

February 21, 2021
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Acts
Community Baptist Church
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SCRIPTURE MUST BE FULFILLED

Acts 1:12-26

As we have stated in the introduction to this study, the story of *Acts*, the history of the founding and initial building of Christ's Church, is full of firsts. We should expect to read about unique events or situations because the Church is something radically new. The story of the Church's beginning days tells about actions, practices, and miracles that are not repeated in the last pages of the *Acts* story. Nor should we attempt to repeat these things or expect God to work in the same way today.

For example (in light of our text today), sometime in the future we as a local church will earnestly pursue a pastor to take my place. Should we follow the example of *Acts*? If so, in order to fulfill Scripture, I will need to meet an ignoble end. That is not a pleasant thought. Then, you will secure my replacement by vetting two candidates who must meet certain criteria. Having settled on two choices, you will present them to the congregation, pray for God's will to be done, and then throw dice until the answer is clear. No one with any common sense is going to recommend that approach. That method was a "first" in the beginning days of the Church.

The practice of casting lots (which is not exactly the same as throwing dice) is found multiple times in the Old Testament as a means for discovering God's will. Aaron cast lots to determine which goat was sent to the desert and which was to be sacrificed (Leviticus 16:8). Joshua cast lots to determine inheritance of land in Israel (Joshua 18:8). The Levites cast lots to determine who was responsible for the special music at church that week (1 Chronicles 24:31). And there are several other examples.

But this is the last time we find followers of Christ casting lots in order to determine His will for the Church. More important is the fact that the first leaders of the Church recognized the importance of knowing and fulfilling Scripture. The Scripture to which they appealed was not so much a clear command as it was a promise that they understood was fulfilled right in their midst.

The lesson for us is clear. When we are put in a position to make a choice regarding God's will, knowing and doing Scripture is the critical matter. We must not attempt to do God's will according to our own preferences, according to popular opinion, according to what will ultimately make us look good, or smart, or even pious. Our first step in decision-making is to fence in our choices by Scripture. Having done that (or even in the process of doing that), we must pray persistently in a unified spirit for God to reveal His desires for His Church.

Obedient Disciples (vv.12-14).

This part of Luke's account of the early Church reveals how the disciples returned to Jerusalem and waited. These followers of Christ simply and obviously obeyed His commands. *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away (v.12).*

Here is a wonderful example, the picture of submission to Christ's command. This is what Jesus's statement, "If you love Me, you will keep My commands," looks like. The men who Christ intentionally picked to continue His work had to submit to His commands if they would do that work. Though it is a great honor for Christ to choose us, that does not put us above Christ who sends us.

Also, this is a beautiful picture of the balance between God's sovereign choice and human responsibility all through Scripture. This delicate balance was obvious when God chose to use Gideon and a little band of warriors to defeat the massive Midianite army. How that worked out is a matter of balance. *Then the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the jars. They held in their left hands the torches, and in their right hands the trumpets to blow. And they cried out, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!" (Judges 7:20).* The attack was with the sword of the Lord and it was for Gideon.

That same kind of balance between divine fiat and human obedience was demonstrated by Solomon. The Chronicler opened the second book with the words, *Solomon the son of David established himself in his kingdom, and the LORD his God was with him and made him exceedingly great (2 Chronicles 1:1)*. We see the same balance in Solomon's conclusion, *"Now the LORD has fulfilled his promise that he made. For I have risen in the place of David my father and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and I have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel" (2 Chronicles 6:10)*.

Because God chooses servants, His chosen servants must be sensitive to and quick to do His will. To that end, the Lord's chosen representatives quickly returned from the Mt. of Olives. Luke described the trip as a Sabbath's day journey, which was set at 2,000 cubits or about 5/8 of mile. That does not mean that all these things had taken place on the Sabbath. Rather that was simply a measurement, a common way to speak about distance.

The apostles also demonstrated how the followers of Christ stay the course. *And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying (v.13a)*. They were simply obeying Christ's order, not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4), and they entered the upper room. It is significant that the Greek text does not say "an" upper room but "the" upper room. It was a particular or well known place. It seems like this is probably a reference to the same upper room where the apostles and Jesus observed the Passover Feast. Wherever it was, it was a large room able to accommodate 120 people (v.15). And the Lord's representatives stayed put (*staying*) just like Jesus told them to do.

The Bible makes it clear that these were particular disciples who were waiting for the promise. There were eleven apostles. This listing of the apostles follows the same pattern that is found in the various Gospel accounts that identify the twelve apostles (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16). Those listings are always broken down into three groups of four with the same four men listed as the leaders or the first ones mentioned. Here the leaders are *Peter and John and James and Andrew (v.13)*. Then we have the second group, which is always grouped together in the other accounts, but not in the same

order, *Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew (v.13)*. Finally, there is the third group which is always the third group. *James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James (v.13)*.

Obviously, Judas is missing from this listing of who was in the upper room. As we will see in this text, that is a significant absence. Judas's absence will be the first order of business for the Church.

While they waited, the disciples devoted themselves to prayer. *All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers (v.14)*. A clarion call at the beginning of this verse reveals that unity was the key characteristic of the first meetings. Also, it is important to note that of the 120 who met together, the eleven apostles are mentioned as well as Mary, Jesus's mother, and His brothers.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, figured so significantly in God's plan for incarnation. Obviously, she was a virtuous woman. Obvious also is the fact that God had chosen her for signal service to be remembered and honored. Yet she considered herself to be the Lord's handmaid. The great significance of the statement that she was with the 120 disciples is that this is the last mention of Mary in the Bible. That is proof enough that God never intended for Mary to be venerated above normal human peers.

It is also especially encouraging to read that *His brothers* were part of the original Church. These were Jesus's biological half-brothers, the other children of Joseph and Mary. We are familiar with these men because Mark named the brothers in his Gospel. The people asked about Jesus, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him (Mark 6:3). In typical ancient Middle Eastern culture, Jesus's sisters were not named.

These were the brothers who did not believe in Jesus and even mocked Him (John 7:3-5). We know that Jesus met with James after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7), which convinced him that Jesus was God in the flesh. James became a significant leader in the Church (Acts 15:13; Galatians 2:9) who also wrote the letter bearing his name. James no doubt influenced the other brothers, in particular Judas (better known as Jude) who wrote the letter that bears his name.

But back to the important characteristic of the group. *All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.* They were “sticking close” to prayer. That is not to say that prayer is the only thing they were doing because along with prayer they were praising God with joy in the temple. At the end of his Gospel record, Luke told us that the disciples *worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God (Luke 24:52-53).* For ten days they were devoted to prayer and praise while taking care of other responsibilities of life.

This might cause one to wonder what would happen in Community Baptist Church if all of us met together for ten days being continually devoted to prayer and praising God?

Pondering Disciples (vv.15-26).

Who should take the place of Judas? That was the issue at hand. Now we come to that very important question that the early Church had to deal with: What to do about Judas? Why was that even an issue? Just forget about the guy, right? Well, ignoring, forgetting about Judas was not a possible response in light of what Jesus had told these men. *Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28).* There are going to be twelve thrones, but there wouldn’t be twelve apostles to sit on those thrones because Judas the betrayer had failed and was no more.

In the face of difficult decisions like this, we must respond like the first Christians did. The chief focus was that Scripture must be fulfilled. The Scripture in question came from two psalms of David. Peter quoted, *For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it”: and “Let another take his office” (v.20).* This is a quotation of two statements in two different psalms from David. First is the statement from Psalm 69, *“May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents” (Psalm 69:25).* David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit prayed this originally regarding the enemies who persecuted him. Peter, also speaking by Holy Spirit inspiration, applied it to Judas.

A second statement from David was, *“May his days be few; may another take his office!” (Psalm 109:8).* This also is one of David’s imprecatory prayers asking God to invoke the vengeance He promises as He protects His servants. It probably is the most heated, direct, outspoken of his imprecatory psalms.

Notice how Peter and the Church interpreted the Scripture. *In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry” (vv.15-17).*

A foundational truth is that Scripture is the work, the revelation of the Holy Spirit. This setting is a most clear example of Peter’s instruction about inspired Scripture. *Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).*

Therefore, because the Holy Spirit spoke through David, whatever he prophesied had to come to pass. It is highly unlikely that David fully understood what he was saying. He was praying about the enemies of God who were persecuting him. God intended to apply the same truth to the enemy Judas who persecuted David’s relative Jesus.

The issue at hand was what to do about the hole Judas left. They wondered about *Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.* In many of the Messianic psalms, the circumstances David was facing at the moment would become the same or increased circumstances the Son of David, Jesus Christ, would face. Therefore, like David’s enemies, Judas became the chief enemy who collaborated with Satan to destroy Jesus.

One observation about what Judas did that disqualified him speaks some of the saddest words in human history: *“For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry” (v.17).* Judas enjoyed all the blessings from the hand of Jesus the other apostles enjoyed. Judas received perfect, pure, complete teaching from God Himself. Judas witnessed multiple miracles that confirmed that Jesus is God the Son. But none of that direct and

extreme evidence convinced him to die to self to live for Christ. This statement goes a long way in explaining how a person can grow up in a Christian home, attend a Christian school and a good church, and walk away to live in deep sin. There is no amount of human influence with Bible truth that can change a person from non-elect to elect.

The Holy Spirit had given the Scripture through David. The apostles recognized this and Peter declared how the Scripture was fulfilled. A foretold tragedy came to pass. *Now this man bought a field with the reward of his wickedness (v.18a)*. Luke's account here makes it sound like Judas went out and bought the field where his grave would be dug. Actually, Judas did not purchase the field himself. The religious leaders purchased it for a place to bury the betrayer. They used the money they had given to Judas, money he had thrown back at them in remorse for his heinous crime. Therefore, it is okay to say that he bought it because it was with money given to his possession.

A place to be buried was the sinner's "reward" for betraying God the Son. He bought a grave at a high price. First, thirty pieces of silver was a lot of money. It was the price the Mosaic law required if someone killed a slave. Therefore, it reflected the value of human life. That was precisely the connection when the religious leaders paid that sum for Jesus's life.

This was all part of the fulfillment of God's promise in Zechariah 11:12-13, which in that setting was wages for the shepherd rejected. It is a picture of Christ speaking to His rebellious people. *Then I said to them, "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"— the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter (Zechariah 11:12-13)*. The Hebrew word for potter in this text is very similar to the word for treasury.

Matthew recorded how Judas and the religious leaders fulfilled the Scripture. *Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it*

yourself." And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5).

There is no contradiction between Matthew's statement about Judas hanging and Peter's description of the hanging in which he said that Judas *falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out (v.18b)*. There is no doubt that Judas tried to hang himself but either the rope broke or a branch or something so that Judas fell headlong over the cliff smashing on the rocks below.

As is generally the case, truth came to the surface. *And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood (v.19)*. Matthew referred to it as the potter's field because soil there was suitable for making pottery. It was ultimately called the Field of Blood (*Akeldama*) because it was purchased with money that paid for an innocent man's (Jesus's) blood.

So what should the disciples do to fill the void left by Judas? Their response pictures the necessary balance between human wisdom and Divine directing (vv.21-26). The apostles established some ground rules. *"So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection" (vv.21-22)*. This is just a logical decision. Someone who will be responsible for testifying about Jesus ought to know Him personally and intimately. Such a witness must by all means be witness to Christ's resurrection.

Paul, though an apostle "untimely born," did not have the privilege of being among the "twelve" from the baptism until the ascension. He met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He was taught by Jesus in the Arabian Desert (Galatians 1:17). Jesus Christ chose him to be an apostle (Galatians 1:15). Christ has chosen us also to be His witnesses though we did not walk with the apostles.

The outcome was agreeable to everyone. Two candidates were set forward. *And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias (v.23)*. Neither of these men would be the wrong or mistaken choice. But how would you like to be Barsabbas who is never mentioned again? Then again, neither was Matthias mentioned subsequently. They chose Matthias after

prayerful consideration. *And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place" (vv.24-25).*

So was Matthias chosen by the luck of the draw? It almost sounds that way. *And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles (v.26).* No, it was not luck, or fate, or chance. Nor was this a decision out of God's will, because Christ actually chose Paul. After the apostles, few of Christ's chosen servants are mentioned in the Bible. Few of them become well known even in the Church. But we are the Lord's chosen servants all the same.

This event was unique, like so many of the situations as Christ established His Church. The important lesson is that Scripture has something to say about our decisions. If we are not first square with Scripture in making our decisions, it is unlikely that our choices will be in God's will.