



Discernment-Part 8
Apostasy & Stumbling Saints
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Well, sometimes it's good for us to step back and get the big picture on things—particularly when we're studying our way through a Gospel. It'd be good for us, at this point, to step back and think through the big picture of what's going on here. What is the whole point of Christianity? I mean, to be as broad as possible, as we're reading through the Gospels we see that Christ came to earth with a mission—a specific mission. And his mission, to put it in his terms, was to give his life as a ransom payment for many. He came to be born in Bethlehem, as we read in chapters one and two—we studied all that—so that he might live this human life in our place to die on a cross outside the gates of Jerusalem: a baby born to die, a mission to give his life as a ransom for many.

Then we get into chapters 3 and 4, and studying through Luke, we saw that he had a message, of course, that went along with his mission. And the message was that those who would benefit from his death had to turn from their sin, and they needed to put their trust in him—turning and trusting—repentance and faith, the message of the gospel. That, of course, is his message.

Then we got to chapter 5, which we're going to wrap up—the series that we started in chapter 5 verse 1. We saw him shift to a focus on employing his method. He has a mission to die on a cross; he has a message of repentance and faith; and then he begins the method of him taking people, drawing them out, pulling them together, assembling and enlisting people, training them, and then getting that message out through them—sending them out to take the message not only to the first century but every successive generation till the 21st century, at least—to enlist people to send them with the message.

Now that's the propagation of the message of the gospel through individuals. And early in the ministry he starts investing in these people. His mission—die on a cross—to get our sins canceled out. His message—if you want the benefit of that you need to turn and trust, you need to repent and put your trust in me. And here's the deal: I'm going to enlist people who now are going to take this message and they're going to go.

Now, if you even go—if you haven't turned there, it'd be good for you to get to Luke 6 as we wrap up the series we started in chapter 5 verse 1—and you see the heading there, if you have an ESV it'll read something like this: "Jesus Calls His First Disciples." And we saw that. The reason we've gone from chapter 5 verse 1 all the way to where we're ending today—eight sessions later, in Luke 6:16—is because these two scenes are nice bookends: him calling his disciples, and then, today, he commissions his apostles. These now are the men that have been trained in the successive six sessions that we looked at—these scenes in his life. We saw him training them. And one of the things they need is discernment. They need to know the message, they need to understand the



mission field, they need to get the idea of what it means to distinguish all the things that he's teaching through the scenes.

Now, you know that is what we've been trying to do—especially with the subtitles on each of these sections—and trying to show distinctions that these men had to understand if they were going to go out in their generation and take the message of the gospel, with the mission of Christ as the centerpiece—the cross of Christ. They needed the training. So we have dealt with all of that.

But we get here to this last scene where he is sending out his apostles. Now that's right before we get to next week, which will start a brand-new series—twelve weeks—on his Sermon on the Plain, as we'll call it. We'll get into that next time, Lord willing. But before we get into his sermon, we need to see this section here. Chapter 5 verse 1 through chapter 6 verse 16 is almost the culmination—at least as we read through the literary development of the book of Luke—the culmination of his training of his disciples. A lot more training to go, I get that, but we've moved from “disciple,” which we've learned something about—*mathētēs*, the Greek word, a learner, a follower—to now he's going to name twelve of those disciples “apostles,” and that's a big deal. That's a big shift.

And I suppose even before we read verses 12 through 16—which we're going to study today—we need to understand something about the apostles. Let me lay my cards down first on this front. The reason we added this in the discernment series is that what I want to do in looking at this is just ask the question, “What's God's discernment (or Christ's in particular) in picking these twelve?” So we're going to look at that. But when we think about what he's doing, he's taking them for what? To make them apostles.

Now, you need to distinguish between the use of the word “apostle” in the New Testament. There is a technical sense and a non-technical sense—a formal sense and a non-formal sense. What I like to say to help you distinguish this in your own thinking—though the translators don't do this for us—is “Apostle” with a capital “A” and “apostle” with a small “a.”

Capital-”A” Apostles—there's only twelve. And we know that because that's what he picks: twelve. They're called “the Twelve.” And then by the end of the New Testament, in Revelation 21:14, when the New Jerusalem—where you and I, I hope you're going to join me, are going to live—in the New Jerusalem it says that on the twelve gates we have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and on the twelve foundation stones we have the twelve names of the Apostles of the Lamb—twelve. So we only have twelve. So in a technical sense, only twelve of them, and here are the twelve that he is choosing.



Now, there are other apostles—small “a,” though. You need to distinguish—though the translators don’t make that convenient, you know, literary sign for us—you need to know there are people like Timothy and Silas, Epaphroditus, and others that are named—Barnabas—who are named “apostles,” but it’s used in a sense that’s non-technical. They’re not one of the Twelve, but they are “apostles” in what sense? Maybe understanding the word will help you get into the passage we’ll read in a second. “Apostle”—it’s made up of two Greek parts. One is the preposition apo—which is the prefix for a lot of words that have made it into English that just get transliterated. Apo means “away from.” *Apostellō* is the verb “to send.” To send away from you—which is not a negative thing in this case; it’s a commissioning, a sending out of his team.

Now that’s what these twelve were going to do. But they’re going to do it with a special kind of authority. They’re going to have, as 2 Corinthians 12:12 says, this ability to do miraculous signs. They’re coming with the authority of Christ. Just like Christ showed his credentials through miraculous signs, these twelve are going to be endowed with that. And they are going to be doing things and saying things uniquely that bring the message of Christ to the first generation—including writing that down for us. And not all of them were writing apostles, but many of them were, and they gave us the New Testament. And here the message is now codified.

Now we—as later apostles, if you will, small “a”—we now can take that message to our generation after he gathers us, trains us, calls us, and sends us out: apostles. So the Twelve—very important. What I want to do is ask the question, What is the discernment of Christ in picking these? What do we learn from the choice that he made?

Now let’s read it. That’s a lot of intro, but let’s get into it now. Luke 6:12–16:

“In these days he”—that is Christ—“went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.” So he goes out to the mountain and he prays all night. I don’t know when the last time is that you gave up all your sleep and prayed all night long for something. I mean, some of you never; others of you maybe as a vigil by the bedside of someone in a hospital, a loved one there—whatever. But think about that: this is a major night of prayer. Must be a big decision, a big deal.

“And when day came”—it’s morning now, verse 13—“he called his disciples together”—they’re just wiping the sleep out of their eyes, but he’s been up all night praying—“he chose from them twelve.” So I’ve got a bunch of followers of Christ; now he’s going to take twelve and they will become the prototype, in one sense, of all those that are now given the gospel—entrusted with the message of reconciliation. And he’s going to send them out with special authority. “He named them apostles.” And that’s what the word means—just transliterated from Greek into English: sent ones—authorized and sent ones.



Then he lists them. Now let's go through this a little bit slowly and fix a few things in our own thinking so we can keep this list straight in our minds.

First one is Simon. Now, if you're new to all this, you know him as Peter. Most of us know that; we sometimes call him Simon Peter. Peter was the name that Jesus gave him as a bit of a motivation, among other things. He renamed him—Peter. “Simon, whom he named Peter”—not at this point, but he will later.

Andrew his brother—and if you don't know that, that's probably helpful. You can bracket those two together. We have two relatives—kin, blood brothers—here: Simon and Andrew.

James and John—those two should go together in your mind. Though they're not distinguished that way in our text, we know elsewhere they are the physical sons of a man named Zebedee—sons of Zebedee. So James and John—they're brothers. So I've got two brothers: Simon and Andrew. Got two more brothers: James and John.

Then I have two more here—let's keep these together in our thinking—Philip and Bartholomew. And here's the thing about Luke, by the way: when he's writing his Gospel—of course guided by the Holy Spirit, I get all that—but humanly speaking, he's very careful about the facts that he brings. He calls him Bartholomew. Other Gospel writers, like John—who was in this group—he writes back and doesn't call him Bartholomew.

Any time you see the word “Ben” as a transliterated beginning of a word or a phrase, that's the Hebrew word for “son,” and it's usually “son of someone”—so “Ben whatever.” And in Aramaic, “Bar”—bar-whatever. And in this case, when you see this compound word “Bartholomew,” this literally is “the son of Tolmai”—son of Tolmai. So this is his formal name—his surname. His given name—that he was called, as John makes clear to us—is Nathanael. Now, when you look at it that way, if you know your New Testament—if you know the book of John in particular—you know, oh yeah, I get it: Philip and Nathanael—often paired together. As a matter of fact, we meet them in John chapter 1 when Philip introduces Nathanael (or Bartholomew, to be formal) to Christ. He's the one who said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Remember that?

So we've got Simon and Andrew—brothers; James and John—brothers; we've got Philip and Bartholomew (Nathanael)—their friends apparently; they're close.

You've got Matthew. Now if you are a Sunday school graduate, you know he's got a more Jewish name. We meet him under a different name in Matthew—the Gospel that he wrote. His name is Levi—that's his Jewish name. So you can put that somewhere next to his name so you keep that straight. When you read of Levi elsewhere you'll remember him.

Thomas—and if you grew up in church some time ago or you had an old translation you might remember this word “Didymus,” which is just a transliteration of the Greek word which means—and thankfully the ESV translates it this way for us—it means “a twin.” He's a twin, and he's often called that—he's called Thomas Didymus, or Thomas the Twin. “Twin” is not here, but he's a twin and that's unique, and so they knew him as “the Twin.”

Then there's James—now this is kind of like your kids' kindergarten class because there's a lot of double names here. You've got people that already had a James and you're also going to run into another Simon here in just a second. So you've got duplicate names. So what Luke does is distinguish between the first James—he's not the brother of John. This is the James who's the son of Alphaeus. So that's a different James. He's also called, by the way—if you want to put this in the margin—“James the Lesser,” which doesn't sound like much of a title. I wouldn't want “James the Lesser”—that's a bummer. But James mikros, in Greek—it could refer to his stature: James “Shorty.” I mean, I don't know—short guy. Or maybe his age—you know, “Junior,” he's young. I don't know. Either way, we don't hear much from him throughout the Gospels. But there you go: James—Shorty, Junior—son of Alphaeus.

Then there's Simon—another. We already had a Simon; here we've got another Simon. We've got Simon, and to distinguish him from Peter—as though we needed to—it makes this clarifying description of him: he's the one who's called “the Zealot.” Now that doesn't refer to his personality, as we'll see. That has something to do with his politics. We'll look at that in a minute.

Then in verse 16 we have two Judases. We've got Judas, the son of James. Now, we've got to remember this: when you are reading these Gospels, you have to understand they're written after these events and by the people that were here. So one of the things that Luke does—he's very technical about listing things like “Bartholomew” instead of “Nathanael,” which was what they called him, but his formal name was Bartholomew. Well, “Judas” is referred to in other Gospels not as “Judas”—because I'm thinking you don't want to be called “Judas” anymore, after the fact. No one in your small group is high-fiving Judas because you've got the same name—“Hey, there's Judas!” You don't like him because he's the traitor, which you see there in the last verse: “Judas Iscariot, who became the traitor.” So he's referred to—you should know this—as “Thaddaeus” elsewhere in the Gospels. Thaddaeus. So “Thaddaeus” is what he would, I think, after the fact, have preferred to be called after the betrayal—but he's the namesake of Judas.



So we've got two Simons, we have two Jameses, and we have two Judases. We've got Simon and Andrew, who are brothers; we've got James and John, who are brothers; we've got Philip and Bartholomew (or Nathanael and Philip) that seem to have known each other together as friends before their calling.

So there's our list: Simon, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew (or Nathanael), Matthew (or Levi), Thomas the Twin, James (also known as James the Lesser), Simon the Zealot, Judas (who's also known as Thaddaeus), and Judas Iscariot. There's our Twelve.

Question: Why did Jesus call these twelve? Was it random? I mean, verse 12—does that not make it clear in verse 12? He prayed all night about this—as though he needed to—but he's in communion with the Father, clearly making this a prayerful, wise, providential decision. This is not haphazard. This is not “off the cuff.” This is not improv. He has planned this and decided: These are my Twelve. What's the lesson in that?

Well, there's got to be some lesson in that, because if you're going to pick twelve on the “God team”—because the Old Testament has come to fruition and you're the Messiah—and you're going to pick this “God team” to take this message, and these twelve are going to be special envoys of your ministry, and they're going to be the first disciples who become Apostles—you know, with a capital “A”—I don't think this is the team you're going to pick.

One of the reasons is we know about these. Now we've got to kind of be anachronistic here and think back to what we learn later, okay? We're going to learn some things after these men were picked. But what do you know about some of these already? I mean, this is in chronological order. We already met that some of these guys—at least four of them—are fishermen: Simon and Andrew and James and John. It doesn't take a seminary degree to be a fisherman. And I'm not saying they were all poor—one of them probably was not that poor; he had his own team, he had servants—and so, but they're, you know, they're not on the “God team.” They're not the priests. They're not the high priests and the scribes. They're not, you know, the Pharisees—and I know we've come to see the Pharisees as notoriously bad guys, but weren't there some? Couldn't you go and just pick some of the top, you know, seminary thinkers who have been trained theologically? I mean, you are the focal point of theology; you're the Messiah. Not the “God team.”

By the way, you've followed, I hope, through this series where we are geographically. I mean, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a suburb outside of Jerusalem—that's the center of God's attention. He flees to Egypt. Then he goes up to be raised in Nazareth—which Philip says, “Man, that place is a hole in the wall.” And they're all, by the way—except for probably Judas Iscariot—from the region



of Galilee up north. Now, what you need to know is if you're thinking about Israel's hope of Messiah, you're going to think about Bethlehem perhaps, you're going to think about Jerusalem; you're not going to think about Galilee.

Now, I don't mean to diss where you came from, but this is not—Galilee is not Orange County. It's not L.A. County or Ventura County. It's like Kern County or Imperial County, or dare I say Riverside County—I don't know. It's not Orange County, all right? This is not where people who are of any prominence are going to—it's where there are cows and things smell funny when you drive through it, and it's got barns, and there are hicks. This is Galilee. Sorry, Galilee. He's collecting a team—at least eleven of the twelve—from out in the way-out country.

We already learned that Jesus—in Luke 3—we learned that he was just about thirty years old when he started this public ministry, and most rabbis—and there's been a lot of scholarly debate about this—but I mean, most of us would assume he's picking these guys younger than him. So some of these paintings of these haloed disciples that Jesus picks and they've got these white beards—not the case. You need to picture—like even James the Lesser—he's probably a teenager. But we can assume they're young; they're under his age. If they're in their twenties—most of them, we assume. F. F. Bruce has written about this; there are others. This is not just random speculation. There's good reason to believe they were young.

They're young; they're not from a prominent place; they're not trained. Their background gives us a sense that Jesus is picking these people on purpose. What is the purpose? Well, they become in some ways a template for us, twenty-one centuries later. We are the sent ones for our generation—small “a,” I recognize. And what do we learn from the fact that he picked a bunch of ordinary nobodies? Why is that?

Well, I think we learn this elsewhere as Jesus not only taught it, but also the apostles reiterated it. It's because you and I should not be hung up at all thinking that we have some limitation. Number one on your outline—if you're taking notes—it'd be good for you, just like I think the lesson of Jesus's discerning choice would get us to realize about these people: they need to get over their past. You need to get over your past. Don't be hung up on it. Get over it.

You are called by God to make an eternal difference in the lives of people in your office, in your neighborhood, in your family. God has entrusted you with a message—like an ambassador of Christ. Ambassadors, you think, are these upper-crust folks with the pedigree. God doesn't work that way. He chooses common people. And if you think you're a common person, congratulations—that's exactly what God chooses to do: to do great things through regular people; extraordinary things through ordinary people. That is his intention.



Let me prove it to you. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1—a very familiar passage, I hope, to you, but it'd be good for us to read it periodically. 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Couldn't be clearer that this is intentional. If it's not explicit in Luke 6—although it's obvious—it's certainly explicit here. God purposefully chooses people like the twelve disciples who are not the upper crust of the first century because he's trying to make a point. Verse 26—1 Corinthians 1:26: “Consider your calling, brothers.” Now who are these folks? These were the Corinthians. The Corinthians were living sometime after the disciples—not far, a couple 10–15 years—and they were now supposed to—Paul asked them to consider their backgrounds: “Not many of you were wise, at least according to worldly standards.” Not a bunch of PhDs in the crowd. Now, it doesn't mean there weren't some—and there were some; there are some brilliant people—but according to worldly standards, God didn't assemble just the top of the top. “Not many powerful, not many of noble birth.” He didn't look through society and pick the best—just like he didn't look through the first century in Galilee or Judea and pick the best.

“But God chose what is foolish in the world”—at least that's how they view us—“to shame the wise.” Now, that assumes, by the way, that we're carrying out our task. Our task is with a focus on the mission of Christ with the message of Christ. His method is enlisting us to take that to folks. And in reality it shames the wise in many ways—particularly as they repent of their sins and they recognize the unlikely tools through which God gets his message out. It reminds me of Balaam, and I can't help but think of Balaam when I read this passage: the high-falutin', high-dollar, hot, prophet-for-hire who needs correction. And who does God enlist to correct Balaam? You know the story, right? A donkey. I mean, you don't need a seminary graduate to get God's message out. Now, that's an extreme example; you've got a few things going for you that the donkey doesn't have. And all I'm saying is, God can use whatever he wants to get his message out. And the truth of it can shame the wise—and certainly the donkey shamed Balaam. And you, without any kind of big-falutin' credentials from the world, can be the one in your office that brings the wisdom of Christ to those people.

He “chooses the weak of the world to shame the strong.” Verse 28: “Chose what is low and despised in the world... even the things that are not”—quote-unquote—“of no consequence to the world, to bring to nothing the things that are.” Why? Here's the purpose: “So that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” I don't want you to mistake it: you will be the people in South Orange County that will make an eternal difference. Let me make this clear: it's not the people that people are looking to, reading about in the papers, in the business journals. They are not the people a thousand years from now that will be hailed as making a huge difference—an eternal difference—in the lives of people in our county. Not going to be them. It'll be you. Because if you open your mouth as an ambassador—as a sent one—and you bring the message to those people, you will change their eternal destiny. And the Bible says that's the thing that God is doing in choosing normal people. He's not choosing the richest, not choosing the smartest, not choosing the most influential, not choosing the most famous—he's choosing you and me to bring the message because the power is in the message.



As a matter of fact, that's what he goes on to say. Look at verse 30: "And because of him"—God—"you are in Christ." Now think about that. How did you become a Christian? Because you had some PhD share the gospel with you? Oh, maybe a couple of you. No—because God had worked in your life to bring you to him. It could have been through some silly means that God got you to see your sin, repent of it, and put your faith in Christ. The means is not important. That's why he chose a bunch of Galileans—fishermen, tax collectors, and all the rest—so that no human being may boast, because we want to see that it's from him and not from us, "who became to us"—by the way, Christ did—"wisdom from God, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that, as it is written"—he quotes now Jeremiah—"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

I want to make it really clear that the work of God's kingdom on earth—as he expands the citizenship of heaven among us here in South Orange County—it will be his doing, and we will give him credit for it. And part of that will be, "Look at the band of people that got it done."

"But Mike, you don't understand my past. My past isn't just nondescript and, you know, it isn't just that I didn't do well in school. I have an immoral past—a checkered past." A couple of these names might have jumped out at you. I mentioned Levi—who's called Matthew, his Hellenized name. And I said that he—or I didn't say, we just said his name—but you know his occupation. What was it? A tax collector. Who did he collect taxes for? For Israel? No—for Rome. Rome was the occupier of Israel, and some of the Israelites sold out and became—in the minds of the people of Israel—traitors in collecting money for Rome. Now, Rome made that an attractive job because you were now authorized—with Roman soldiers standing behind you—to get whatever you could out of these folks and line your own pockets. The Talmud—we quoted the Talmud last week—the Talmud said of the tax collectors that they are just professional extortionists. That's how they viewed them. They were seen as the sellouts. They were seen as the worst in society—in Jewish society. And you know, it's because they weren't doing things ethically. They were liars, they were cheats, they were bullies. That's what Matthew was. He looked at his past and he said, "Everybody hated me." And you know what? For good reason. I wasn't loyal, and I was unethical.

There's a guy down there—Simon. I said it's not his personality that makes him be called "the Zealot." It's not the reason he's called "the Zealot"—zeal, by the way, not a bad thing. Jesus was known for his zeal. He's called a Zealot here with a capital "Z" because it's not just a nickname based on his personality. It's his political affiliation. The Zealots—the Zealots were known as a group of people—as some call it, the outlawed political party. They were the folks that were the opposite extreme of the Matthews of the world, who would collect taxes for Rome. They would never do that. They hated Roman occupation. They were the ones that would do anything to anyone who would show any loyalty to Rome because they were so loyal—and only loyal—to Israel. As a matter of fact, they were known for killing people. They didn't take them to the Sanhedrin. They didn't give them due process. There were no trials. If anyone showed that they were going to give deference to Rome, the Zealots were the ones that would knock them off. You want a current, you know, 21st-century word for these folks? How about this: the terrorists. That'd be a better way to say it: "Simon the Terrorist." These are the people that are known for killing people without any trials.

This was the breadth of the unethical backgrounds—from Matthew to Simon. And it's not just that they're nondescript people without a pedigree. These are people who were sinners. In fact, if you still have 1 Corinthians 1 open, turn to chapter 6. I just want to remind you—you may say, "Well, that's great, you know, it's not about my lack of knowledge or, you know, career in school or whatever. My problem is, I did horrible things before I became a Christian." Well, here's the deal: when you come to Christ, Christ changes all of that. And I want you—just like the people of Corinth—to get over your past. Get over it. I don't care what you were. It's why one of the most prominent figures in all the New Testament was a murderer. His name was Saul; God changed his name to Paul. He became the writer of the New Testament, and he said, "I am the worst of sinners." And I don't think that's just rhetoric. He felt that—really—he was the worst because he opposed Christianity and killed Christians—innocent Christians. Think about that: a murderer. God put him up as—what the Bible says—an example of God's incredible patience—his perfect patience.

Chapter 6 verse 9 says: this is not just an excuse for a lot of sinners to be standing up for Christ. No. God changes people. Because when it comes to sin—unrighteousness—that's not the people that inherit the kingdom of God. "Don't you know the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don't be deceived: sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who practice homosexuality, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God." Okay—get that. "That's one of the reasons I don't think I can ever speak up for Christianity, because man, somewhere my category of sin is on that list." Doesn't matter. Look at this, verse 11: "And such were some of you"—but your past is past. "You were washed"—I assume you're a Christian here; that's what Christianity and the death of Christ is all about: cleansing, forgiveness—"you were sanctified"—that's used here in a positional sense—you were set apart as God's child—"you were justified"—declared right before God—"in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

You're no longer who you were. Enough with the thinking of the world that once you have a problem, it's always going to define you. It doesn't define you. So you don't introduce yourself to me as a "recovering alcoholic," or whatever else you might do. If you were a drunkard, you were a drunkard. You're not anymore. See what I'm saying? God is changing you. You're not doing that anymore. Whether it's a sexual sin, a habitual sin, an issue of dependence—whatever it is—can you just get over that? God chose terrorists, if you will, and sellouts and liars to be a part of his first-century apostolic team to remind you and me: get over our past. Get over your past. God wants to use you. Your past should not be your hang-up.

Verse 16—I want to go to the end of this passage in the middle of the sermon because it's the thing that really jumps out at us, doesn't it? It's probably something you've already sat there and thought about, just as I kept saying this was Jesus's prayerful choice. And the last one on the list—who's always last on the list—is Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. "Iscariot" was a reference to the town where he was probably from—or at least his family was—in southern Judea. And he's the traitor, the betrayer, the treasonous apostle.



Now, I keep saying this is a prayerful, providential choice—a wise, discerning choice of Christ. Why in the world would you choose Judas, to bring close into your inner circle? Didn't you know? Of course he knows. Many times in the Gospels Jesus reveals that he knows. He knows. If I ask the question, "Why would Judas be chosen as a part of the apostolic band?" some of you Sunday school grads would say, "I know—because later, when the betraying takes place, the apostles keep quoting the Scriptures: 'This is the fulfillment of Scripture.' Even Jesus himself said, 'This betrayal fulfills the promises of the Old Testament.'"

That doesn't really change the question, does it? Why in the world would God, in his providence, choose to put in the inner band a traitor—which is exactly what Jesus is doing? He's confirming the Father's will in putting this guy in the inner circle.

Turn, if you would, to Matthew chapter 13. And let me suggest this: I believe that Jesus chose Judas—and God in the Old Testament had foreseen and predicted and decreed that Judas would be a part of the apostolic band—to emphasize, in very profound and vivid ways, a truth he continually tries to teach his disciples and is trying to teach us in passages like this.

Matthew 13:24—he put forth another parable: "The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, the weeds also appeared. And the servants of the master of the house came and said, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?'" We can do some weeding out there in the field. The master said, "No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them." We don't take the wheat out—and that might be a problem. So underline this: "Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, 'Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

At the end—at the harvest—the reapers are going to figure this out. But right now, the reality is the kingdom of heaven is like a field with a lot of people that look the same, and some are bearing grain and some are just weeds. And God is not going to allow the church to go around and try and, you know, catch you at the door and say, "Well, wait a minute, you've got to have an interview with five pastors here; we need some references; we need to do a fruit check, see what's going on in your life. You can't come in here; you're not a Christian." We can't do that—because maybe, in our feeble, short-sighted human discernment, we may be saying no to a real Christian. No—so the doors are open. You come in. You sit there. You have a Bible in your lap. You want to come to a small group Bible study—fine. Come on. Unless you do something egregious—unless you threaten us or something—you come in, and you're part of it. But the reality is there are some here that are looking like Christians that are not.



Jesus, I think—here’s my proposition—put Judas in the band of the inner circle, as God had prophesied in the Old Testament, so that he would get all of us who sit in a room like this and send a little shiver up our spine to say, “Ooh, that means in this room right now there are some fakes. There are some phonies. There are some Judases here.” And we don’t know who it is. It’s like that day when they sat around at the Last Supper and he said, “Someone’s going to betray me.” And they were like, “Oh—who is it? Is it me? It’s not me, is it? Me? Not me. Is it him?” That feeling right there—that’s why Judas was part of the band.

I’ll put it this way—number two: it’s so that you and I would make sure that we’re not Judas. Make sure you’re not a fake. That, I think, is the thing that should remind us: if a guy like that can walk with Jesus and talk with Jesus for three years and be a phony, I can’t look at my résumé and say, “Well, I’ve been going to church for years. I know the Bible. I read the Bible every day. I’ve even gone on ministry trips and missions trips. And of course I’m a Christian.” No, no. Judas proves—if anyone proves—that you can run through the motions and do the stuff and never be genuinely converted. He’s the “son of perdition.” He is the one who not only was planted by the enemy—I mean, that’s the immediate cause, the immediate agency—but he’s filled with Satan, the Bible says there at the end.

I mean, let’s just let that one sink in and get quiet in this room for a second: there are some of you here—you’re not of God. You’re not converted. But you sit here; you come to our programs, and you’re just like Judas in that no one knew. No one knew. Oh, they look back, and with 20/20 hindsight they started putting pieces together—but they didn’t really know who was the traitor, who was the phony, who was the fake. And if we sit in a room that I trust is filled with a majority of real Christians, but some non-Christians here who are just going through the motions of Christianity, it should make us all pause like they did at the Last Supper, going, “Oh, is it...? I hope it’s not me.” What does that do? Puts the mirror up. As 2 Corinthians 13 says: test yourself; see if you’re in the faith. Jesus said, a good, true tree—are you bearing good fruit? Is there really good fruit in your life? Self-examination. We can’t do it at the door. We’re told not to do it at the door—not in terms of having some kind of committee that figures out whether you’re a real Christian. You have to figure that out. Judas helps me remember to do that—even, by the way, pastors. And he was an apostle.

Here’s one way to tell—not in every case, but one way to tell. Look at the parable just before this. Jesus is explaining the parable—not of the weeds and the wheat—but he’s telling the parable of the sower and the soils. Remember the four soils? We have four soils: one is nothing but path—right? It’s all tracked down. We also have the rocky soil—got a lot of rocks in it. Then we have the thorny soil, and then we have the good soil. These are the four soils. And the seed comes on all of them.



And Jesus now starts to explain this in the parable. In verse 18: “Hear then the parable of the sower.” He’s already told the story, but now he’s going to interpret and tell us what it means. Verse 19: “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.” This is what was sown along the path. It doesn’t even get started. Nobody’s tricked by that. The birds come and eat it up. Satan doesn’t want them in here. They’re never going to sit through—maybe just one sermon and get totally bent out of shape when they hear me preach, and they’re gone—done. And no one thinks they’re Christians. They reject it outright.

Here’s where the confusion comes—in verse 20: “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word”—and this is worth underlining—“and immediately receives it with joy.” Now I’m thinking we throw a party for that person—get them signed up for baptism. Fantastic! “Hey, welcome to the club. You’re in. You’re in the kingdom. Let me give you some verses of assurance. Here’s a Bible. Let me tell you what website to go to. This is great.” We say all that, and we’re confident they’re Christians because of their reception of the message. “Yet”—it’s not real—“has no root in himself.” Now that’s the part we can’t see. All I can see is what’s above ground. I don’t see what’s going on in your heart. “But he endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.”

Now, here’s the thing—I said you can tell if you’re fake. Here’s one way you can tell: if, when the going gets tough in Christianity—and often because of your Christianity—you bail out. It’s what we call being an apostate. When you do that and you go, “I’m done with this,” that’s a good sign—don’t sit there when someone shares the gospel with you ten years from now and you haven’t been in church in years and you don’t care about it anymore, you have no interest in it anymore because when the going got tough you bailed out—don’t tell that person who shares the gospel with you, “Well, yeah, I’m a Christian. I’ve been through all that. I’m sure God’s good with me because I prayed a prayer; I was into it at one time.” Listen—you went out from us, 1 John 2 says, because you were not of us. If you would have been of us, you would have remained with us.

And here’s an interesting little play on words, if you will. We call it an apostate. The word to be “sent out one” is apostle—apo + *stellō*. Now, this word for apostate is apo + “to stand” (*histēmi*)—to stand off and away. It’s the crossing of “I’m done. I’m done with those guys.” Okay, the sent ones—we’ve got the message; we buy this; we’re going out to make more disciples. The apostate is the one that’s like, “I’m done.” And what’s the impetus for that in the passage? It could be tribulation, persecution, something in your life—the crisis—gets you mad. You’re done. It’s over.

Next one—not catastrophic. This is more like the leaky faucet. This one comes on slowly. Verse 22: “What was sown among thorns”—there’s the third soil—“this is the one who hears the word”—and we assume he embraces it, he’s fine, he’s looking like one of us—“but the cares of the world”—it’s like just life droning on and on—“and the deceitfulness of riches”—there’s a priority statement. They start chasing after the... “I got no time for church, got no time for service, got no time for all

of that”—“it chokes the word, and it proves unfruitful.” Which is always the litmus test in the Bible: does it bear good fruit? No fruit. Why? Because their attachment to Christianity was temporary—based on the things it did for them. And then just time: “I don’t have time for this.” Defections—apostasy, if you will. That’s what we call it—standing away—either through some immediate crisis or just through the droning on of life. “I’m not into that anymore.” When that happens, it’s a good sign you were a Judas. I don’t care how exciting it was when you were with us. I don’t care how interesting it was. I don’t care how into it. I don’t care how devoted. I don’t care if you went and preached the gospel to people. That bailing out is—Hebrews 2 and 3 says—it’s a sign. It’s clear. It’s evident—you didn’t endure to the end.

Although that’s a tricky statement to say, by the way, I should read the rest of this parable, because the fourth soil—you think, oh, he’s got this cookie-cutter view of Christianity and every Christian’s perfect and they’re all bearing fruit the same. No, no—I’m not saying that. This is not perfection. Verse 23—this is not everybody being held to the same standard of sanctification and production. Verse 23 says: “As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields—in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” We’re all going to be growing at different rates. We’re all going to be variously productive in the Christian life. I get that. I get that. This is not saying, “You have to be perfect to be a Christian at that church.” I’m not saying that at all. Here’s what I’m saying: when you defect, and you have nothing to do with this anymore, and you walk out and say, “I’m done with it”—either over time, slowly (soil with the thorns) or quickly (through some events in your life)—good sign you never had it to start with. I’ve got more on that on some of the sermons on the back of the worksheet if you want to explore that more. I know that’s a controversial doctrine; you can dig in another time.

But the parable that we looked at first—of the weeds—when did the weeds and the wheat get distinguished? Was it because of a crisis? Was it because of the ongoing struggles and cares of the world or the riches and priorities of chasing down a paycheck? Was that what determined the difference between the weeds and the wheat? No. When? Reapers—judgment—end of time.

I’ve got to read you this passage. I call it the scariest passage in all of the Bible—Matthew chapter 7. As long as we’re in Matthew—we’re not too far from it—turn there, and I want to get the whole analogy of the field and the reapers—get that out of it—and let’s just talk straight terms about the problem. And that is that some people will get to the end of their lives and never bail out of the church—they never bail out of reading the Bible; they will never stop doing deeds in the name of Christ. They will continue to do things that, on the outside, seem very believable in terms of their Christianity. And the only time they’re going to find out that they were a Judas—a fake, a phony—will be on Judgment Day. They should’ve known better—maybe better teaching, maybe this passage being memorized—something should have told them.

Here's how it plays out in verse 21—Matthew 7:21: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.” Now, the apostates don’t say it quite that way anymore—“Lord, Lord”—but “the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Well, let’s see—Isn’t that the person you’re talking about? Didn’t Judas do the will of Christ for three years? Well, sure he did. But the problem is, as we’ll see in Judas’s life, there was a lot of external conformity with a lot of internal opposition. So we ended the sermon last time—we were talking about that duplicity, the hypocrisy of, you know, as we say sometimes, “sitting on the outside but standing on the inside.” The will of God is always authentic. The fruit of a real Christian is always authentic. It always grows from the inside out.

Keep reading—“On that day many will say”—not a few, not a couple—“many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not?’”—look at this list here—“‘prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’” Now I understand this is an extreme example, but what’s the impetus for this discussion? Who are we talking about? Who’s the example? Judas. What did Judas do? Certainly prophesied in his name. Certainly cast out demons in his name. He did a lot of mighty works. He was an apostle. He did miraculous signs—we can assume. We have no sub-circumstantial reference to it; that’s what the apostles did. They went from village to village with the authority of Christ, doing things that we could only imagine—and yet he was lost. Because he’ll hear this—just like some in this room will hear this—in verse 23: “I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you.’” Not “I used to know you,” not “I kind of...”—“I never knew you; had no relationship with you. ‘Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

“Well, wait a minute—prophesying would be an obedient act for an apostle. Casting out demons would be an obedient act for an apostle. Doing mighty works—wouldn’t that be an obedient act for him?” Yeah—but they’re “lawless.” Why? How come? Because, much like Judas, there’s an exterior of conformity while the inside part’s not there.

Let me prove this to you—John 12. I know we’re turning to a lot of texts, but let me turn to this one real quick. It’s worth seeing Judas and his duplicity. It’s the things that people see versus what’s really going on in my life. When it came to Judas—think back now—John is writing this (the last Gospel written), thinking and connecting the dots. Would you ever doubt Judas, you know, during the three years? I doubt you would—even if you saw signs and symptoms of defection, even if you saw things that didn’t add up—you’d be like, “Well, Jesus chose him. He’s one of us.” I mean, you would give him the benefit of the doubt—just like you’ve given people the benefit of the doubt in your Christian past and then you thought, “Well, I’m sure, you know—that was weird—but I’m sure they’re fine,” and you end up realizing, as they become apostate, that they’re not fine and that they never were fine. That’s what John is kind of—I know it’s the product of the Holy Spirit, the book of John—but John sees this, connects the dots in retrospect.

Context: Jesus is at a dinner here at Lazarus’s house. Mary and Martha are there. Verse 3—John 12:3—Mary takes a pound of expensive ointment made of pure nard and she anointed the feet of



Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. House was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. “But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ‘Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?’” Denarii—minimum-wage worker’s day wage. That’s a lot of money. And apparently this was expensive and rare perfume, and he’s like, “We could have sold that—could have given to the poor.” John looks back and connects the dots. And I don’t know how he got to this place—whether this was completely revelatory from the Holy Spirit or whether this was—which I think it was—him looking back: “You know what? I wondered about that. He had an excuse for that. I realize now what he was doing.” Verse 6: “He said this, not because he cared about the poor”—so people thought—“but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

Think that through. Now John goes on—we’re onto them now. Give him the benefit of the doubt—as we all should; we should be very gracious and magnanimous. But when it comes to it, when the defectors defect and the apostates apostatize, at some point we look back and recognize, “You know what? There’s an example—and I don’t ever want to be that—where my obedience is some kind of conformity on the outside, keeping up appearances, and in reality, it’s not authentic fruit.”

Did Judas give to the poor? I bet many times he gave to the poor. He was the treasurer. He cut a lot of checks, if you will, to charity. But when it came to it, there was stuff going on people couldn’t see. You need to test yourself—to see if you’re a real Christian as you sit in this auditorium this morning. And you should say, “If I’m to die today, am I really going to stand before God and he’s going to say, ‘Enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,’ or will he look you in the eye and say, ‘Oh yeah, you were a churchgoer. You were a Bible study attendee—I get all that—but your heart was never right with me. Depart from me, you worker of lawlessness. Never knew you.’”

Yeah—there are eleven other guys in this list that I think are very instructive for us. You’ve got to get over your past; you’ve got to make sure you’re not a fake. When it comes to the rest of these guys, what we recognize—as we kind of get ahead of ourselves in the chronology of the Gospels—these guys were known for making some pretty big mistakes themselves. They weren’t apostate, but they weren’t perfect. It’s the discernment between the apostate and the stumbling saint. And are there any stumbling saints here among the other eleven? Oh, absolutely.

Start at the top of the list—verse 14: Simon. Ever make any mistakes, as you recall, in your reading of the Gospels? Turn to this one, if you would, real quick—Luke 22. The thing you probably remember is his denial of Christ in the courtyard of Caiaphas. I want you to see how Jesus set this up because it’s very insightful. Once you get there, jot this down as number three on your worksheet, because I think it’s important for us to put it this way. I know this is a broad and general statement, but you’ll see that there are certain aspects that you may need to apply in your future—maybe this week, next week, next month. But when it comes down to it, you need to trust Christ when you falter. That’s very broad, I get it—but we’re going to make it very specific. Because there

may be a way you need to trust him here, and a different way you need to trust him here, and a different thing you need to trust him for here—and we’ll explain all that. But let’s put the broad statement: Trust him when you falter. And you will—because even Simon, who’s at the top of the list every time—he faltered big.

Here’s Jesus explaining it before it actually happened. Verse 31—Luke 22:31: “Simon, Simon”—of course we know that’s his name, but he changed it to Peter, but whatever—he’s using his old name. “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you”—send a chill down your spine—Jesus looks you in the eye. “Satan wants you.” “Oh—tell him I’m busy.” I mean, wow. I don’t know what he’s thinking—but that’s a sobering statement. And not only that—he doesn’t just want to chat with you—“that he might sift you like wheat.” What does that mean? I don’t know—doesn’t sound good. Don’t want to find out. But Jesus says, verse 32, “I have prayed for you”—I prayed for you—“that your”—underline this word—“faith may not fail.” Your faith. There’s the key. “And when you have”—here are another two words to underline—“turned again”—translates a word in Greek. We’ve read some of my writings on repentance; you even know the word *metanoia*—repentance. This is a synonym for it. We see it a lot in the New Testament—“to turn.” It translates “turned again.” Now that assumes what? That when Satan comes to sift you, he’s going to have some success. You’re going to fall, and you’re going to need to turn back. And what do you need there? Well, he’s already said it: “I’m praying for your faith.” You need to turn to me when you stumble, and you need to trust me when you stumble, and then you need to get about the work I called you to do. Look at the next three words in English: “strengthen your brothers.” You’ve got a job to do. From the very beginning he’s telling Peter, “I’ve got a job for you. You’re going to be key.” He’s going to become the first pastor—the first preaching pastor—of the church in Jerusalem. Very important role. And he says, “Listen—you’re going to stumble. You’re going to stumble hard. Satan’s going to sift you. And when you fall, I don’t want your faith to falter. I want your faith to be strong. I want you to turn back—there’s repentance, if you will—and I want you to trust me because you’ve got work to do. You’re an apostle.”

Peter goes—as he often does, right? Here’s another bit of his faltering: he’s got a hubris about his own performance. “Oh, Lord, I’m ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Of course—“I’m never going to falter like that.” Which, by the way, don’t ever say that. If you’re ever sitting here thinking, “Well, you know what Mike’s talking about—Christians sinning big and stuff—I’d never sin big. A little sin, not big.” To him who thinks he stands—I’m quoting now 1 Corinthians 10—“take heed.” Be careful. Watch out—lest you fall. It’d be good for you to go, “I’m sure I could. Don’t want to.” Peter goes on: “Never gonna. I’ll go to the end. Let ’em just lop my head off for Christ—no problem.” Jesus says, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster won’t crow today—this day—until you deny three times that you even know me.”

Now you know the story. He actually does—of course Jesus is right—he denies him. That’s the night of the trial. Next day is the crucifixion. Then there’s the Sabbath. Then there’s the resurrection. And after the resurrection, we still—we’ve got time between the resurrection appearances—Jesus starts appearing to the disciples and commissioning them to do their work—in



Peter's case, to be that preacher and to be the apostle and to strengthen his brothers, to be that leader.

But in John 21 we find him, after the resurrection, going out fishing. He's not in Jerusalem anymore; he's back in Galilee, and he's fishing again. He's out fishing—and this is not to catch his lunch. This seems to be a paradigm shift for him. Why? Because of Jesus's response to him. He shows up—special post-resurrection appearance. He comes there and he says to Peter, "Listen, I've got a question for you. Do you love me?" "Uh—you know—you know I like you a lot." "Then feed my sheep." You want a parallel for that? "Strengthen your brothers." You've got a job to do, Peter. "Hey—you've had a few bites now—breakfast that we asked you. Yeah. Do you love me?" "Oh—you know—you know I like you a lot." "Tend my lambs. You've got a job to do." Third time Jesus says, "Do you like me a lot? Do you really like me a lot?" "Lord, you know all things; you know I like you a lot." "Then would you feed my lambs?" That's your job.

What's Peter struggling with? Where is his faith starting to falter and shake? He doesn't believe—after he had a stumble, after he had turned, he had repented, he was sorrowful—he went out and cried that very night and begged God for forgiveness: "God, I failed." What was he doubting? What was he not trusting God for? Jot it down—it'd be worth writing down, because you're going to struggle with the same thing when you stumble big. You're going to struggle with believing Christ's forgiveness. And you need to say, "You know what? I can't do that. When I falter, I need to trust Christ." And one of the promises of Christ is this: "If you confess your sins"—really confess your sins—"he is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness." Now don't call Christ a liar. That's the truth. And if he says it's forgiven, then get back in the game and do your job. "I can't"—that's what Peter was saying.

We've got Andrew—we don't know a lot about him; not a lot of ink is spilled on Andrew—not in the Gospels, at least. The next two on the list in verse 14—printed there in your worksheet—who do we see? James and John. James and John—sons of Zebedee. Although Jesus kind of changed their name too—and it wasn't a compliment, nor was it a motivation. It's actually a bit of a rebuke. He didn't call them "the sons of Zebedee"—he called them the "sons of what?" "Thunder." Thunder. Do a little work on that—Boanerges. It's the Aramaic term for it. And if you study the second half of that compound word, it can be translated "thunder," but this is not about phonics, right? I mean, this wasn't something they... it wasn't junior-high humor: "Sons of Thunder." What was it? It can be translated this way: anger, rage. You're like thundering with anger in your responses—with harshness. You have a hair trigger. You're a frustrated person. "Sons of Thunder."

I've got to have you look at this—please, one more—Luke chapter 9. You're in Luke 22; if you're still there, go to Luke 9. Here you'll see why Jesus called them Boanerges—the Sons of Thunder; sons of rage. Verse 51—go all the way down to verse 51, Luke 9:51: "When the days drew near for him" (that is Christ) "to be taken up"—the ascension is on the other side of the cross and the resurrection—"he set his face to go to Jerusalem." So they're going to go—from Galilee to



Jerusalem. “He sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him.” You remember this—two-day, three-day travel from north to south. They stopped in the Samaritan villages like we did in John 4 going north. Now he’s going south. And he sends ahead some of his disciples—a couple of his messengers here—to make arrangements for the night. “But the people did not receive him”—verse 53—“because his face was set toward Jerusalem.”

What does that mean? “Going to Jerusalem? Why?” I don’t know what they told them—“Hey, we’ve got to go to Jerusalem; we’ve got this big thing going on—Jesus, some culmination of his ministry.” And they’re like, “Jerusalem? Jerusalem? What do you think—we’ve got Mount Gerizim right here. That’s God’s chosen place, not Jerusalem.” And just like the woman at the well tried to have that debate about which mountain was the right one—the Spirit said, “You’re not staying here. If you’re going to Jerusalem, you can’t stay here. No vacancy. Move on.”

Verse 54: “When his disciples James and John”—sons of rage—“saw it, they said, ‘Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?’” That’s a bit of an overreaction, perhaps, for a “We’ve got a free room in the hotel and we’re not giving it to you.” But think about it—they’ve had three years now of the endowment of the Spirit to do miraculous signs as apostles in the first century. They’ve seen things—by the word of their mouth—happen. They’re thinking, “You’re no normal rabbi. You’re the Messiah. They rejected the Messiah. They deserve to die. Let me do it—I’ll just call down some fire on these people. Let’s toast them.” The whole village.

Jesus says in verse 55—“Yeah, that’s a good idea.” No—“He turned and rebuked them,” and then went on to another village—which was Jesus’s response to the problem.

Now, is it wrong to deny the Messiah room when you have it? Absolutely. Is it wrong for your errant theology to think that if you’re going to Jerusalem you shouldn’t have any right to stay in our town? Absolutely—it’s wrong. Is that a punishable offense? If you turn away the Messiah based on your stupid theology for all the wrong reasons because of your nationalistic pride in your Samaritan place—absolutely it’s wrong. But here’s what Jesus kept teaching his disciples from the beginning: let God deal with your enemies. Leave room for the wrath of God. Don’t take it into your own hands. And, in fact, be kind to your enemies—it may lead them to repentance, or it’ll just make them even more culpable at the end of time. But don’t you do it yourself. Now, there’s government, and it plays a role obviously in retribution—but when it comes to personal responses like, “You can’t have a room here,” calling fire from heaven is not the right response. You have a problem with the timing of God. In time he’ll deal with it. James and John want to deal with it right now.

May I ask this? When it comes to faltering, how often does the faltering in your Christian life come from your impatience—your inability to trust God (let’s put it this way) for the timing of what he

wants to do? And when you add to that rage or anger, or the tendency for your mouth to have all of these harsh, terrible things come out of it—and you sit back in guilt saying, “Look what I just did”—usually it’s because of your impatience, your lack of restraint. Your temper. Well, here’s the deal: you need to learn to trust Christ when you falter—for the timing, for the judgment of God. No more unguarded words, hasty actions, rash responses. When you see it, see it for what it is, and learn to trust Christ for him to take care of the problems in the long run.

One more—we don’t have time to go through some more of these, but let me just mention Thomas in verse 15. Thomas—Didymus; that’s the transliteration of the word “Twin,” translated for us in our ESV. Thomas is a twin—but that’s not how we know him, either. He’s called that throughout the Gospels—Thomas the Twin. We know him as what? Doubting Thomas.

Now turn with me to this passage—the last one I’ll turn you to—John 20. This is where he earned his reputation as the Doubting Thomas. Now, I’ve got to say this—follow me. I think many of us, myself included, have looked at John 20 and given Thomas a lot of sympathy. As a matter of fact, we—as apologists, if you will, those that want to defend the faith—say, “We’re not Mormons here; this is not about a ‘burning in the bosom’ or some subjectivity or mysticism. We should, as Paul said to King Agrippa—this is reasonable, rational; you should be able to back it up. Our brains ought to be engaged. We’re not about believing something without facts and evidence.” So we look at Thomas in John 20 and we say, “You know what, I’m not going to bash the guy. He wanted proof.” And so we treat him with sympathy. Some of us do. Sunday school—you treat him maybe with contempt for this; but then you grow up, you think, “Well, wait a minute—maybe it’s not a bad thing.”

Well, let me say this—I think perhaps we’ve given him too much sympathy. I get the fact that we want proof. I get the fact that it’s right—and God wants to provide credible, reasonable, logical reasons for our faith. But there’s a problem going on in this passage that I think is rooted in his personality that we’ve already seen expressed in the text. We don’t have time to look at it, but jot down John 11:16. When the going got tough for Jesus and the enemies started to press in on him, I’m assuming you’ve got Peter saying things like this: “I’ll go—let’s fight it all the way to the end. I’m ready to go to prison and death with you.” You’ve got James and John wanting to call fire from heaven and kill everybody. And then you’ve got Thomas. And his response in that passage is this: “We’ll just go to Jerusalem with him that we may die with him.” “We’ll die with him.” Not, like Peter says, “Hey, I’m ready to fight to the very end,” but “It’s over. It’s over. A lot of people hate us. I think we’re going to die in Jerusalem. I’m ready. Are you? Hey Nathanael, you ready? We’re going to go die in Jerusalem. Jesus is going to be crucified.” He’s a pessimist. He’s negative. Don’t overblow that one passage, but the guy has got a very—I don’t know—a downer view on everything, it seems, when we see him.

And then you add that kind of mentality to what happens here and you start to say, “Wait a minute—I’m not going to be so sympathetic toward Thomas.” Verse 24—John 20:24: “Now

Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.” It’s post-crucifixion, post-resurrection. Jesus appears to his assembled apostles—minus Judas, who killed himself—and Thomas ain’t there. Where are you, man? That’s what I want to know. Where’d you go? I can only assume—but I doubt it was for good reasons—that you’re out at Costco, or you’re shopping or something. You’re doing your taxes. I’m assuming you’ve got the mentality you’ve shown throughout the text: “It’s over, I guess.” “Guys,” the other disciples said, “We saw him. He’s alive. We’ve seen the Lord.” But he said, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side”—where I saw that spear go—“I will never believe.”

And we think, “Okay—look, he wants proof.” And we preach it that way sometimes. Let me retract a little bit of how I’ve preached this in the past. Here’s the problem: if you put in your mind how many times—even in the Gospel of John alone—that Jesus, from the beginning of his earthly ministry, kept telling the disciples, “I’m going to die in Jerusalem, but then on the third day I’m going to rise. I’ve got authority to lay my life down; I’ve got authority to take it back up again.” In the words of Matthew 20—“I’m going to Jerusalem,” he tells the twelve disciples, as he pulls them aside—this is not just walking along the way—looks them in the eyes and says, “Hey, I go there; I’m going to be delivered. Chief priests and scribes are going to be against me. They’re going to condemn me. They’re going to flog me and mock me and crucify me—and then, on the third day, I’m going to rise again.”

Now—you’ve got ten guys, not just—I don’t know—guys off the street, not people that live in some weird place—people you’ve lived with for three years and you know intimately—and they say, “We saw him.” Now you’re combining the promise of Christ with the testimony of these men, and you still say, “Ain’t gonna believe it”? I don’t think we should be so sympathetic. I think you should say, “What’s wrong with you, man? You should believe what Jesus said.” There’s credible reasons to believe it.

Well, Jesus let him sit there with that incredulous attitude for eight days. Verse 26: “Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas”—hey, congratulations—“was with them.” He happened to be there. You were out there crying somewhere—now you’re there. “Although the doors were locked”—this tells us something about the resurrected body of Christ: not a ghost, but he’s got not all the limitations the unresurrected body has—“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’” And then he said to Thomas—and I don’t think this was like, “Oh, you wanted to see my hands—oh, here they are.” No. “Hey, Thomas—put your finger here, and see my hands; put out your hand and place it in my side—see the scar—there it is. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” I don’t think there was a lot of sympathy in Christ’s voice at that point. “You stop being someone who doesn’t believe what I said. You’ve got credible reasons. You’ve got eyewitnesses. Believe it.”



Thomas—rebuked—says in verse 28, “My Lord and my God!” And Jesus said, “Have you believed because you have seen me?” You really didn’t need to—you had testimony, you had promise. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” And that’s every successive generation since: you have prophecy, you have credible eyewitnesses.

Thomas may have had reasons—perhaps, I don’t know what they would be—for being so distrusting. But his faltering is remedied by believing the promise of Christ. Don’t be a “Doubting Thomas.” Peter needed to trust in the promise of Christ’s forgiveness. James and John needed to believe in the promise of Christ’s judgment and his justice and his timing. Thomas just needed to trust Christ—what he said—his promises. I don’t know what the promises are that you’ll need to trust in when you have to turn back from your stumbling, but you need to believe what God said.

Hey—God wants to reach this generation with the gospel. Just like 2,000 years ago, he’s assembling strategic teams to do it. Unfortunately, you’ll sit on the sidelines as long as you keep getting tripped up with concerns about yourself—plagued with your past mistakes, incapacitated by thoughts of your present inadequacies. You need to stop. Christ enlists people like you and like me to do extraordinary, eternally important things. You’ve got to learn to trust him. Make sure your faith is genuine. And once you do, exercise it—ambitiously—in a merciful, powerful God who wants to use your life this week to change people’s lives.

Stand with me—I’ll dismiss you with a word of prayer.

God, send us forth into this generation without the timidity or the lack of faith that we sometimes see in the apostles in the Bible. We know we’re not apostles in the classic, technical sense, but every Christian has been entrusted with the message of reconciliation. We’re here to stand up for your Son in this generation. We’re here to speak up for the gospel. We’re here to put the spotlight on the mission of Christ—to die for sins in the place of the guilty. We’re here to echo the message of Christ of repentance and faith. And we want to be a part of your method, which is investing in people like us—ordinary people—who are just going to be faithful to say, “Here am I—send me.”

So God, we want to collectively, just in this time of prayer—very simple time and short time of prayer—say to you: we’re willing. Use us, despite our past. We’re not going to get hung up on that. We’re going to believe your Word. We’re going to believe in your forgiveness. We’re going to believe in your promises. We’re going to believe in your timing and your equity. So give us the boldness and the wherewithal to go out into our world this week and make a difference for you.

In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.