

What Judas's Death Teaches Us About the Spirit

by John Piper

John Piper's sermon explores the significance of Judas's death and the role of the Holy Spirit in ensuring the invincibility of God's purpose and the importance of historical knowledge of Jesus in the Christian faith.

Duration: 23:43

Scripture: Acts 1:15

Topics: "Book Of Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker uses the analogy of a wild, uncontrolled cannon on a ship to represent the potential danger of Judas in the disciples' midst. He emphasizes the importance of having an unwavering zeal for the glory of Jesus Christ. The speaker also describes the image of a little child holding their father's hand as a representation of the normal Christian life. He explains that in times of danger or confrontation, we should look to God for strength and confidence, rather than expecting only kindness and tenderness.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org. Would you open up your Bibles, please, to Acts chapter 1? I'm going to read at verse 15, verses 15 through 26, and you'll profit from following along and keeping the Bible open as Pastor John brings the message of the morning. Acts chapter 1, verses 15 to 26.

In those days Peter stood up among the brethren, the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty, and said, Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas, who was guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle, and all his bowels gushed out.

And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language, akeldama, that is, field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it. And his office let another take.

So one of the men who had accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, until the day when he was taken up from us, one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection. And they put forward to Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justice, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, Lord who knowest the hearts of all men, show which of these two thou hast chosen to take the place in 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 on Matthias. And he was enrolled with the eleven apostles. Let me take you back to last week's image of the little boy holding his father's hand.

The picture of the ordinary, normal, good Christian life. I, you, the Christian, the little child holding God's hand. And it feels firm on our hand, and we've got a firm grip on him.

There's been forgiveness, there's been reconciliation. We trust him, he loves us. Life is good, and you're walking down the sidewalk, and suddenly in front of you there's a very, very wild looking man.

His hair's all like this, and his eyes are glazed and piercing, and he looks right at you, the little child, and says, Hey stupid, still holding on to your mama's hand? And you're terrified. Little teeny kid, wild eyed maniac, looking you in the face, ten feet away. And as you look away from his terrifying face up to your father's face, what do you want to see as your father looks at this man? Let me give you my answer.

I don't want to see the same face that I was enjoying a minute earlier. I don't want to see kindness, tenderness, warmth. I want to see strength, indignation, and confidence, so that I can feel safe.

Well, before you have a chance to really check out your father's face, he's already got you pulled around behind him, and the hand grip on yours would feel uncomfortably tight in any other circumstance, but communicates very clearly right now, even if your legs buckle and you pass out, I'm not going to drop you, it's okay. And he looks that assailant in the face and says, Mister, you better be careful. I'm his father.

And then just boldly and confidently walks by with him between you and the man, and goes on home. Now, the point of this little picture is that we need not only to see the soft, green, warm, clover-covered grasslands of the character of God, but we also need very much to see the stark, rugged, steep, granite cliffs of his character as well. Because there are times in our lives when we look to God, and that's what we desperately want to see in the midst of our distress and our storm.

Or another way to put it would be, we want to see, we ought to see and know, not only the tenderness of Jesus, but the toughness of Jesus. Or, to look at our text here, and I'll try to make this plain in just a moment where I get this, we ought to see, not only that the Holy Spirit is a spirit of love and joy and peace and kindness and meekness and faithfulness and goodness and self-control, but he is also a Holy Spirit with an awesomely invincible purpose in the world. And he is a spirit who has an unwavering zeal for the glory of the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Now those last two things are, I believe, the two main points of this text, believe it or not. And I'll try to show you where I get them. There is an awesomely invincible purpose in the mind and heart of the Holy Spirit for us.

And secondly, he has an unflinching, unwavering zeal for the glory of the incarnate God-man, Jesus. Now let me try to show you where these two things come from in this text. We've got a paragraph here, extending from verses 15 to 26, that is sandwiched between the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit

and the fulfillment of that promise at the day of Pentecost.

And when I bump up against a paragraph like this, I say, well now, why is this here? What does it contribute? Seems like the Holy Spirit's been all over the place here. Is he here? How is he here? What's the message here now? How does it all fit in? The answer came to me as to why this is here by looking at its structure. And I want to try to describe the structure to you.

I began to read verse 16 and I read, brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled, had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas. And I said, hmm, this whole thing's about Judas here. So let's just take that first sentence as kind of a banner, a kind of theme statement.

The scripture has to be fulfilled about Judas. And the Holy Spirit is the one who spoke in scripture. I'd love to unpack that for an hour about the inspiration of the Bible.

The Holy Spirit spoke through David. The Psalms are inspired. They must come true.

They're infallible. I mean, these are important things that we hold, but I'm passing over that now. And then I noticed in verse 20, when I asked what scriptures have to be fulfilled, Peter.

Verse 20 answers that it gives two quotations from the Psalms for it is written in the book of Psalms. Number one, Psalm 69, 25. Let his habitation become desolate and let there be no one to live in it.

Speaking about Judas as it comes to be found out. And second, his office. Let another take Psalm 109.

And then I noticed, oh, I see. You've got two Old Testament quotations and the rest of the paragraph is a description of the fulfillment of those two. It's shaped like that.

That's why I'm doing that with my hands. Here's Psalm 69, 25. And it was just described in its fulfillment in the death of Judas and the purchase of this land, which became a field of desolate blood.

And then you've got Psalm 109, verse eight. It's the second half of verse 20 and its fulfillment in the replacement of Judas with Messiah. So I say, ha, I've got it.

I see you've got a middle statement with two Old Testament texts. You've got two fulfillments, Judas death and burial and the replacement with Messiah. And you've got an overarching statement that says the scriptures had to be fulfilled.

Now, it seems to me then that the first point that I mentioned is obvious. Luke, who writes this, Peter, who preached it and God, who inspired it, want us this morning to feel the invincibility of the purpose of the Holy Spirit. One thousand years before this happened.

One thousand years before this happened, the Holy Spirit so spoke through David as to have an intention relating to Judas. And Peter stands up and says, you know what happened to Judas? God fulfilled the Holy Spirit's purpose and therefore take heart, my people. The purpose of the Holy Spirit in the life of his church and the redemption of his people is invincible.

And I want to see that when I look into my father's face in times of betrayal, especially. Do you not? Times when there have been lying. Times when there have been mistrust.

Time when the close bosom friend betrays you. And you are utterly at a loss to explain what's going on in your life. And you feel the father's hand and you look up.

Do you want to see him go like this? Or do you want to panic God? Do you want to confuse God? Do you want a shrugging God? I can't figure it out either, John. Don't know what makes Judas tick. I'm at a loss.

There's a lot of people that have a God like that. I can't get him out of this text. The scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit, with his invincible purpose 1,000 years ago, spoke concerning Judas.

That's my God. That's the father I want to look up to. When I'm being betrayed.

When I'm being lied to. When I'm being mistrusted. When I'm being forsaken in the garden of Gethsemane.

That's the father I want to look up to. No shrugging shoulders. No panicked face.

No confused look. I want a God who can look at me with the most serene, invincible smile. I've got it under control, son.

I wrote the book 1,000 years ago. It would be a terrible thing, I think, if Jesus had to say, I don't know what to make of Judas. This is absurd.

This is chaos. This makes no sense. It's like a canon in Victor Hugo's novel.

I remember this scene. There's a French galleon, a warship. And below deck, there are 200 5,000-pound cannons with their necks sticking out the portholes.

And they're strapped down. And he describes this scene, hundreds of men in here ready to go to war, and a storm strikes the ship. And it begins to top and turn and toss.

And one of these 5,000-pound cannons unstraps. He describes it like a wild, raging bull. And it starts crushing men.

It turns this way. And it crashes that way. And it kills two men.

And it crashes that way. And it kills others. And it's starting to punch holes in the side of the ship.

And the scene is absolutely awesome. Utterly out of control. Utterly unpredictable.

Ready to destroy the master ship. Is that Judas? No way. That's not Judas.

If it was, we'd have no God of the Bible. We'd have no Jesus of the Gospels who said, John said, Jesus knew from the first who those were that would believe and who it was who would betray him. Jesus prayed at the end, John 17, 12, While I was with them, I kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me.

I have guarded them. None of them is lost but the son of perdition that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. What if he had said, None of them is lost but one.

11 out of 12 is not bad, is it, Father? I don't know what happened. I don't know what to do about it. But that's not what he said.

And that's not the way God is. None of them is lost but one because the Holy Spirit's purpose is invincible. It had to be fulfilled.

One last question. Why now is part of that invincible purpose that Judas be replaced? And not merely replaced, but replaced by a man who very specifically had to have been part of the disciples' group from the baptism of John to the ascension. That's the second fulfillment of the second half of verse 20 now in verses 21 to 26.

Let another his office take. This too must be fulfilled. And here's how it must be fulfilled.

Peter says, He must have been one with us from the beginning, watching Jesus go in and out and hear all of his teaching and watch all of his deeds. Why? My answer, and it has a direct application to us here at Bethlehem, is that the baptism with the Holy Spirit promised in verses 4 and 5, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit promised in verse 8, the clothing with power from on high promised in Luke 24, 49, and the fulfillment of that, all of that was coming upon these apostles. And this text makes clear that the coming of the Holy Spirit with that kind of power was not meant to sweep these apostles up into a sphere of a spiritual high that disconnects them from the historical realities of the Jesus who walked this earth and spoke and taught and healed and died and rose.

In other words, even as he promises that the Holy Spirit is going to fall and give them extraordinary power, he says the Holy Spirit never short-circuits the historical knowledge of Jesus. The Holy Spirit never short-circuits the preservation of the once for all revelation of God in Jesus Christ, nitty-gritty incarnate on the face of the earth. Rather, the Holy Spirit has an unwavering zeal for the historical Jesus.

The Holy Spirit loves the Jesus of the Gospels. He is not sent to lift you into an ah historical sphere where you can have touchy-feely feelings with no roots in the historical realities of Jesus Christ. That's the message of verses 21 to 26.

In other words, there must be something in our experience that corresponds to Matthias. You know how easy it would have been for the apostles to say, we don't need Matthias, we're going to have the Holy Spirit. We're going to have God.

And he's going to remind us everything that needs to be said and he's going to lift us into this area of power. We're going to have the kind of power that can save 3,000 people in a day. What do we need with Matthias? Who just will remember three years of Jesus' ministry and help preserve that? And the answer simply is, that's the way God does it.

God means for all spiritual experiences to be tested by and measured by Jesus as revealed once for all on earth and preserved in the Gospels. Where does it say? I think I have it written here somewhere. Yes, 1 John.

By this you will know the Spirit of God. By this you will know the Spirit of God. Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.

You see what the test is? The incarnation. There were people in those days who were interpreting the reality of the Holy Spirit in a way disconnected from the incarnate, fleshy, touchable Jesus. They weren't measuring their spiritual experience by what He taught and what He was and His death and His humility and His lowliness and His love and His compassion and His mighty resurrection.

They were just flying off into the spiritual experience without an orientation on history and specifically the history of Jesus Christ. So the lesson for us now at Bethlehem as you have been hearing long, long for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit that we might know what it is to be clothed with power and to have the Pentecostal effectiveness of 3,000 people converted in a day. I don't withdraw anything I've said.

I just say and I hope it's been clear all the years I've been here that with all of the devotion to the upward quest of spiritual fullness we never forsake the backward quest to the fullness of knowledge of Jesus Christ revealed once for all in history and preserved in Holy Scripture. For some people they're very at home reading and studying and memorizing and teaching and that's Christianity. And for other people they're very at home in spiritual experiences and pursuing through prayer the fullness of God and longing for the touch of God's Spirit and manifold gifts.

And what I want to say is this text makes it manifestly clear to me that Luke will not let us be either or. He will not let the people who love to spend all their times reading and studying and being the Matthias symbol of this text be only that. Nor will he let those who are most zealous for spiritual gifts and most full of longing for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit short circuit the historical knowledge that keeps us on beam and balanced in our Christian life.

And so I want us to go and do the upward work of prayer for fullness and the backward work of study for the fullness of knowledge and I believe if we take heed to Peter's desire to have Matthias in place here before the baptism of the Spirit comes we too will be guarded. Here's another image to leave you with. If our roots are not deep down in the firm settled soil of biblical revelation about Jesus it's very likely that our branches will not stretch very high into the sky of God's power.

Let's pray. Almighty God and Heavenly Father and Lord Jesus Christ revealed once for all and now reigning and indwelling us by your Spirit and ready in your time to clothe us with power from on high we bless you and praise you. We ask for a balanced wisdom biblically.

We ask for lives that are passionate for the fullness of God and lives that are passionate for an understanding of your revelation in Scripture. We praise you that the Holy Spirit's purpose is invincible and that when we look up into your face we do not find a panicked or confused or puzzled God but a God sovereignly in control and able to help us in the midst of betrayal. And so Lord strengthen us now with these things.

Build up your church. Unify your church. Empower your church.

And all the church said Amen. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Feel free to make copies of this message to give to others but please do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission.

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