the gospel is for you, for us, for sinners. May God in his marvelous grace touch your heart. May you recognize by Scripture what you are, and may you respond to the invitation. Believe on our Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. By God’s grace entrust yourself to him. Believing in him, receive as a free gift, eternal life. May God help you to come to him. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these wonderful words from Luke, the evangelist and historian. We’re grateful for the warnings and admonitions of the Word of God, and for the comforts and promises of the word as well. May, O God...