

The Church's First Business Meeting

(Acts 1:15-26)

7/24/19; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

My daddy tells the funny story of a friend of his that had worked at a textile plant for nearly 30 years.

One day, the company sent in a brand new group of managers to hopefully make the company more profitable.

One change was that employees would be held to a strict 30 minute lunch.

No one was to go to lunch 5 minutes early or return 5 minutes late.

In order to do that, employees were rewired to clock in and out for lunch.

Well, this man had been working there since the plant opened and he had always taken a longer lunch than most.

He was the maintenance director so his lunches were often spent working while the machines were not running.

As a result, his lunch break was rarely monitored by anyone.

However, his new boss has warned him that the strict lunch hour also applied to him.

Needless, this fellow had seen new managers come and go and none of them ever really enforced anything.

So, he continued with his longer lunches despite repeated warnings.

One day a few weeks later, he returned from his normal 45 minute lunch and found that manager in his office.

He was told to collect his things and empty his office.

He was being terminated after 30 years for failure to follow company policy.

So he grabs his stuff and follows the manager out.

And then as he is telling the story, he says this..

“The strangest thing happened when I go to the parking lot. As I walked to my car, to my great surprise, the plant kept running. I looked back and the sounds of machines kept filling my ears. For years,

I thought if they ever get rid of me, this plant will shut down. But strangely, they fired me and everything kept moving right along.”

As they say, one broken spoke doesn't keep the wheel from turning.

This is the story of life.

No matter how valuable or needed we think we are, the world keeps turning..

In terms of God's plan of redemption and salvation, the betrayal of Jesus by Judas probably seemed like a detour.

Here was this supposedly faithful disciple, and now he is gone.

He betrayed Jesus, and the group of 12 is now a group of 11..

Well, as we open the book of Acts, we are going to be encouraged by what we see in Acts 1:15-26..

You see, no one is indispensable to the plans of God.

God will accomplish his purpose.

There has always been Cains and Pharaohs and Sauls and Judases throughout human history.

There have always people who were opposed and actively trying to stop the plan of God, yet everything that God has planed is right on track as it should be in the world.

And today, we are reminded of that in Acts 1.

Judas has betrayed Jesus.

Judas has abandoned the disciples.

But God's plan is still marching forward.

Judas is a dead traitor but God is not caught off guard.

So let's see how God works out his sovereign plan in the world.

We will begin in verses 12-14 with what we will call...

I. The Blessing of Obedience (12-14)

Let's simply begin by reading verse 12..

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the [j]mount called [k]Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a [l]Sabbath day's journey away.

Last week, we concentrated on verse 9, which described the ascension of Christ.

This glorious event of Jesus finishing his first earthly ministry and then rising to heaven to sit at the right hand of God, where he will remain until the Father sends him to rapture the church.

In that scene, Jesus ascends to heaven in the clouds as some of his followers look on..

The ascension happened right outside of Jerusalem on a small hill known as the Mount of Olives...

Here is a modern picture of the Mount of Olives that is taken from the temple mount looking east..

As that glorious event comes to a close, angels appear to the disciples reminding them that Jesus will return but also reminding them to get on with the plan.

Now what is the plan?

Well, right before Jesus ascended, he told the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came.

As we would expect of true believers, these men obey Jesus..

And we see a picture of that obedience in verse 12..

These men and the women with them returned to Jerusalem to wait for the Spirit to arrive.

It would have been a short journey back down the Mount of Olives and back up the Temple Mount, so they simply obey Christ and head back into Jerusalem.

Verse 13..

13 When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and [m]James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, [n]James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the [o]son of [p]James.

What we see in this verse is the 4th list of the disciples given in the Bible with one exception..

Judas Iscariot is no longer on the list.

But the rest of these men have been on the 3 previous lists in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

It is also interesting to note that this is the last time we see these names of the men other than Peter, James, and John.

All the rest simply disappear into world history as they do their best in fulfilling Jesus' command to go and make disciples of all the nations.

But these aren't the only ones who are following Christ..

Verse 14..

14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

So, we have the disciples in Jerusalem, but we also have the women who followed Jesus.

Mary the mother of Jesus is here.

This list would most likely include Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Salome, and others who had been with Christ.

We also note that Jesus' biological half brothers are also here..

Remember, Mary went on to have kids with Josphe after the birth of Jesus.

Mark 6 even gives us the names of Jesus' brothers.

3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:3)

So we see James and Joses and Jude and Simon as Jesus' half brothers and we take note of his half sisters as well..

Now understand at first, none of his siblings believed in Him..

John 7:5 says this..

5 For not even His brothers were believing in Him. (John 7:5)

We talked about this when we were in John 7..

How would you like to have a brother who was completely perfect in every way?

So, their unbelief seems natural..

But here in Acts 1, we see Jesus' brothers present..

And what was the reason they came to believe and follow their brother?

The resurrection.

He made good on his promise to rise from the dead, and they saw him and believed.

So they are here in the what is called the Upper Room.

It is highly likely that this is the same room where Jesus and his men ate the last Passover meal on the night before his death..

It has become the first place that the church is beginning to gather..

And note what they are doing in verse 14..

They were there waiting and praying.

Jesus was resurrected and then ascended 40 days later.

They had been told to wait in Jerusalem on the Holy Spirit.

He will arrive on Pentecost, which is always 50 days after Passover..

So these disciples had about 10 days to wait in Jerusalem.

Now they didn't know that.

We know that because we have the timeline.

But while they waited on the Lord, they prayed.

And please note how they prayed.

They prayed continually and with one mind.

In other words, they prayed in agreement.

They prayed without dispute or conflict or disagreement.

They were followers of Jesus and their hearts were knit together in Him.

What a beautiful picture of unity in these early days of the church.

So they are simply doing what the church does.

They are fellowshiping together.

They are praying together.

And they are obeying the Lord together.

If you show me a church that does that, I will show you a group of people who are being blessed by the Lord.

So, we move from the blessing of obedience to..

II. The Curse of Disobedience (15-20)

Verse 15..

15 [q]At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty [r]persons was there together), and said, 16 “Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. 17 For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry.”

As we see a picture of great unity in this group of Jesus’ followers, Peter needs to address of the greatest displays of disunity in world history.

And that is the betrayal of Jesus by Judas.

Peter describes him here as a “guide to those who arrested Jesus.”

That is putting it mildly.

I am sure Peter was close to Judas.

I am sure that the other disciples in this room were too.

He had been with them for 3 years.

Peter even says that Judas was given a share in this ministry.

In other words, his betrayal was a shock to this group.

None of the disciples saw Judas as threat.

None of the disciples saw Judas as traitor.

None of them saw him in any way other than one of the group.

Even when Jesus sent him out of the room, they weren't suspecting him of being a betrayer.

They simply thought he was going to get supplies because he handled the money for the group.

On top of that, Peter is aware of his own shortcomings.

So, he probably describes the world's worst traitor in the kindest way as a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

Now, Judas was much worse than that.

He was a man driven by his love of money to the point that he would give up the Son of God for a few silver coins..

He was wretched to the core and Jesus even described him as a devil.

But the issue at hand is his replacement.

There were 12 disciples and now there are 11..

And Luke even throws in the fact that Judas is dead to show that his repentance and restoration isn't possible.

So what happened to Judas?

Well, we know that he got the 30 pieces of silver from the religious leaders..

He then went and led the Jews to Jesus.

But soon afterward, he realized his greed and tried to return the money.

But the religious leaders would take it.

Instead, a piece of land was purchased with money and Judas head there and hanged himself..

And then one of tow things happened.

In his suicide attempt, the branch broke and he fell to the ground and burst open.

Or either the hanging was successful and he hung there until the branch broke and he fell to the ground.

Either way, Judas committed suicide and therefore he had to be replaced..

And you may ask..

Why replace him?

Aren't 11 about the same as 12?

And the answer would be yes.

But we get the reason that Judas had to be replaced, and this really sets the tone for the church age..

So why does Peter stand up and how does he lead this group to take care of this?

He takes them to Scripture.

The church will not be a free for all..

It will not be a group of people who make up their own rules and do other own thing

The church will not be founded on business meetings and committee recommendations.

The church will be guided by Scripture.

Decisions will be the result of what Scripture prescribes.

Peter is not making this decision on his own.

Peter is leading the church to obey the Bible..

And what did the Bible say?

Well, first of all, the Scriptures predicted a betrayer of Christ.

Jesus even pointed out passages like Psalm 41:9 which says, “

9
Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
Who ate my bread,
Has lifted up his heel against me.

But not only did Scripture predict the arrival of a Judas, Scripture also told how to handle his betrayal...

For this, Peter turned to the book of Psalms..

You see this in verse 20..

***‘Let his homestead be made desolate,
And let no one dwell in it’;***

and,

‘Let another man take his [s]office.’

And Peter as the leader of the church has a duty to honor the word of God..

So what happens next?

They seek to obey Scripture by “letting another man take his office.”

Now it needs to be said here that there isn’t a verse of Scripture to handle every issue that arises.

In those cases, churches are called to trust the men who are biblically qualified to lead and look to the Bible for guidance.

This early church had some great qualities.

They were in agreement.

They prayed continually.

They were led by men like Peter who let Scripture be their guide and standard of doing church.

This leads to the final section tonight which we will call..

III. The God of Providence (21-26)

21 Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out [t]among us— 22 beginning [u]with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

Now the issue is who do we choose to replace Judas?

Well, Peter defines the office of apostle right here..

Now this is a unique office..

The apostles teaching will be the foundation of the church, so not just anyone will do..

So what are the requirements and qualifications of an apostle?

First, it must be a man.

That is right here in verse 21..

Peter says that is must be someone among the men..

In fact, he uses the Greek word that is unmistakably masculine here..

This doesn't mean that the women among Jesus followers are second class or lesser Christians..

This is simply a reflection of the created order.

God made Adam first and Eve out of his side.

She was his equal but under his leadership.

The same is true in the church.

Women are of equal worth and value before the Lord, but the role of leader and authority in the church has been given to men by God Himself.

Second, this replacement must be someone who was a witness to Christ throughout his ministry.

Peter says it must be a man who was with Jesus from His baptism to His ascension.

And then Peter defines the role of Apostle.

He will be a witness to the resurrection of Christ.

And he will take that message to the world.

With those qualifications in mind, it came down to two men..

Verse 23..

23 So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen 25 to [v]occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” 26 And they [w]drew lots for them, and the lot fell [x]to Matthias; and he was [y]added to the eleven apostles.

Couple things to see here..

First thing to see is that two men were chosen but God was consulted...

Verse 24 says that they prayed to God to seek his counsel on which man it should be..

Second thing to note is that these men weren't Baptist because they threw dice to decide which one it would be.

In all seriousness, the casting of lots is always draws questions from people.

First of all, I remind people of this verse..

Proverbs 16:33..

33

***The lot is cast into the lap,
But its every decision is from the Lord.***

Now does that mean we should cast lots or draw straws to make decisions as believers today?

No, and do you know why?

We have the Holy Spirit to guide us in our decisions, and how does he guide us?

Through the Word that He inspired.

In fact, this Sunday morning in John, we are going to see the blessing of the Spirit that comes through His inspiration of the NT.

But at this point, these men are still waiting on the Spirit to descend, so they use the OT practice of casting lots.

And the lot falls to Matthias, who became the 12th apostle.

Now, a couple interesting notes..

First, notice what was said about Judas..

End of verse 25..

Judas turned aside to go to his own place.

A couple months back, we talked about Judas in the gospel of John, and I pointed out that Judas went to hell as a result of his betrayal of Jesus.

Some people object to that notion, but it seems clear here that Judas is not in heaven.

In fact, in fact it appears he may have his own separate place in hell hotter than the rest..

Judas went to his own place after his betrayal of Jesus and his suicide..

Second interesting note is that Matthias is never mentioned again in Scripture, but as I said neither are the others except Peter, James, and John.

Now the historical record says that Matthias ended up near the Black Sea which is in southern Russia.

In fact, if you visit the country of Georgia today, there is a simple grave that is the supposed site where Matthias was buried..

Here is a picture of it today.

Now the stage is set for these 12 men to receive the Holy Spirit and begin their mission of taking the gospel to the world..

As we go, let me offer a few principles from these verses...

Conclusion

#1 - The plans of God unfold through the obedience of His people.

I love to see how these people simply obeyed Jesus after he left.

It is often said that when the cats away, the mice will play.

But the departure of Jesus did not lessen their obedience.

They saw him rise to heaven and they went to Jerusalem as He instructed.

Simple obedience to the commands of Christ are how the Lord works out his plan in the world.

These men needed to go and wait on the Spirit so that the church could be born and the gospel could spread.

They didn't devise a grand plan of their own, they simply obeyed their Master.

How much more should we do the same.

If you want to be used of God, live in obedience to his commands.

#2 - The plans of God overcome the sinful actions of people.

Judas' sin did not derail the plan of God.

Quite the contrary, Judas' sin furthered the plan of God by sending Jesus to the cross..

Sin is reality in a fallen world but God's plan is not undone by it.

God is not responsible for sin and God did not create sin, but He did allow it and is sovereign over it.

The most wicked people cannot overcome the goodness and mercy and sovereignty of God.

#3 - The plans of God are now revealed through the Holy Spirit.

Thankfully, we don't cast lots and draw straws to make decisions today.

We rely on the Spirit of God to lead us and direct our hearts.

And HE does that through the Scripture that he inspired.

He does that through the prayers that we pray.

And He does that through the wisdom that he offers in the Bible.

I don't need goosebumps or pulley bones to know where to go and what to do, I have the Spirit at work in my life as I read, pray, and obey.

Let us pray.