**The Unstoppable Word**

Acts 1:12-26

**King David** was the greatest King of Israel and arguably the greatest king of all time. But even King David made massive mistakes - committed horrible sins - and experienced severe consequences. The hardest one for him emotionally was when his son, Absalom, betrayed him and staged a revolution to take over the throne.

Put yourself in David’s place. ***You are the hero is Israel!*** Over and over you and your fighting men have fought and defeated one enemy after another. You have risked everything for Israel and your reign is finally secure! The kingdom is at peace and most of the tribes are doing well and getting along. The Ark of the Covenant has been returned to Jerusalem and you have led the nation in wholehearted worship of the Lord. But then you hear rumors that **your oldest living son** is campaigning at the city gates - gathering people to his cause - spreading discontent with your reign and presenting himself as a better, more fair and wise king.

And most tragically of all, after four years of this campaigning, ***the whole nation chooses Absalom over David!*** So David was forced to flee, with only a few loyal men with him. Imagine the heartbreak, **the betrayal, the sadness and fear**. As he had been earlier in his life when running from King Saul, David was again on the run.

This may have been the situation when David wrote **Psalm 69**:

“More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; might are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies.” Psalm 69:4

The Psalm goes on as **a cry for deliverance**, for God to prove Himself again faithful and to save His servant, to whom He had promised the kingdom! Clearly foreshadowing and anticipating how ***the ultimate Anointed One***, the Messiah, would be treated by his enemies, David wrote:

“Zeal for your house consumed me… You know my reproach… my foes are all known to you… They gave me sour wine to drink. Let their own table before them become a snare…” Psalm 69:9,19,21-22

David, ***the Anointed King of Israel***, feels the rejection of God’s people and pours out His cry to the Lord for justice.

“Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them. ***May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents***.” Ps. 69:25

This is **DAVID’S prayer against HIS enemies**. David was surrounded by treachery. He was betrayed by one of his own sons. Most of his advisors and many of his close friends sided with Absalom. So David called on the Lord for justice - for this evil and treachery to be punished.

He envisioned ***the camp of his enemies being suddenly empty***. Instead of teeming with soldiers and attendants, he saw them all being struck down, all gone. Every tent devoid of people, devoid of life. This is the prophecy that Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says was fulfilled in Judas’ betrayal of Jesus.

“Brothers, ***the Scripture had to be fulfilled***, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas.” Acts 1:16

David’s experience, as **the anointed king of Israel**, betrayed by a close friend and opposed by many enemies within Israel, was a prophetic anticipation of what his great-great-great grandson, Jesus, would experience. Just as the prophecies of a coming king in the line of David had to be fulfilled, so ***the prophecies about His betrayal and suffering HAD TO BE fulfilled***. It was necessary. It was established in the eternal will of God.

**God’s plan is unstoppable**. His promises cannot be broken. His word will be fulfilled. It must be fulfilled. Acts 1, citing both Psalm 69 and Psalm 109, show us **three important facts about evil and suffering**. Even the most personal betrayal, even the greatest hardship and suffering, cannot stop God’s good plans for His people.

Brother, sister,

**When YOU feel betrayed and discouraged, remember:**

“Brothers, ***the Scripture had to be fulfilled***, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas.” Acts 1:16

**God’s Word is unstoppable**. His plans and promises will be fulfilled! Let’s hold on to these three facts. First:

**When you feel betrayed and discouraged, remember:**

1. **Evil does not Surprise God**

“Brothers, ***the Scripture had to be fulfilled***, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas.” Acts 1:16

**It was necessary** in the plan of God for the Messiah to be betrayed. It was tragic and the results were devastating, but it was necessary. It was part of the plan. When Judas went to the Pharisees and they paid him to lead them to Jesus, God was not shocked and dismayed. ***Jesus knew this was coming*** and foretold it at the Last Supper. Only John caught the quiet exchange that took place between Jesus and Judas and even he didn’t understand the significance of it until later. “What you are about to do, do quickly.”

Jesus calls Judas “the one doomed to destruction.”

**When you feel betrayed and discouraged, remember:**

1. **Evil does not Surprise God**

“I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost, except the son of destruction, ***that the Scripture might be fulfilled***.” John 17:12

Now, let’s be clear. **God is never the CAUSE of evil**. God did not FORCE Judas to commit this terrible betrayal.

* Judas FREELY chose to sell out his Rabbi for 30 pieces of silver.
* Esau freely chose to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup.
* Pharaoh freely chose to harden his own heart and not let God’s people go.

God KNEW those choices would be made. God was in control of every detail in those situations. But God did not CAUSE those free choices. There is mystery here and our brains can’t totally harmonize these truths. But God is sovereign AND people are responsible. We have to live with that tension.

The point for today is simply that ***evil does not surprise God***. God is sovereign over all evil. He prevents a lot of evil and injustice and limits what He does allow. But evil never surprises God. Whatever betrayal, hardship and suffering you have experienced - it does not surprise God. He knew it was coming. More than that, ***it is part of God’s plan for YOU*** - for your growth toward maturity.

So the believer can actually **REJOICE in our suffering** because we know God uses it to grow us. We can rejoice in our pain and betrayal at the hands of men because it draws us closer to the One who will never let us down. We can endure the worst betrayals and disappointments because they give us a little idea of what Jesus experienced and thereby increase our fellowship with Him. Second.

**When you feel betrayed and discouraged, remember:**

1. **God promises to Punish all who do evil**

“Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open…” Acts 1:18

There will be justice in the end. Evil is often its own consequence. But even for those who seem to prosper from their evil, like Judas, they get what is coming to them eventually. Judas was so torn up by what he did that he ended up taking his own life.

Judas serves as a **powerful contrast to Peter**. Both followed Jesus the whole time. Both had responsibility in the traveling band. Both betrayed Jesus in the last week of his life. And both wept over their failures.

But ***only one REPENTED***. Only one went back to Jesus to be forgiven and restored. Why did Jesus ask Peter three times ***“do you love me?”*** Because Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times, so Jesus gave him three chances to affirm his love. It was a new beginning.

But not Judas. Judas ran away from the Lord. ***He allowed his guilt and shame to consume him.*** He refused to come back to ask for forgiveness. So where Peter’s sin, guilt and shame were washed away in the grace of Jesus, Judas died in his sin, guilt and shame.

This is **what God guarantees for all who do evil** and don’t call on Jesus to forgive them. This is the consistent message of the entire Bible. God WILL punish sin. Both Psalm 69 and 109, which Peter quotes in Acts 1, are called IMPRECATORY Psalms. That means they are prayers for JUSTICE - even for vengeance. Listen to just a couple of examples.

1. **God promises to Punish all who do evil**

“Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and make their loins tremble continually.” Psalm 69:23

For those who chased him from the light of his palace into the darkness of caves, David prayed that they would be plunged into darkness. For those who haunted him with fear, he prayed that their insides would roil with terror themselves.

1. **God promises to Punish all who do evil**

“Add to them punishment upon punishment… Let them be blotted out of the book of the living…” Psalm 69:27-28

For those who attacked him and injured and abused his servants, David prayed for punishment and pain. For those who killed his friends and soldiers, David called on God for their death - for them to be blotted out of life. These are serious prayers! Now Psalm 109.

1. **God promises to Punish all who do evil**

“Appoint a wicked man against him… let him come forth guilty… May his days be few; may another take his office.” Psalm 109:6-8

For those who accused David of failing as a king and failing to bring justice, David asked ***for accusers*** to come back against them. For those who called him guilty of sin, he prayed that they would ***be found guilty*** before God. For those who threatened to cut short his life, he prayed that they would ***have a short life***. For those who drove him from his throne, he asked God to ***remove them from their office***. The ultimate punishment is to stand before God guilty with no hope of mercy.

1. **God promises to Punish all who do evil**

“When he is tried, let him come forth guilty… May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered… let not the sin of his mother be blotted out.” Ps. 109:7,14

What is more fearsome and terrible than this? To be utterly exposed before the justice of God! One more.

1. **God promises to Punish all who do evil**

“He clothed himself with cursing as his coat; may it soak into his body like water, like oil into his bones. May it be like a garment that he wraps around him.” Ps. 109:18-19

What a vivid picture! The evil man who curses other people **dresses himself in those curses**. That selfish, hateful attitude comes to define who they are. It seeps into their bones. It sinks into their souls. And this is ***the ultimate consequence for sin*** - to be defined and consumed by it forever; to be stuck with YOURSELF, with your hate, with our anger, with your bitterness and selfishness - FOREVER. That would be hell indeed.

***Does God SEND anyone to hell?*** Ultimately, yes. It is Jesus who stands as Judge and determines were everyone spends eternity. But in a very real sense, each person makes that determination before they stand before Jesus. Every person chooses to either call on God for mercy or to refuse His offer of mercy. You probably know John 3:16 but do you know John 3:36?

1. **God promises to Punish all who do evil**

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the **Wrath** of God remains on him.” John 3:36

Apart from the mercy of Jesus, **everyone stands before God clothed in their sin**, guilty and covered in shame. God HAS TO punish this sin. The punishment for sin is WRATH - condemnation. It is described as fiery torment and pictured in the lake of fire.

This is a terrifying thing for those outside of the protection of Jesus. But it is actually ***part of the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel***. God WILL punish all evil. He WILL bring justice in the end. If we did not know this to be true, how could we believe in the goodness of God? How could we trust God to restore all things if evil was NOT punished in the end? If there were no consequences for tyranny, murder, idolatry and oppression?

Hold on to these facts. God is never surprised by evil. He promises to punish all who do evil. One more truth to encourage us today.

1. **God has a plan to Restore all things in the end**

“One of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection… and he was numbered with the eleven apostles” Acts 1:22,26

For a long time I wondered why this account was in the book of Acts. Maybe you have too. The preaching, the miracles, the travels of Paul - sure. But why the rolling of dice? Why the appointing of an apostle named Matthias who is never mentioned again? Is this how we are supposed to conduct our church business meetings?

* And who has brought **the holy dice** for the ceremony that we might determine the Lord’s will for young Rebekah’s marriage? We have two eligible bachelors here, let us settle the question! May the sacred spotted cubes be thrown!

No. **This is not a passage about how to make decisions**, except for the bit where they do stop to pray. The point in that regard is that this is the last Old Testament decision to be made in the Bible. The very next chapter is when the Holy Spirit is poured out. So don’t use dice. Listen to the Spirit as you pray.

The point of this story is **the RESTORATION of the PEOPLE OF GOD**. Did you notice how verse 13 felt like an Old Testament genealogy?

1. **God has a plan to Restore all things in the end**

“Peter and John, and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the Son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.” Acts 1:13

You’ve got the “son of So and So” a couple of times, and the apparently arbitrary long list of names - like a Jewish genealogy. ***But it is INCOMPLETE***. Eleven names, not twelve. 5 PAIRS; one not a pair. Poor Judas the son of James is left dangling without a buddy. ***The good Judas needs a buddy!*** The genealogy of the New People of God has to be completed - it has to be restored!

Just as there were 12 sons of Jacob as the patriarchs of Israel, **the Lord ordained 12 apostles** as founding fathers for the church. Here was the fulfillment of ***God’s plan for His people*** from the beginning. 12 foundational leaders, not from the same immediate family but from the family that followed Jesus for his entire ministry. Here is the prayer the disciples prayed as they huddled together in the upper room: *“You, Lord, who know the hearts of all…”*

1. **God has a plan to Restore all things in the end**

“Show which of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside.” Acts 1:25

The rolling of dice was a sign that these 12 men were **GOD’S choice**, not any person or group. Do you remember how Jacob ended up with 12 sons? That process was not what HE would have chosen and certainly not what his WIVES would have chosen. It was a competition between Leah and Rachel. Rachel was the one he loved, but she couldn’t have children. Leah was not loved by Jacob, but she could have babies so she did have babies.

In desperation Rachel pulled the old Abraham and Sarah maneuver (since that worked out so well) and gave her maidservant to Jacob to produce children. It “worked,” in the sense of having babies that counted for Rachel’s “score,” but it obviously created many more challenges in their already complicated home arrangement. Seeing Rachel tally some “points,” Leah joined in that game and now Jacob essentially had four wives. That is one tricky and convoluted way to have 12 sons. Not the way Jacob would have chosen.

But it was the way God used. The same thing here. Rolling dice to replace a traitor was not something any of the disciples would have chosen to do. But it was the way God used to complete the team, to round out the founding fathers of the church.

They rolled the dice, the dice chose Matthias...

1. **God has a plan to Restore all things in the end**

“And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” Acts 1:26

And that’s the last we hear of Matthias in the Bible. What he ended up doing for the Lord didn’t matter. It might have been really amazing, with lots of miracles and thousands responding to his preaching. We simply don’t know. But what he did (or didn’t do) was not the point. The point was that sin had fractured the apostolic band of 12, and God - in His grace - restored their full number.

12 is the number of completion. When John the apostle saw his vision of heaven, he saw 12 gates and twelve foundations surrounding the Holy City of God.

1. **God has a plan to Restore all things in the end**

“Showed me the holy city Jerusalem… having the glory of God… with twelve gates… and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.” Rev. 21:10,12

The gates - the entry points into heaven, into the holy city, are through the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Verse 14:

1. **God has a plan to Restore all things in the end**

“And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” Rev. 21:14

What a picture of completion! You get into heaven through **a GATE** named after one of the twelve sons of Jacob - the family through which God promised to bless the entire world - the family from which came Jesus, the Messiah.

And **the foundations** for the holy city are the 12 apostles. All believers who came after that group have stood upon the foundation of their testimony. Peter was the leader of the group, and it was on His confession of Jesus as the Christ that Jesus promised to build the church.

Imagine if you were looking at this city, circling around it with the angels, and counting the giant foundation stones one by one as you went around the enormous cube city. Then suddenly you saw a gaping hole in the foundation because one of the foundation stones was MISSING?!? Judas was a false stone! He fell away. He left Jesus. He was like a rotten beam in your construction. He had to be replaced!

So **there is Matthias** - humble, understated, we know nothing about him - Matthias. Doing his job, filling in that gap. Matthias is the patch cement of the kingdom. He completes the edifice. He brings the apostles from 11 up to their finished 12.

***Do you see the Gospel connection here?***

***You and I are MATTHIAS!*** We are nothing. Nobodies. It doesn’t matter what we do or don’t do. We are simply **single stones in this enormous temple** God is constructing with believers from throuhgout history and all over the world. Peter says it this way:

1. **God has a plan to Restore all things in the end**

“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood…” 1 Peter 2:5

You may feel like parts of you have been broken off, one by one - that you are a shabby stone indeed, crumbling every which way. But God is shaping you - He is chiseling you into the exact shape He wants as the Master Builder. He is fitting you perfectly into His Holy, eternal Temple.

With Jesus as our cornerstone, resting securely on Him and His finished work, each of us is being built together as God’s single, glorious masterpiece. You are Matthias. Your works - like mine - will not be recorded and announced for the world to be impressed with. But what you do matters as you love and serve others, as you pray and reach out - because it is part of how God is shaping you. And through your efforts, the Lord will reach people that you are uniquely designed to reach!

Some of you may know the name **Edward Kimball**. He was a dry goods salesman who agreed to teach a Sunday School class for young boys. One of those boys was named Dwight, and Dwight did not know the Bible at all. So Kimball decided to visit this boy at the shoe store where he was working.

As Kimball approached the store, he almost turned back. He felt awkward, unsure. But he trusted the Lord’s leading and went in, finding Dwight in the back.

“I simply told him of Christ’s love for him and the love Christ wanted in return.” Edward Kimball to Dwight L. Moody

Edward Kimball had a part to play. We celebrate this story because of who D.L. Moody became. But Kimball’s ministry to the other boys in that class was no less significant.

***God has a plan to restore all things!*** He is never surprised by evil. He promises to punish all who do evil. And He is - right now - working His plan to restore all things. You and I are part of that plan. God’s word is UNSTOPPABLE. Nothing can thwart God’s plans. He WILL build His church. He will bring us to perfection. What God has said He will do.

***Let’s not fight the process as God shapes us***, let’s trust the hand of the Potter. Let’s pray with patience and faith like the disciples in the upper room. And let’s take steps of faith, like Kimball, to find the remaining living stones in the world that the Lord will use to complete His Temple!

Let’s pray!

Benediction - Eph. 2:19-22