

“A SHOOT FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE”

I. Introduction

- A. One of the things that we need to keep in mind as we read the New Testament is that it is part of a larger story, a story in which Israel plays a critical role.
1. While the gospel is God’s power for salvation for people drawn from all nations, from the call of Abraham up until the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost God chose to carry out his plan of redemption in the context of a covenant relationship with the nation that he brought into being through Abraham: the nation of Israel.
 2. Of course, the Old Testament makes it abundantly clear that the Israelites were no better than the rest of fallen mankind.
 3. In spite of all of the wonderful things the Lord did for them, they turned away from him and did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.
 4. Their unfaithfulness resulted in judgment, as the temple was laid waste and the people were carried off into exile.
 5. Yet God did not let Israel’s sin spoil his plan of salvation.
 6. He promised that he would preserve a remnant and usher in his glorious kingdom, a kingdom whose blessings would be enjoyed not only by Israelites but by people from all nations.
 7. Jesus came into the world in order to establish that kingdom.
- B. The passage that we are considering today is set within a context of rising opposition to Jesus.

1. We saw last week that the Pharisees were furious at Jesus when he healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath.
2. This led them to join with the Herodians in plotting to destroy Jesus.
3. Israel's leaders were setting themselves against Israel's Messiah.
4. Here in this text we see that, amid this opposition, Jesus called and instructed those whom he would eventually commission to lay the foundation upon which his church is built.

II. The Prayer Vigil

- A. The text begins with Jesus going up a mountain in order to pray.
 1. Even this little detail makes a connection to the bigger story.
 2. It brings to mind the time when Moses went up Mount Sinai to meet with God just before God established the Sinai covenant with Israel.
 3. And just as Moses's time on Sinai was immediately followed by the instructions that he gave to the people of Israel, Jesus's time on this mountain was immediately followed by the teachings that he gave in what is sometimes referred to as "the sermon on the plain."
 4. This parallel between Jesus and Moses indicates that Jesus is being set forth as the new Moses, the one who will set up the new covenant between God and his people.
- B. Another thing to note about this passages is how it gives us a window into Jesus's prayer life.
 1. Prayer was obviously an extremely important part of Jesus's life.
 2. Not even the fact that he was always in demand could cause him to neglect prayer.

3. As the perfect man, Jesus expressed his dependence upon God and sought communion with God through prayer.
4. His prayer life was both regular and rigorous.
5. He made time for extended seasons of prayer prior to some of the most important moments in his life.
6. One such instance was on the Mount of Olives, just before his betrayal and arrest.
7. Another is here, just before his choice of the twelve apostles.
8. This was indeed a momentous decision.
9. Jesus was choosing the men whom he would personally commission to give the foundational testimony upon which he would build his church.
10. As the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”

III. The Twelve

- A. After spending that night in fervent prayer, Jesus came down the mountain, called his disciples to him, and chose twelve of them to be apostles.
 1. This reminds us that Jesus had more than just twelve followers.
 2. The twelve formed his inner circle, but many others were numbered among his disciples.
 3. The general meaning of the word “disciple” is ‘learner’ or ‘pupil.’
 4. This tells us something about what it means to be a Christian.
 5. If you are a Christian, then you are enrolled in the school of Christ.

6. You are not autonomous.
 7. Your identity is not determined by your feelings, your desires, or your preferences.
 8. Your life is not your own.
 9. Jesus is your master and your teacher.
 10. Through his Word, he instructs you about who you are and he guides you in how you are to live.
- B. As for the word “apostle”, in its general sense it describes someone who has been sent by another as an authorized representative.
1. In its more technical theological sense, the word refers to the men who were specially appointed by Jesus to give the foundational testimony upon which he would build his church.
 2. Jesus did not pull the number twelve out of the air.
 3. He chose twelve because it corresponded to the twelve tribes of Israel.
 4. In choosing twelve apostles, Jesus was demonstrating the continuity between the church in its Old Testament administration and the church in its New Testament administration.
 5. God’s purposes for the New Testament church are not separate from his purposes for Old Testament Israel.
 6. Now, contrary to what opponents of Reformed or covenant theology contend, this does not mean that the church replaces Israel in God’s plan.
 7. It simply means that the church is the body in which God’s purposes for Israel come to their fruition.

8. As Paul says at the end of his letter to the Galatians, the church is “the Israel of God.”
 9. This explains why the New Testament so often cites passages and titles that refer to Israel in the Old Testament in a manner that shows how they are reaching their fulfillment in the church.
- C. When Jesus chose the twelve, he was reconstituting Israel around himself.
1. He himself is the true remnant of Israel, because he is the only Israelite who has been perfectly faithful to God.
 2. This is the point that is being made in Isaiah 11, where the Messiah is referred to as “the stump of Jesse.”
 3. As you may know, Jesse was the father of David, Israel’s greatest king and an important Old Testament type of Christ.
 4. Isaiah referred to the Messiah as a “stump” because Israel’s unfaithfulness caused God to fell her like a tree.
 5. Yet that did not spell the end for Israel.
 6. As Isaiah writes, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit... In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” (Isa. 11:1, 10-12 ESV)
 7. This is what Jesus was doing in calling his apostles and commissioning them for their ministry.

8. He was forming a new Israel around himself.
- D. In all of the places where the twelve are listed, Simon is always the first name on the list.
1. The name that Jesus gave to Simon was Peter, a name that means 'stone' or 'rock.'
 2. As spokesman for the twelve, he was given a name that pointed to their role in proclaiming the message that would stand as the church's one foundation.
 3. The name "Peter" also points to fact that all believers are living stones in the temple that God is erecting in Christ by the power of the Spirit.
 4. Peter himself points this out in his first epistle, where he writes, "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Pet 2:4-5 ESV)
 5. This metaphor of a stone points to the church's steadfastness and stability.
 6. But this stability is not inherent in Peter or in any individual believer.
 7. While the apostolic testimony is the church's foundation, it is the content of that testimony that gives the church its security.
 8. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone upon which the temple of the Lord is being built.
- E. As for the other men on this list, some are identified by different names in the lists found in the other Gospels.

1. Bartholomew was also known as Nathanael, and Judas the son of James was also known as Thaddeus.
2. We should also note the significance of the fact that Matthew and Simon the Zealot served alongside each other as apostles.
3. As a tax collector, Matthew collaborated with the Romans.
4. As a radical Jewish nationalist, Simon sought to overthrow the Romans.
5. These men were natural enemies to each other.
6. Yet in Christ they were made one.
7. Thus the reconciling power of the gospel is seen even in the men who played a foundational role in the establishment of the New Testament church.

IV. The Traitor

- A. This brings us to the last name on the list, "Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."
 1. Even though God was guiding the process by which Jesus chose the twelve, one of those chosen was Judas, the man who would eventually betray Jesus.
 2. God was not taken by surprise when this happened.
 3. He knew what Judas was going to do before Jesus chose him.
 4. He knew it before time began.
 5. Why, then, did Jesus choose an apostle who would later prove to be untrue?
 6. There are several reasons.

7. First, it shows us how God subverts evil to his greater purpose.
 8. While Judas's betrayal of Jesus was motivated by the evil in Judas's own heart, God used Judas's evil actions in order to accomplish his plan.
 9. As Peter explained in his Pentecost sermon, Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God," even though the evil deed was carried out "by the hands of lawless men." (Acts 2:23 ESV)
 10. This reminds us of what Joseph said to his brothers about their selling him as a slave: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." (Gen 50:20 ESV)
 11. In the same way, God caused Judas's betrayal of Jesus to work for the good of those whom he appointed to eternal life.
- B. Another reason why Jesus selected Judas was to provide a warning against presumption.
1. Here we are reminded that the church's office-bearers are not infallible and that a profession of faith is not always indicative of the presence of genuine faith.
 2. If an apostle can prove to be an apostate, then so can anyone else.
 3. This is why our faith should not be shaken when we see seemingly committed Christians fall away.
 4. We need to remember that in this present age, the church will always be a mixed multitude, with weeds intermingled with the wheat.
 5. This is also why it is so important that we keep our own faith vibrant and alive.

6. While it is certainly true that no true Christian can permanently fall away from the faith, one of the means that God uses to prevent us from falling away is the warnings that he sets forth in his Word.
 7. Judas himself stands as such a warning.
- C. Lastly, Jesus's choice of Judas reminds us that the stability of the church never depends on men but on Christ.
1. Though the apostolic proclamation of the gospel serves as the church's foundation, the content of that message is Jesus himself.
 2. As we noted earlier, Jesus is the cornerstone.
 3. This is why the test of orthodoxy is not in the claim to have church officers who stand in an unbroken line of succession that can be traced back to the apostles.
 4. It is why orthodoxy is not tested by the subjective experiences and feelings of individual Christians.
 5. Instead, the test of orthodoxy is Christ as he is set forth in the apostolic message, the message that is contained in the New Testament.

V. Conclusion

- A. This passage may not seem all that significant at first glance.
1. But when we read it in light of the bigger picture of the biblical narrative, we see that it is truly glorious.
 2. The choice of the twelve marked a key point in the unfolding of God's plan of redemption.
 3. In the first century, Israel was still laying in ruins.
 4. Even though the temple had been rebuilt, they were under foreign control, with no true king of their own, with a corrupt priesthood,

and with teachers who said that salvation could be obtained by works of the law.

- B. Jesus's teachings, healings, exorcisms, and his appointing of twelve apostles announced that a new day was dawning.
1. This marked the fulfillment of what the Lord had promised seven hundred years earlier through the prophet Isaiah, telling his people, "Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you majestic forever, a joy from age to age. You shall suck the milk of nations; you shall nurse at the breast of kings; and you shall know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. Instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron. I will make your overseers peace and your taskmasters righteousness. Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I might be glorified." (Isa. 60:15–21 ESV)
 2. If you are a Christian, those words are addressed to you.
 3. They describe your heritage and your hope.
 4. And if you are not a Christian today, you can lay hold of this glorious heritage and hope by repenting of your sins and trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.
 5. If you have him as your cornerstone, you can rest assured that you will never fall.