

May 12, 2024
Sevent Sunday of Easter

“The Greater Testimony”

Acts 1:12-26, 1 John 5:9-15

The followers of Jesus pray about choosing a replacement apostle and in the prayer say of the vacancy: *“to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”* Interesting phraseology there. They’re talking about the guy who betrayed Christ over to torture, crucifixion and death. They could have used much harsher language about Judas. St. John certainly does in his writings. But in the end, *“turned aside to go to his own place”* does indeed fit.

When I was a teenager I couldn’t wait to get my own place. I really wanted to be out from under the authority and influence of my parents. I went to college for journalism and became a newspaper reporter, but I chucked it after two years and the main reason I did that was because, on that salary, I’d never be able to move out of my folks’ place and into my own!

The Bible doesn’t give us any specifics of Judas’ motivation for betraying Jesus, but it isn’t difficult to think that after three years of following Christ and toward the end seeing that things weren’t leading to majesty, power, riches and glory, Judas wanted to sellout for a better deal; to do his own thing and make his own place in the world. As Christ proclaimed, the kingdom of God had come near, but Judas chose someplace else; his own place.

We face the same temptation. God’s Word says to us today, *“If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning His Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself.”* What testimony?—the same as Judas received. The kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus Christ God’s Son! Forgiveness by grace! Reconciliation to God! Everlasting life in bliss upon Christ’s return on the Last Day! *“And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

Good news! But what is the requirement of this Gospel good news? Repent, turn, and follow Christ; that you dwell in the light of Christ, in His kingdom, in His place, where He is Lord and King. And the truth is that, according to the world, dwelling in Christ does not seem all that majestic, profitable and glorious. Here it means humility, service, sacrifice and yes, even suffering and hardship. So we are tempted to seek to get out from under His authority and seek that which better fits our own desires...to make our own place where we’re in charge.

“Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.” Again, the testimony is that Jesus is life. But the world says that testimony is a lie, that here and now is the life, me and mine is the priority, and that humility, suffering and sacrifice have no part with us.

So the possibly troubling question I put before you today is this: where are you intent on making **your** place?

It can be a troubling question because when you look around your life, I bet you’re spending a lot of time and effort on making your place here and now comfortable. I know I am. I just spent a whole week’s vacation fixing up my place in Bayou Blue. We like our toys and leisure activities. We like living quiet, comfortable lives with little discomfort and sacrifice and we work toward pulling that off. So when we hear the call to take up our cross and follow Jesus

it can be troubling, because we don't seem to be struggling too much for His sake. We may wonder if we are turning from Christ and making this world our own place.

It is a troubling question because much too often the answer is "Yes. I am making my own place. I am loving the world too much. I am making idols out of wealth, comfort, leisure, family, etc." It's troubling because such idolatry is damning to the soul. If we make our own place, it is not Christ's place. It is not the kingdom of God.

So what are we to do?

"If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son."

We are to hear and receive the greater testimony of God! It is really that simple. It is doing exactly what Jesus very simply said, *"Repent and believe the Gospel."* This means continually reorienting yourself and your life toward dwelling not in your own place, but in Christ's kingdom. It's that simple...simple, but not easy.

The great temptation for we who know the Gospel good news is to fool ourselves into thinking we can make our own place and have Christ move in with us, right? We set our plan for life, seek our desires in life, our priorities in life centered around ourselves...and then we invite Jesus to come over and hang out there with the Gospel. But this is the testimony of the world, right?—that we have a kingdom here and Jesus is taking up residence there.

But that's not how it works. Christ's disciples and maybe Judas in particular were looking for that type of Messiah—one who was going to destroy Roman tyranny and bring an earthly kingdom where they got to rule alongside Jesus in power, might, wealth and contented happiness. Jesus was headed in a completely different direction; to the suffering servant mission of the cross to pay for sin, and establishing a church in which His followers became servants of all in love to spread the good news of forgiveness, experience His kingdom by grace through faith—often in the midst of trials and suffering.

Maybe it was that Judas couldn't handle that. He wanted his own place where he was in charge. And that's what he ended up with. Even after he realized the evil he had done. He was in his own place where he had to bear the load of that despicable sin. Had he repented and turned back to Christ's kingdom he would have known that even that sin was covered by Jesus' blood. But he stayed in his own place.

The greater testimony of God is that there is a better place. Its entrance is the cross of Calvary and the price of admission stands paid for in full by Christ's blood shed there. Outside of this place is death. In this place is abundant life in the Son of God. This testimony is for you today and forever.

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."

When you catch yourself loving the things of this world too much, seeking your own place here, maybe resenting your trials and sufferings and bristling against the authority of your Creator, turn to Him with it. Seek His will more earnestly and pray for it. Yes, everything may be falling apart around you here, but that is exactly why you don't want to go to your own place here. Ask Him to take you to His place.

"And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we asked of Him."

Accept the greater testimony. True, it declares that in the world you will have trials and tribulations. But Christ died to save sinners for eternal life. When you pray according to His will

that you receive that life, that He bring you to His place, you receive it. In fact, you are there already.

Amen.