

Acts 1:15-26

Introduction

This morning, we come back to Acts 1 and the days of waiting and preparation between Jesus' ascension into heaven and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. We've seen that there was a gathering of about 120 persons in an upper room and that they were all with one accord continually devoting themselves to prayer (1:13-14)—praying for the kingdom to come (cf. Mat. 6:9-10). It was while the disciples were praying that Peter came to see the necessity of bringing the number of the Apostles back to twelve. Jesus chose twelve disciples as a sign that the kingdom community that He was about to create would be the fulfillment of God's promises to the Old Covenant twelve tribes of Israel. Since Judas Iscariot had fallen away, it was necessary to find someone to take his place. But should this cause the disciples any doubt? How has it happened that they're in this position of having to replace a disciple whom Jesus chose? Has this happened outside of God's providential control? Are the disciples "reacting," as it were, with "plan B"? The answer, as we're about to see, is more than just, "no." The answer is completely to the contrary! We read in verses 15-17:

I. Acts 1:15–17 — And in those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers (a crowd of about 120 persons was there together), and said, "Men, brothers, it was necessary that the Scripture be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry."

Notice the care with which Peter chooses his words, and the simple conviction of his words: "It was *necessary* that the Scripture be *fulfilled*, which the Holy Spirit *foretold* by the mouth of David concerning Judas..." The betrayal and defection of Judas and his ultimate fate, as evil and as terrible as it was, falls ultimately and mysteriously under the sovereign decree and plan of God. We know that all things fall under the sovereign decree and plan of God even down to the sparrow that falls to the earth and the number of hairs on our head (cf. Mat. 10:29-30), but because the defection of Judas is so closely associated with the accomplishment of our redemption, this was even "foretold" by the Scriptures.

Notice how Peter equates Scripture (that which is written [*graphie*]) with the very word of God given by the Holy Spirit. It was necessary, Peter says, that the Scripture be fulfilled in the betrayal and defection and ultimate fate of Judas. Peter's view of Scripture is the very highest it can be. When Scripture speaks, God speaks. Scripture, therefore, carries the full weight of divine authority and truthfulness. It's Peter who later writes these words:

- 2 Peter 1:20–21 — Know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes by one's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever made by the will of man, but men being moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The point here is not that wherever there are prophecies in Scripture, *they* come from the Holy Spirit while the rest doesn't. Peter's assumption is that the entirety of Scripture is prophetic. The (Old Testament) Scriptures are often summed up with this expression: "Moses and the prophets"

(“former prophets” and “latter prophets”; Lk. 16:29; 24:27; Jn. 1:45; Acts 26:22; 28:23). The Scriptures don’t just *include* the words of prophets, they are themselves prophetic—written, edited, and compiled under prophetic inspiration and always with a prophetic purpose. Therefore, the entirety of Scripture in all its parts is the very word of God — bearing the full weight of divine authority and truthfulness. Shouldn’t this cause us to approach the Scriptures with humility and obedience, and even with a certain fear and trembling? And shouldn’t this also cause us to approach the Scriptures with full confidence and expectation and faith?

It was necessary, Peter says, that the “Scripture” be fulfilled in the betrayal and defection and ultimate fate of Judas. When we hear the word “fulfilled,” we often think of a bare “prediction” of something that will eventually happen. But instead of “fulfilled,” we could also translate, “filled up” (“it was necessary that the Scripture be filled up...”). In the end, the entirety of the Old Testament Scriptures are, in one way or another, fulfilled, or “filled up,” in Jesus (Lk. 24:27, 44). The question, then, is how is that Scripture which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning *Judas* “filled up” in *Jesus*? In other words, this isn’t just a prediction about Judas or something that Judas will do; it’s a prophecy that’s “filled up” not ultimately in Judas but in Jesus, and in His accomplishment of our redemption. Before we come to see how this is and exactly what part of Scripture Peter is thinking of, Luke interjects a narrative comment of his own.

II. Acts 1:18–19 — (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his unrighteousness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines spilled out. And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldamach, that is, Field of Blood.)

Have we ever wondered why this explanation was necessary—or at least why it has to be so graphic? Matthew tells us that after throwing the pieces of silver into the sanctuary Judas departed, “and he went away and hanged himself” (Mat. 27:5). Now we learn from Luke that no one ever took Judas’ body down and that his body was never given a proper burial. Instead, he was left hanging until his bloated and decaying body fell to the ground. When that happened, his body burst open in the middle and all his intestines spilled out (as would be naturally expected). Matthew tells us that the field where Judas died became known as the “Field of Blood” because it was purchased by the chief priests with blood money (money paid to Judas for Jesus’ blood). But Luke tells us that there was another reason: It was called the “Field of Blood” because the blood of Judas himself was spilled and soaked up in this field. Why is all this “necessary.” Why is Luke so graphic?

Luke sees in the terrible fate of Judas, the terrible judgment of God. What happened to the body of Judas after his death was a sign of the eternal torment that awaited him—the one of whom Jesus said that “it would have been good for [him] if he had not been born (Mat. 26:24). Matthew says that the field in which Judas hung himself was purchased by the chief priests, but Luke highlights the divine irony of the situation by saying that it was ultimately Judas who acquired the field with the “price of his unrighteousness” as a place for his own blood to be spilled. God turned the sin of Judas back upon his own head.

Notice how Luke emphasizes Judas' "unrighteousness." While Judas experienced remorse and self-condemnation (cf. Mat. 27:3-4), he never truly repented of his unrighteousness with the "repentance that leads to life" (cf. Acts 11:18). If he had, he would not have hung himself. His sorrow was only the "sorrow of the world" that "brings about death" (2 Cor. 7:9-10), and so he died in his "unrighteousness"—still in his sin. And what was the sin of Judas? Judas had walked with Jesus and listened to Jesus and eaten bread with Jesus and pretended to be a true follower of Jesus for three years. He had convinced everyone around him that he was a true disciple, and for a little while he had convinced even himself. But eventually Judas realized that Jesus was not at all the Messiah he wanted. He came to hate and despise Jesus. He began stealing from the money box that was intended for the support of Jesus and the disciples (Jn. 12:6). Judas loved money and he hated Jesus, and so in the end he found a way to satisfy both his love and his hate by becoming a "guide to those who arrested Jesus." He who had eaten Jesus' bread and been one of His closest companions became His betrayer. He betrayed Israel's Messiah — the one whom God Himself had sent into the world (Ps. 41:9 & Jn. 13:18). At the end, Judas expressed his remorse by saying that he had "sinned by betraying innocent blood" (Mat. 27:4). He knew he had done wrong, but he still felt no love for Jesus. He knew that Jesus was "innocent," but he still refused to believe in Jesus. And so he died in his "unrighteousness"—still in his sin. He died, as Luke makes clear, under the righteous and terrible judgment of God. Were we capable of the same sin? Yes, we were.

So now we come back to our original question: How is that Scripture which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning *Judas* fulfilled—or "filled up"—in *Jesus*? Luke returns, now, to Peter's address to the brothers in the upper room.

III. Acts 1:20 — "For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS RESIDENCE BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.'"

Peter quotes first from Psalm 69, and it's important, here, that we see the larger context of the Psalm. David prays:

- Psalm 69:1, 4, 7–8, 12, 20 — Save me, O God, for the waters have threatened my life... Those who hate me without cause are more than the hairs of my head... for Your sake I have borne reproach; dishonor has covered my face. I have become estranged from my brothers and a foreigner to my mother's sons... Those who dwell at the gate moan about me, and I am the drunkards' songs... Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I hoped for sympathy, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.

David isn't thinking, here, about the enemies of his future greater Son, Jesus. He's thinking about his own enemies. So this isn't a "prediction." He's not thinking about one specific man (such as Judas), but about a whole host of enemies who are even more than the hairs of his head. His own brothers and mother's sons have abandoned him. Those who mock him can be found everywhere from the city gate to the drunkard's lair. His heart is broken and sick. He is weary with calling out and his throat is parched. His eyes fail while he waits for his God (Ps. 69:3).

David is in deep personal distress. But we also remember that he prays not just as an individual, but as the anointed king and representative of God's covenant people. David prays as the covenant head of God's covenant people. This is what gives added meaning to the words David prays in verses 6-7:

- Psalm 69:6-7 — May **those who hope for You** not be ashamed **through me**, O Lord Yahweh of hosts; may **those who seek You** not be dishonored **through me**, O God of Israel, because for Your sake I have borne reproach; dishonor has covered my face.

David is constantly aware of what his own defeat at the hands of the wicked would mean for the righteous remnant among his people. David's prayer is motivated not only by his own deep personal distress, but by the distress that he feels for all who are hoping in God and seeking after Him. This is what explains the conclusion to David's prayer. Being confident that God will judge his opponents and bring him deliverance, David says:

- Psalm 69:32, 34-36 — **The humble see it and are glad; you who seek God, let your heart revive...** Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them. For God will save **Zion** and build **the cities of Judah**, that they may dwell there and possess it. **The seed of His slaves** will inherit it, and **those who love His name** will dwell in it.

God's judgment poured out upon David's enemies equals God's salvation not just for David but for all of the righteous whom David represents. It's only in this light that we can understand the curses that David invokes upon his enemies. This is not about David being vindictive, or vengeful, or hateful. This isn't about a personal vendetta. This is about David's longing for God's justice in the destruction of the wicked and reprobate and the salvation of all the righteous ("Your kingdom come").

- Psalm 69:22-28 — May their table before them become a snare; and when they are in peace, may it become a trap. May their eyes darken so that they cannot see, and make their loins quake continually. Pour out Your indignation on them, and may Your burning anger overtake them. **May their camp be desolate; may none dwell in their tents.** For they have persecuted him whom You Yourself have struck down, and they recount the pain of **those** whom You have wounded. Add iniquity to their iniquity, and may they not come into Your righteousness. May they be blotted out of the book of life and may they not be recorded with the righteous.

Those who betrayed and persecuted David find their "fulfillment" in Judas who betrayed and persecuted David's greater Son, Jesus (this explains how Peter can change David's "May *their* camp [lxx: residence]" to "let *his* residence"). If David was the covenant head of God's people under the Old Covenant, Jesus is the covenant head of God's people in the Covenant of Grace (the New Covenant in both its promissory and its inaugurated state). If the defeat of David at the hands of the wicked would have meant the temporal defeat of the righteous remnant in Israel, the defeat of Jesus at the hands of the wicked would have meant our own eternal damnation. So what do both Peter and Luke see in the judgment of God poured out on Judas? They see *in that judgment* not just the vindication of Jesus (cf. Heb. 5:7), but the salvation of all God's people. The judgment of those who betrayed and persecuted David finds a fulfillment in the judgment of

him who betrayed Jesus (as well as in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70). And this judgment of Judas, “the son of destruction” (Jn. 17:12), is in turn a sign of our salvation in the vindication and triumph of Jesus.

The second Psalm that Peter quotes from is Psalm 109, which opens with these words:

- Psalm 109:1–5 — O God of my praise, do not be silent! For they have opened a wicked mouth and a deceitful mouth against me; they have spoken to me with a lying tongue. They have also surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without cause. In return for my love they accuse me; but I am in prayer. Thus they have set upon me evil for good and hatred for my love.

Once again, those who persecute David are those who were closest to him—those whom he had loved; and so their hatred is a terrible betrayal. And once again, David sees in his own suffering as king the suffering of all who are afflicted and needy among the covenant people that he represents.

- Psalm 109:16 (cf. v. 22) — [H]e did not remember to show lovingkindness, but persecuted **the afflicted, the needy man, and the disheartened** to put **them** to death.

When David looks confidently ahead to his salvation, he says:

- Psalm 109:30–31 — With my mouth I will give thanks abundantly to Yahweh; and **in the midst of many** I will praise Him. For He stands at the right hand of **the needy**, to save **him** from those who judge his soul.

Who are the “many” in the midst of whom David will give thanks to Yahweh? They’re all the needy who participate *with* David—who share *with* David—in his salvation. And so we see once again that God’s judgment poured out on David’s enemies equals God’s salvation not just for David but for all the afflicted whom David represents and whose protection is David’s responsibility. The curses that David invokes upon his enemies, therefore, are not vindictive, or vengeful, or hateful. There is no personal vendetta here. Instead, the invocation of God’s curse upon his enemies expresses David’s longing to see God’s righteousness displayed in the destruction of the wicked and the salvation of all God’s people. (A person may pray for the salvation of sinners and pray at the same time for the destruction of the wicked reprobate.)

The people who were fighting against David and persecuting the afflicted and needy must have had prominent positions in the land. When David says, “he did not remember to show lovingkindness,” he implies that these were people in a position to stand up for the righteous and defend them. But instead of delighting in blessing, they loved cursing; instead of showing lovingkindness, they clothed themselves with cursing (Ps. 109:17-18). So David prays:

- Psalm 109:6–15 — Appoint a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged, let him come forth a wicked man, and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; **let another take his office**. Let *his* sons be orphans and *his* wife a widow [the assumption is that he has himself made many to be widows and orphans]. Let his

sons wander aimlessly and beg; and let them search for food from their ruined homes [the assumption is that the sons partake in the character of their father]. Let the creditor seize all that he has, and let strangers plunder the fruit of his labor. Let there be none to extend lovingkindness to him, and let there be none to be gracious to his orphan. Let those who follow him [who come after him] be cut off; in a following generation let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before Yahweh, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out [inter-generational wickedness]. Let them be before Yahweh continually, that He may cut off their memory from the earth.

Once again, we see with Peter how the judgment of those who hated and betrayed David is fulfilled in the judgment of Judas who hated and betrayed Jesus. And we see how the vindication of David and the salvation of the afflicted whom David was appointed to protect and defend is “fulfilled” in the vindication of Jesus and the salvation of all of us whom Jesus now keeps and protects and defends (cf. Jn. 17:12). Therefore, what we see in the terrifying judgment of God poured out on Judas is nothing less than our own eternal salvation in the vindication of Jesus, our covenantal head (cf. 2 Thess. 1:6-10).

David assumes that the office left vacant by his enemy’s death will need to be filled by someone else (“let another take his office”)—and filled specifically by someone who will “remember to show lovingkindness.” Therefore, the filling of that office will be to David just another *sign* of God’s salvation. It will be an occasion for praising Yahweh in the midst of those who share with David in Yahweh’s salvation. So also, the filling of the office vacated by Judas (Acts 1:17, 22) is to us a sign of the triumph of God’s salvation. So maybe now we can hear that note of joyful triumph in Peter’s words:

IV. Acts 1:21–26 — “Therefore *it is necessary* that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us— beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” And they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men [and who knew the heart of Judas], show which one of these two You have chosen to take the place of this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

In what could at first appear to us to be a somewhat random and unimportant moment, we see now the triumph of God’s salvation — deliverance not just from sin and death, but also from the world that hates Jesus and persecutes those who follow Him.

In the judgment of Judas and the choice of his replacement, we’re assured of the ultimate fate that awaits all who persecute God’s people. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

- 2 Thessalonians 1:6–9 — [I]t is right for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give rest to you who are afflicted and to us as well at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, executing vengeance on those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the

penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might...

The writer of Hebrews says, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). Not only, then, are we assured of the ultimate fate that awaits all who persecute God’s people, but we’re also warned to flee to Christ ourselves—and to call others to flee to Christ—in light of the terrors of God’s righteous judgments. The fate of Judas ultimately stands as a warning to us all.

And yet at the same time, in the judgment of Judas and the choice of his replacement we’re also assured of that ultimate salvation that awaits all of us “who have believed” and who will therefore be “considered worthy of the kingdom of God” (2 Thess. 1:5). After saying, “These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might,” Paul continues:

- 2 Thessalonians 1:10 — ...when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.

In another place Paul writes:

- 1 Thessalonians 5:9 — For God has not appointed us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Listen now to these “last words of David” (2 Sam. 23:1) in the light of his role not only as a prophet by whom the Holy Spirit spoke (Acts 1:16), but as one who was himself a prophetic “type” (a covenant head) pointing us to Jesus (*our* covenant head).

- 2 Samuel 23:2–7 — “The Spirit of Yahweh spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, ‘He who rules over men as a righteous one, who rules in the fear of God, is as the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, from brightness of the sun after rain, with the tender grass springing from the earth.’ Truly is not my house so with God? For He has made an everlasting covenant with me, ordered in all things, and secured; for all my salvation and all my desire, will He not indeed make it grow? But the vile men, every one of them will be thrust away like thorns, because they cannot be taken in hand; but the man who touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they will be completely burned with fire where they sit.”

Brothers and sisters, we’ve been rescued from this burning fire! We have obtained salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, let us not sleep as others do, but let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:6, 8).