



Potomac Hills Community Church, PCA

GRACE ORIENTED • CHRIST CENTERED

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The Acts of the Apostles: The Spirit sends the Church with the Gospel Acts 1.12-26 Preparation and Prayer

INTRODUCTION: *The certainty of Indecision.*¹

What do these three scenes have in common?

Scene One:

It's the bottom of the ninth, bases loaded, two outs. The winning run is on second. And Terrence Long comes to the plate. It's the fifth and deciding game in the American League Division Series between the Oakland A's and the Boston Red Sox.

There's two strikes on Long when the Red Sox catcher, Jason Varitek, walks out to the mound to talk things over with the pitcher, Derek Lowe. Varitek says, "Throw me the two-seam lockup,' which is the two-seam sinker inside."

Lowe replies, "Absolutely. We kind of looked at each other. I told myself, 'I've thrown this pitch a million times. Trust it, throw it through the target.'"

And Derek Lowe got Terrence Long to **watch** a called strike three to save Boston and send them into the American League Championship Series against the Yankees.

Scene Two:

The Nazgul are flying over the city, looking for the one who carries the ring of power. The movie, of course, is Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers. And the pull of the ring is so strong on the hobbit, Frodo Baggins, that he ventures out on top of this wall and despite the shouts of his friend Sam, just stands there as the Dragon is about to grab him.

Until he's saved at the last second, of course.

Scene Three:

The other night I was sitting in our living room and staring out the front window of our house, something I don't often do. I was just looking. When all of a sudden, a large bunny came out from underneath the van, which was parked in the driveway. It hopped to the middle of our front yard and just stopped. It would

¹ Red Sox dialogue is taken from the article, "Red Sox Lowe-ball A's in ninth," by Ian Browne, www.MLB.com, 10-7-03.

start to go one way, then turn around and start back the other way. And it went back and forth for several minutes. One way was the street and cars that would surely squash it, and the other way was two large dogs that would be more than happy to receive it ... as dinner. And so it went – back and forth. Finally, I guess it got tired so it just stopped and sat there. And then I got tired of watching it and left and when I went back later it was gone.

So ... what do these three scenes have in common?

In all three, the main character was **frozen** by indecision.

They didn't **know** what to do ... and so they didn't do anything.

They just stopped.

Terrance Long took a called third strike on what had to have been the biggest at-bat of his career.

Frodo Baggins was drawn by the power of the ring but repelled by the power of the dragon, so he froze, unable to move.

And the rabbit saw either danger or dogs in every direction, so it just stopped.

Now ... since none of us are professional athletes, at least not yet, and since none of us are movie stars, at least not yet, and since none of us are stupid rabbits ... we don't have to worry about these kinds of things.

Indecision is not something that affects us.

Don't we wish!

In fact, the reality is that **indecision** affects us a lot.

We don't know what to do ... so we do nothing.

We just wait around, waiting for **something** to force us to take action, some action, any action, something. Because indecision and waiting just **kills** us. Most of the time we hate it. As Americans, we're people of action. We expect results. And results take action – immediately. Even in the church.

We would have driven the Apostles nuts.

What happens in **Acts 1:12-26** is a direct result of what Jesus told the Apostles in **Acts 1:4**, where He said, *“Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you what He promised.”*

In the NIV, that verse says, *“Do not leave Jerusalem, **but wait** for the gift my Father promised...”*

They had to wait. And while they waited, God would be working amongst them and God would be working in them, preparing them for the Holy Spirit.

We don't like to wait. When we're waiting we don't think God is **doing** anything. We just think we're being delayed. And we don't like it.

Sometimes we have times like this in our lives, and they make tough going for us. These are often the hardest times for us to live through. We want to **do**

something. Or, what is even more significant, we want **God** to do something. And when we can't see anything being done, we think something's wrong. God's not doing anything. If I'm really a Christian and on track with God, then something should be happening. And that's not usually the case. A period of waiting in your life is not necessarily a period of inactivity. It is often a period of preparation, which is what waiting is for. Sometimes while we're waiting we can see the preparation; most times, we can't. God is doing things in our lives that we cannot see or at least of which we are unaware. And that's the situation in Acts 1:12-26; God is preparing the Church for the Holy Spirit.

I said there were three themes in the book of Acts.

The first theme concerns the sending of The Holy Spirit.

The second theme concerns the sending of Church.

And the third theme concerns the sending of the Gospel.

But all of those serve the sole purpose of pointing to Jesus.

The Spirit of Christ sending the Church of Christ with the Gospel of Christ. And that's ...

BACKGROUND: *What Acts is all about.*²

One reason I love to study the book of Acts is its uniqueness. It is **the** sourcebook for the spread of early Christianity. It is the chronicle of the spreading flame of the Holy Spirit, tracing the work of the Holy Spirit through the birth, infancy, and adolescence of the Church. Its title could well be "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" or "The Continuing Acts of Jesus Christ" or even "The Acts of the Risen Christ Through the Holy Spirit Working Through the Church." I have chosen to title this series, The Spirit sends the Church with the Gospel. But as I just said, it's really The Spirit of Christ sending the Church of Christ with the Gospel of Christ.

The author of Acts was Luke the physician, and he begins with a reference to his already completed work on the life of Christ, which we know as the Gospel of Luke: **Acts 1:1-2**, "*Dear Theophilus: In my first book I told you about everything Jesus began to do and teach [2] until the day He ascended to heaven after giving His chosen apostles further instructions from the Holy Spirit.*"

Naturally Theophilus remembered, and his thoughts turned to Luke's great scroll and its remarkable account of Christ's life. He was thereby primed for what was to follow. Then Luke continues with some new information as he tells Theophilus something more of the time after Christ's resurrection, **Acts 1:3**,

² Background and Exposition of the text is taken from Preaching the Word: Acts by R. Kent Hughes, pages 13-16, 23-28; Acts: An Expository Commentary by James Montgomery Boice, pages 9-20, 30-37; The Spirit, The Church, and The World: The Message of Acts by John R. W. Stott, pages 21-51; and Authentic Christianity: The Book of Acts, Vol. One by David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, pages 5-18.

*“During the forty days after His crucifixion, He appeared to the apostles from time to time and proved to them in many ways that **He was actually alive**. On these occasions He talked to them about the Kingdom of God.”*

This is a very important sentence, because it shows that Jesus didn't just give the disciples certain **ideas** that they were to take into the world. He appeared to them as one who had risen from the dead. They knew He had died. Some of them had stood at the cross. They had heard the blows of the hammers. They had seen the nails driven and then later, when the soldiers came, they had seen the spear thrust into His side.

They **knew** Jesus had died.

But then Jesus rose and began appearing to them. And His appearances were enough to get them back together again. They would have never come together again for just a philosophy or an idea. They came together again because the Jesus they had known and loved was alive. He had conquered death. And He comes back for forty days so they will know what to do when He's gone.

As I've said, and will keep saying, the main thrust of this text is about Jesus. Don't get sidetracked, and there's lots of side issues in Acts, because this book is all about Jesus. And Jesus says, "...let Me tell you what your business is, what God wants you to do. Your job is to be My witnesses in the world."

Acts 1:8, *“But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and **will tell people about Me everywhere**—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

These were Jesus' final earthly words. It has been 2,000 years, and Jesus has not once during that time planted His feet on this earth and audibly addressed His followers. Perhaps that silence is intended to prevent anything from obscuring Jesus' last words, so they will continue to echo in the Church's ears.

Our Lord has laid down in the clearest terms the mission for those who are to follow Him. This is the mission of the church that would dare to call itself New Testament — the mandate of apostolic Christianity.

He didn't say “You will tell people about My teaching.”

He told them, “You will tell people about **Me**.”

And they did, **Acts 17:18**, *“... he told them about Jesus and His resurrection, ...”*

Luke is writing to Theophilus. Here is a man interested in Christianity who wanted to know what it was all about. “I'll tell you,” said Luke. “This is it – it is Jesus. This is what He began to do. He came. He taught. He worked miracles. He gave Himself. He died. He was buried. He rose again. He ascended into Heaven. And then He sent His Spirit to His people so they would go out and tell others about Him. It's all about Jesus. This is Christianity. And this is how it

happened. ***You will tell people about Me everywhere.***

Verse 8 is the key verse of the entire book of Acts.

Chapters 1-7 tell of the witness “in Jerusalem.”

Chapters 8-11 tell of the witness “in all Judea and Samaria.”

And chapters 12-28 tell of the witness “to the ends of the earth.”

This is the foundation on which to build rock-solid faith.

So let’s look at these verses ...

Acts 1:12-26, *“The apostles were at the Mount of Olives when this happened, so they walked the half mile back to Jerusalem. [13] Then they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying. Here is the list of those who were present: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the Zealot), and Judas (son of James). [14] They all met together continually for prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.*

[15] During this time, on a day when about 120 believers were present, Peter stood up and addressed them as follows: [16] “Brothers, it was necessary for the Scriptures to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided the Temple police to arrest Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. [17] Judas was one of us, chosen to share in the ministry with us.” [18] (Judas bought a field with the money he received for his treachery, and falling there, he burst open, spilling out his intestines. [19] The news of his death spread rapidly among all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means “Field of Blood.”)

[20] Peter continued, “This was predicted in the book of Psalms, where it says, ‘Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.’ And again, ‘Let his position be given to someone else.’

*[21] **“So now we must choose another man to take Judas's place. It must be someone who has been with us all the time that we were with the Lord Jesus— [22] from the time He was baptized by John until the day He was taken from us into heaven. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection.”***

*[23] So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. [24] Then they all prayed for the right man to be chosen. **“O Lord,” they said, “you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen [25] as an apostle to replace Judas the traitor in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs.” [26] Then they cast lots, and in this way Matthias was chosen and became an apostle with the other eleven.”***

Jesus promised that when He went away he would send another Helper to His people, **John 16:7**, *“But it is actually best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Counselor won't come. If I do go away, He will come because I will send*

Him to you.”

God still sovereignly sends the mysterious winds of the Holy Spirit — His power, His comfort, His presence — to those who know and serve Jesus Christ. We do not know exactly why and how the Holy Spirit works, but we have been told what we must do to enjoy the fullness of the Spirit. Our situation is like that of the little boy who asked his grandfather, “Grandpa, what is the wind?” “I cannot explain the wind to you,” the old fisherman replied, “but I can teach you to raise the sails!”

The book of Acts shows us how to have the wind of the Holy Spirit in our sails. The attitude that makes way for the fullness of the Holy Spirit is the same attitude seen in Christ’s followers just before the Holy Spirit was given on the Day of Pentecost. They were waiting in expectation and God was preparing them as they waited.

v. 12-13: A TIME FOR FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

As the days flew by and they obeyed His command to wait in Jerusalem, their optimistic belief and expectancy produced a wonderful but uncomfortable tension. They really **believed**, but the Ascension must have been the high point because as His last earthly instructions were ringing in their ears, they were surrounded by a bright cloud, the *Shekinah* glory — the symbol of God’s presence and favor. Then Jesus was gone!

Think of the walk back to Jerusalem after the angels told them to quit looking up and to get going, as described in **Acts 1:12**, “*The apostles were at the Mount of Olives when this happened, so they walked the half mile back to Jerusalem.*” It was only about two-thirds of a mile. Maybe they started out subdued, overwhelmed, stunned by the Ascension. Some were hardly aware that their feet were on the ground. Perhaps some pinched themselves. They returned to Jerusalem with great joy! They went to the Upper Room, **verse 13**, “*Then they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying. Here is the list of those who were present: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the Zealot), and Judas (son of James).*”

I don’t think waiting was easy for them just because they were Apostles. The Holy Spirit hadn’t come yet; they were waiting for Him. And so, not knowing a great deal about the situation, they might have said, “Well, what do we do now?”

And there is a lot they could have done. After the crucifixion they split up and went home. They could have done that.

Another thing they might have done is go back to work. Some had been fishermen. One was a tax collector. Who would have argued with them if they had just said, “We’re going to get on with the business of living.”

If they were trying to be particularly spiritual, they could have said, “Hey, there’s people to be won, we have to go tell them about Jesus **now**. This is big news, why wait, we can do it all by ourselves. Let’s go!”

It could have seemed utterly pointless to just **wait** in the Upper Room.

The situations in which we learn the most about obedience are those in which we cannot see why we’re called to do what we’re doing. If we can give a reason for what we’re doing, then we’re not necessarily learning obedience. What we’re really doing is trusting **our own** ability to figure things out. We’re doing what we’re doing because **we think** it’s the best thing to do. There’s nothing wrong with thinking things out, but it is something else entirely to learn obedience when the prescribed course of action doesn’t seem like the best thing to do.

And when you’re going through a time when you know **what** you’re supposed to do, but you don’t know **why** you’re supposed to do it, and it seems that you’re stuck in one place, you must learn that there is valuable preparation just in remaining where God has put you. The action will come later.

First comes faith and obedience.

Though it is speculation, and the text doesn’t directly say, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that this was the same Upper Room in which our Lord ate the last supper with the disciples. The Greek text says, “*the*” upper room” (not just any upper room). If this is correct, it is fitting that the Holy Spirit was given in the very same room in which Jesus promised Him, **John 14:16-18**, “*And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, who will never leave you. [17] He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world at large cannot receive him, because it isn't looking for Him and doesn't recognize Him. But you do, because He lives with you now and later will be in you. [18] No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you.*”

They stayed together because of one thing: they believed that the Holy Spirit was going to come upon them and they were going to receive promised power. They expected the infilling of the Holy Spirit. They had absolutely no doubt about it. No wavering. No discussion.

The sails must be hoisted to catch the winds of the Holy Spirit through **expectant belief**. Amazingly, the great preacher of the 19th Century, R. A. Torrey, was once a tongue-tied preacher. His early years in the ministry were torture for him. He preached three times each Sunday and committed his sermons to memory but nearly twisted the top button of his coat off as he forced the sermon out. When he finished, he felt a great sense of relief that his duty was over for another week. But then he would immediately think, “You have to begin tomorrow to get ready for next Sunday.”

The glad day finally came when he realized that when he stood up to preach,

though people would see him, there was **Another** whom they did not see but who stood by his side, and all the responsibility for results was upon his Lord. All Torrey had to do was to get as far back out of sight as possible and let Jesus do the preaching. Torrey came to truly believe in practice what he already believed in principle: the Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus, was in him to do the work. Only then did the power come. From that day on, preaching became the joy of his life. He would rather preach than eat.

The primary problem with believers in this matter of the fullness of the Holy Spirit is their lack of believing expectancy. We believe it is possible for others but not for us. We believe that R. A. Torrey experienced it, and Jonathan Edwards, and Corrie ten Boom, and Billy Graham, and Joni Eareckson Tada, but it is out of our reach. Such thinking is just flat wrong.

What needs to happen here?

We don't have to broaden our belief or enlarge our understanding.

We simply need to **really believe** — and so act upon — what we **say** we believe. Do we truly expect Christ to fill us with His Holy Spirit and thus empower our lives? Do we believe in Jesus Christ enough to do what He says? If we trust Him, we will obey Him. And if we won't obey Him, it's because we don't really trust Him.

There's an old hymn called, "*Trust and Obey.*" I had a professor who couldn't stand that title. He would say, "I realize that this screws up the rhythm and rhyme of the song, but it really should be one word, TrustObey. You can't really separate them. It's two sides of the same coin. Remember that."

And I have. I've probably forgotten most of the important stuff he tried to teach me but I've remembered that TrustObey is really just one word.

And that's what these verses are about.

And when we, as a church, TrustObey, then something else happens. We move from faith and obedience to ...

v. 14-15a: A TIME FOR FELLOWSHIP AND PRAYER³

The Upper Room must have been a pretty big because 120 people would soon squeeze in. In addition to the eleven apostles, we read, verse 14-15a, "*They all met together continually for prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus. During this time, on a day when about 120 believers were present ...*"

So there were Jesus' own mother Mary (this is the last mention of her in Scripture), Jesus' "brothers" (the very same brothers who had given Him so much grief during His ministry, thinking He was out of his mind), and "the women" who

³ Works used in this section are Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. 3: The Acts of the Apostles by A. T. Robertson, page 14.

had so faithfully ministered to Jesus during His life on earth: Mary Magdalene, Mary of Clopas, Susanna, Joanna, Mary of Bethany, Martha (in the kitchen no doubt!), and many others.

There were surely times when it was difficult for anyone to hear anything!

We don't know who the rest of the 120 were. But we can guess. I think Nicodemus might have been there. Surely Joseph of Arimathea, and the disciples from the Emmaus road, Cleopas and Mary. Lazarus and most of the other people Jesus healed. They all would have come together because of their commit to follow Christ. The first "Communion of the Saints," so to speak.

This is important, because people need people. And Christians need Christians. One of the worst things that can happen to a believer is to get isolated from other believers. Over the last 12 years of pastoring, I find myself increasingly counseling people to avoid getting isolated. They may be isolated by their words, their actions, their sins, their problems, perhaps by depression, or simply by fear. But being isolated from the Body of Christ **never helps**.

We regularly have people come through, visiting churches, who seem to never stop visiting. I find myself almost begging them, "settle down, pick one." They come, and I apologize if this hits too close to home for you, but I feel pretty strongly about this, they come with their mental checklists of the things they have to have in a church. And I find myself telling them, "throw the list away, pick the **top three** things you can't live without, and as soon as you find **two** of them, **stop!**" Because they look for so long, they wind up being isolated, and wasting valuable months, and in some cases, years of spiritual growth that comes from being connected to the body.

Along with the fellowship of the apostles and other followers of Christ came trusting prayer. And not just any old kind of wimpy prayer, but prayer that was characterized by ...

- **Persistence**

There was **persistence** in prayer. Verse 14 starts, "*They all met together continually for prayer...*" A. T. Robertson says this means, "**they stuck to praying.**" There was a commitment to prayer! The last verse in Luke adds that they were "*continually at the temple, praising God*" (Luke 24:53). Sometimes in the temple and sometimes in the Upper Room, but they were **persistent**.

The one who wants his sail full of the breeze of the Spirit must have such perseverance in prayer. In Luke 11 Jesus told a story of a man who went to his neighbor at night to borrow food for an unexpected guest and only received what he wanted by repeatedly banging on the door, **Luke 11:8-13**, "*But I tell you this—though he won't do it as a friend, if you keep knocking long enough, he will get up and give you what you want so his reputation won't be damaged. [9] And so I tell*

you, **keep on asking**, and you will be given what you ask for. **Keep on looking**, and you will find. **Keep on knocking**, and the door will be opened. [10] For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks. ... [13] If you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.”

We must ask, but persistence is the key. A hurried request soon forgotten and unrepeatable will produce no fruit. The apostolic band believed so fully and fervently that they could not help but pray with persistence!

And just as important, they prayed in ...

- **Unity.**

*“They all **met together** continually for prayer...”*

This is amazing! Eleven disciples — strong-willed men, the kind who argued over who was going to get the best seat in the kingdom and who refused to wash one another’s feet; Jesus’ brothers who had been so perverse as to reject His messiahship; His mother and a whole household of women — rich, poor, chaste, unchaste — **“all”** of them were of one mind — literally, “of one heart and mind.” How? They were all looking up to Christ at the same time for the same thing.

The Lord is pleased to pour His Spirit upon believers who are praying in unity. The Church is described in **Acts 4:32-33**, *“All the believers were of **one heart and mind**, and they felt that what they owned was not their own; they shared everything they had. [33] And the apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s [grace] was upon them all.”*

They prayed persistently and they prayed in unity, but what did they pray about. We don’t really know. The text doesn’t specifically say.

We sometimes talk about prayer in terms of the acrostic ACTS – A for Adoration, C for Confession, T for Thanksgiving, and S for Supplication. I imagine that they did each of those. Certainly they praised God, and I’m sure they confessed their sins. They were getting ready to do the work Jesus had for them. They must have been conscious of their inadequacy and sin. Perhaps Peter led the way. They knew they were supposed to be witnesses of Christ, and yet they knew their failures as well, so perhaps, as the elders here have been repeatedly told, “they became the chief repenters.” They must also have given thanks for everything that had happened so far. And I’m sure they prayed for strength and wisdom for the task. And they must have prayed for the Holy Spirit to come, which, after all, was what they were waiting for.

The wind of the Holy Spirit refreshes the life of those who pray in unity — those who through faith in Christ praise God, confess their sins, forgive each other, and pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to work in each of their lives.

Two things go together in the Christian life: prayer, in which we talk to God, and Bible Study, in which God talks to us. And that's the next thing here ...

v. 16-20: A TIME FOR STUDY

The context here is the need to replace Judas, and when he began addressing this, the Apostle Peter quoted Scripture, verse 16, *"Brothers, it was necessary for the Scriptures to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided the Temple police to arrest Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David."*

And then in verse 20 he quotes from Psalm 69 and Psalm 109 when he says, *"This was predicted in the book of Psalms, where it says, 'Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.' And again, 'Let his position be given to someone else.'"*

As we've already seen, prayer is of great importance. But someone once said, and I think wisely, that when we're talking to God and God is talking to us, we had better let God do most of the talking.

What did they study? Well, they probably began searching the Scriptures for prophecies concerning the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Presumably, this is what Jesus had been sharing with them, as He did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus in **Luke 24:27**, *"Then Jesus quoted passages from the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining what all the Scriptures said about Himself."*

They probably thought, "Well, that was fascinating. We don't we look these things up for ourselves?" So they got out their Bibles and began to read. And they may have said to themselves, "Well, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, so we had better find out what that's all about." And so they went to the Old Testament to study up on the Holy Spirit. And it seems clear that they must have done this at some point, because in Acts 2, Peter quotes from the Prophet Joel, in what is the most important text on the Holy Spirit in the whole Old Testament.

God blesses the study of His Word. In fact, I would say that the **primary** way God blesses us is through the study of His Word. And so if you find yourself in a time of waiting, redeem the time, as the disciples did. Become a better student of God's Word and search the Scriptures for answers to your questions.

And then will come ...

v. 21-26: A TIME FOR DECISION⁴

At some point you have to make a decision. Having been in a place of waiting, maybe you've learned to use that time trusting God, being obedient to what He says, spending time with other believers, praying with as many of them as

⁴ Much of the information on Matthias comes from the article, "Nobodies of the New Testament: Matthias" by Ernest Runions, His Magazine (Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship), October 1978.

you can, and immersing yourself in God's Word ... and so now **it's time to act.**

Verse 21, ***"So now we must choose another man to take Judas's place."***

And so Matthias is chosen by the casting of lots. Some have criticized the apostles for resorting to the drawing of lots to discover Judas' replacement. Such critics forget two things: 1) Drawing lots was the time-honored way of determining God's will in Israel. **Proverbs 16:33** says, *"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD."* 2) Even in the casting of lots the apostles cast themselves completely on God for the outcome in dependent prayer.

Who is Matthias? We don't know. He's a nobody. Up until now we haven't had the slightest reason to even know he existed. He's never mentioned again. The only way we know he's still around is because the New Testament speaks of "the twelve" instead of "the eleven."

But perhaps there's more to it than that. Matthias has a name, and in the Bible that's always significant. To have a name means to be a person. And to be a person is not to be a nobody, but to be a somebody in God's sight.

If we were to ask Matthias, "How did you come to matter to anyone?" I think he would say, "I knew Jesus." Matthias' secret is not a lucky cast of the lots. His secret is his personal knowledge of the Savior.

Peter set the criteria, verses 21-22, ***"It must be someone who has been with us all the time that we were with the Lord Jesus— [22] from the time He was baptized by John until the day He was taken from us into heaven. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection."***

And then they prayed, verse 24, ***"O Lord," they said, "you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen."***

That's a pretty bold prayer. Peter didn't pray, "Lord, in your great arbitrary sovereignty," but, "Lord, You know the hearts. In this room today, tell us which man is right before You." It's one of the most searching prayers in the whole Bible. It's a devastating prayer. The church was calling for a public manifestation of a divine secret. "Only You know, Lord, tell us."

And so Matthias is chosen on the basis of Jesus' own inspection. And Jesus delivered him from being a nobody. He had done something else for Matthias. He touched his life. Matthias had been with Jesus at His baptism by John. And even though he wasn't one of the original apostles, he had stayed with Jesus through His teaching and healing ministry, right up to the cross, resurrection, and ascension.

Matthias exercised faith and obedience through a long time of **waiting**.

He's a great model of what this passage is calling us to do: wait, trust, obey, fellowship, pray, study, preparing yourself the whole time to be **ready** ... to decisively step forward when Jesus calls your name.

CONCLUSION: *Staying in God's Greenhouse*⁵

I recently read a story that contained some of the best counsel about this kind of situation that I've read in a long time. The story was about the Christian singer and songwriter, Margaret Becker, about a time when she was struggling with her purpose and calling. She wrote, "my life felt like it had one foot nailed to the floor ... wearing a circle into the ground ... convinced that this was my final position: miserable." She had prayed and fasted herself down to 100 pounds, gone to all the seminars and sermons, read all the books, and yet was drowning in despair and hopelessness. Finally she told her story to a local college professor who had a reputation for insight, laying it all out before him, including all her despair and longing and pain.

After listening for a long time to Margaret's story, the professor told her he could give her some advice that would help her out of this mess but he didn't think a quick solution was the best thing to do. He said, "you are right where you should be right now ... in God's greenhouse ... an environment where growth is accelerated. It's not comfortable in there. It's hot, wet, a lot of pruning, not particularly clean, but the best for growth."

He went on to say, "I'm frightened that I may interfere with what is obviously a sacred surgery taking place in your life right now."

Margaret Becker left the encounter without any solutions, but with hope. Knowing there was purpose in her struggle gave her new eyes with which to see her life. In the Message, **James 1:3-5** says, "*You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. [4] So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. **Let it do its work** so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way. [5] If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it.*"

Too often I pray, "Lord, let me learn this lesson quickly and get me out of this mess," because I'm looking for speed and recovery ... not maturity and growth. Like Margaret Becker, I will become a person of mature character and integrity with no weak spots **only** if I let God's timing run its course.

Matthias is the model of what this passage is calling us to do: wait, trust, obey, fellowship, pray, study, preparing yourself the whole time to be **ready** ... to decisively step forward when Jesus calls your name, telling you that now it's time to go be "*a witness of Jesus' resurrection*" to those around you.

Because it's all about Jesus.

And those who wait to hear His call, said, "Amen."

⁵ Margaret Becker story is taken from the article, "Long Way Around," from the online newsletter, Journalentry, by Berry D. Simpson, 8-7-03.