

Introduction: Last week Brian got us started in Chapter 1 of Acts, where we saw Jesus prepare his Disciples for the coming of the Holy Spirit, through which the good news of the gospel would spread from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth. Jesus instructed his followers to return to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. And then he floated away. Up into the clouds. One would think that Luke, the author, would be eager to jump into the next part of the story when the Spirit comes and all the amazing things that happen under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but instead, we get this strange interlude between the Ascension and the day of Pentecost.

This whole story happens while the followers of Jesus were waiting. How many of us like to wait? Show of hands, don't be shy. Some of us can handle waiting if it is for a good thing. You have a baby on the way or a grand baby, and you can usually wait for that. Waiting for Christmas though, really tough when you are young, a little easier when you are an exhausted parent. What about waiting at the DMV, anyone enjoy that kind of waiting? (Show Slide of Zootopia) A few years ago a movie came out titled Zootopia, where all the characters were talking animals and living in a modern city. The main characters had to go to the DMV where all the employees were 3 toed sloth's. It was one of the funniest scenes in the whole movie. I hope no one here works at the DMV.

What about waiting for those lab results? You had that CT scan, and you wait for the phone call from the Dr.'s office. Who likes to wait for that? What about that job interview? Waiting for the answer can be excruciating. Maybe you are waiting desperately for your wife to get home from women's retreat. What do we do when we are waiting? Now days we just stare at our phone's or watch TV or find another way to distract ourselves from thinking about it. If it's a package from Amazon, we check the delivery status about a thousand times.

Principle # 1. Waiting is a good thing.

Even though we don't like waiting, it's good for us. This passage gives us a tiny glimpse into what we can do when we are waiting, whether we are waiting for something good, like the Holy Spirit's arrival, or if we are waiting on news that could be bad news. Maybe we are waiting for the answer to a question, or for clear direction from the Lord.

This is one of those stories in the Bible that is highly descriptive. There are no clear instructions that are easily applied to all believers. However, by observing what the followers of Jesus did while they waited, maybe we can glean a few valuable truths that apply to us today.

Principle #2. Waiting is an opportunity to Pray.

Take a look at Acts Ch. 1: 12-14. (READ). After Jesus ascended into heaven, and the angels jump scare everyone who was watching, they finally head back into Jerusalem. I'm sure there was a lot of quiet chatter among the people on the walk back. Shock that Jesus was gone again, surprise that the Angels had appeared, questions about what was next. The Mount of Olives is very close to the old city of Jerusalem. (show picture of Jerusalem from Mt. of Olives.) A Sabbath Days walk, was a reference to one of the Sabbath rules. You weren't allowed to work on the sabbath, but most people had to walk to get to synagogue or the temple, so the Pharisees decided on the number of steps you were allowed to take on the sabbath before it was considered work. Everyone knew how many steps that was, so it would have been a common reference.

We know who was there for this journey. The 11 disciples, the women who were part of Jesus' ministry. Probably Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others who were at the empty tomb. And Mary the Mother of Jesus as well as his siblings. This was a tight circle of

friends. And what were they doing? They were devoting themselves to prayer.

Prayer is the best thing we can do when we are waiting. I know this passage is descriptive, telling us what these early believers were doing while they waited, but the universal principle still applies to us. When we are waiting, there might not be much that we can do, but we can always pray.

They didn't know how long they had to wait. Jesus just said wait until the Spirit comes. We know now that they had to wait about 9 days between the ascension and Pentecost. 9 days. When was the last time you waited 9 days for something with no idea when it was going to come. So, they prayed, and waited and prayed some more. It might be the only thing we can do while we wait.

When we pray, we are aligning ourselves with God's will and his plan. God invites us to "cast all our cares upon him." (1 Peter 5:7) Paul tells us that whenever we are anxious about anything, though prayer and petition to present our requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7) When we pray, we have an opportunity to confess our sins and be forgiven. We have an opportunity to make sure that our hearts are in the right place and our attitudes are in alignment with God, so we are ready for the answer he gives us. When we pray, we are reminded of God's faithfulness in our lives and in the lives of other believers. When we pray, we are reminded that we aren't alone. Especially when we ask other believers to pray for us and with us. The Disciples were waiting, their friends and family were waiting, and praying, and waiting some more.

[Illustration] I love the story of how this church was able to purchase this property in the early years. 26 or 27 years ago. The church was started in a house, and then they rented the school across the street. God put it on the hearts of the congregation, the early leaders of our church to

purchase these 5 acres of land, and it was just way too expensive at the time. So they started praying, and they started sneaking over here and circling up to pray. Then they started to pray around the clock, they set up a tent on the property and took shifts praying that God would provide the land for the church. Sure enough, the county changed the rules about how close houses could be built next to the freeway, and shortly after, this property was listed for sale at a much lower price because the developer that owned it could not build homes on it anymore.

Our church bought this land because people waited and prayed and waited and prayed some more. And God provided.

Sometimes all we can do is pray and do our best to align our will with God's will while we wait. And then we pray some more.

Principle #3. When we wait we have an opportunity to remember. What happens next? Look at vs 15-20. Notice in verse 18-19 that they are in parentheses. This is Luke filling in the backstory for the readers like us, not Peter's words. What is going on? Well, we don't know how many days into the 9-day waiting period we are. We don't know how many hours they have spent praying. We do know that they had a lot of quiet time. Peter had a lot of stuff to think about while he was praying and waiting.

For 3 1/2 years Peter had been following Jesus all over the country. He had listened to the Messiah preach and teach like no one ever had before. He watched Jesus perform miracle after miracle, healing, casting out demons, feeding thousands, raising people from the dead. Peter and the other disciples were even sent out to preach the good news and were given authority over demons and performed miracles themselves. All the while they were waiting for Jesus to overthrow the Roman empire and set up his Kingdom on earth. Then Jesus was betrayed by one of his own disciples and put to death by his own people. What a devastating let down for his followers. Imagine the confusion that Peter felt. He himself had denied Christ 3x during the trial.

Then behold, Easter morning Jesus is raised from the dead and shows himself to his followers, first the women in the garden, then to Peter and the rest. For the next 40 days Jesus shows up unannounced. He walks through wall, he disguises himself on the road, he cooks breakfast on the beach. He explained how his death and resurrection were the plan all along in fulfillment of the scriptures. After all of this, even up to the moment of the ascension, the disciples were expecting Jesus to establish his earthly kingdom. It was the last question they asked before he left.

Imagine the emotional exhaustion that they were feeling while they prayed in that upper room. What a whirlwind of events that had unfolded, all the hopes, all the despair, all the questions. And all they could do was look at each other and pray and wait.

This is pure speculation, but I can imagine Peter looking around the room and having all the memories wash over him. Looking at the faces of those in the room with him and he couldn't help but notice that Judas was gone. Imagine all the anger and grief that he felt toward Judas and the processing he thought through about why, why would Jesus chose Judas, knowing he would be betrayed?

So Peter turned to the scriptures and remembered what God had promised. David wrote both psalm 69 and Psalm 108. In them David cried out to God for help and salvation from his enemies. David asked God to deliver him from men who were wicked by wiping them out, making their land desolate, and replacing them with good men.

So Peter is making all these connection in his head while he is praying. He is looking back at what Jesus said and did, He is looking back at scripture, he is looking around the room and is reminded that Judas is gone, there is an empty seat at the table so to speak.

This is a side note, but worth mentioning. Don't let sin take you out. Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. That was a good chunk of

change back then. But he was so distraught about what he had done he hung himself. He took himself out.

Don't let sin take you out of God's ministry, and the work you are called to do.

Peter recognized that there were only 11 of them now. But Jesus said that 12 would sit on thrones of Judgment over the 12 tribes of Israel. (Matthew 19:28, Luke 22: 30) So Judas must be replaced by another.

Principle #4. Waiting is an opportunity to prepare.

Look at verse 21-26.

They narrow down the options to 2 men. Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. Then listen to again to Peter's prayer. Lord, you know the hearts of all men. Show us the one you choose. When we were talking about this passage in our staff meeting, Sam pointed out the humility in Peter in this prayer. It wasn't about Peter, or who he wanted to pick, it wasn't about a popularity contest or an election. It was all about seeking God's will and God's plan.

Peter recognized the importance of Apostleship and appointing another apostle to the work of the ministry. He wanted to be ready when the Spirit came. What is an apostle? This book is titled, the Acts of the Apostles, after all so it is an important term. What does it mean to be an Apostle? I looked it up my Greek dictionary. The word in Greek is apostolos. Sounds cooler in Greek doesn't it? In its earliest use it meant messenger, one who is sent, a fleet of ships. Specifically in the New Testament, it means a messenger of the good news of the gospel. We see in Acts a shift from the 12 disciples of the gospels, to the 12 Apostles. The title was limited first to those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus life, ministry and resurrection. Paul was later accepted as an Apostle but admitted that his calling was different, he called himself an awkward addition, the least of the apostles. It was Paul's road to Damascus encounter with Jesus that made him a witness to the resurrection.

Are there Apostles today? Not really. I know there are a lot of opinions about this, and there are some who claim apostolic ministry and things like that, but there was something special about the Apostles of the early church. I already mentioned that they were eyewitnesses, so that is kind of difficult to replicate today. In addition to that, the Apostles had a responsibility to preserve and pass on the teaching of Jesus as first witnesses. They heard the word directly from the Messiah, and it is hard for us to confirm that in people today. The Apostles were tied to a special ministry of the Holy Spirit through miracles that were unique to the growth of the early church and the spread of the gospel. I am not claiming that miracles have ceased or that the Holy Spirit doesn't work through believers in miraculous ways, I'm saying there was something special about the miracles of the Spirit through the Apostles which ended with them and has not been seen since. While the title of Apostle was given to other ministers of the gospel such as Barnabas or Timothy, they did not carry the same authority as the 12. Lastly, by the middle of the second century, the church Fathers did not refer to the leaders of the church or the preachers of the gospel as Apostles, that role had ended with the death of the first generation.

Peter was making sure that they were ready for what came next. There were 12 before, God said there will be 12 in the future judgment, so he made sure to fill the empty seat they would be ready.

Principle # 5. Waiting is an opportunity to trust in God's direction. The casting of Lots was an accepted means of decision making in the Old Testament world. Lots were typically wood or stone, with painted marks or carvings. They were placed in a cup or vase, shaken and then the first one that falls out wins. Lots could have been used to decide mundane things. The Roman soldiers cast lots over Jesus' clothes. Like us saying, we have two options, flip a coin. No big deal.

In other situations, casting of lots was used to determine God's divine decision. Moses and Aaron used lots to identify the Israelites who were hiding idols in their tents. David consulted the Urim and Thummim,

casting lots, to find God's will when faced with a difficult decision. It was a way of surrendering human will and trusting God's sovereignty. Proverbs 16:33 says "The lot is cast into the lap but it's every decision is from the Lord."

Should we cast lots in our decision making today? Is this prescriptive or descriptive?

Interestingly this is the last time lots are cast in the Bible. In the chapters to come, the Holy Spirit is given to believers, and when there are difficult decisions to make, they don't cast lots, they pray and listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

One could argue, that with the advent of the Spirit, casting lots is no longer an acceptable form of discerning the will of God. Using a magic 8 ball, flipping coins, or consulting psychics are not good ways to seek God's will either. Just to be clear.

How then do we make difficult decisions when we don't know what to do? When we are waiting and seeking the Lord's will what do we do?

Dr. Gary Friesen, author of *Decision Making and the Will of God*, gives us 4 principles.¹ Understand that the 4 principles are based on a desire to make decisions that are pleasing to God. We are assuming that our desire is to do the right thing. Whether it is right for us personally, or for our family or our employer or church or whatever.

1. The Principle of Obedience. Where God commands, we must obey. The Bible gives us everything we need to know God's moral plan, what is right and wrong. If we have a decision with a moral implication, look to the scriptures.

¹ <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/Principles%20for%20Decision%20Making%20-%20Gary%20Friesen%20and%20J.%20Robin%20Maxson.pdf> Used with permission. See Also, Friesen, Gary and Maxson, J. Robin., *Decision Making and the Will of God*. Multnomah; Twenty-Fifth Anniversary, Revised and Updated ed. edition (August 11, 2004).

2. The Principle of Freedom. Where there is no command, God gives us freedom (and responsibility) to choose. There are a thousand decisions in life that have no moral consequence, and God gives us the freedom to make those decisions. It's ok. You don't need to pray and search the scriptures and fast before making a decision about what to cook for dinner tonight.
3. The Principle of Wisdom. When there is no command, God gives us wisdom to choose. If our goal is to make a God honoring decision, we want to be wise about our choice. James 1 says, if anyone lacks wisdom, he should seek God who gives generously to all without finding fault. When we seek to be wise, God promises wisdom. This might mean consulting with someone wiser than we are, to get sound advice.
4. The Principle of Humility. When we have chosen what is moral and wise, we must trust the sovereign God to work all the details together for good.

We don't have to cast lots anymore. We can seek the Lord, study scripture, listen to the Holy Spirit, and use wisdom to make a decision, then trust that God is going to be with us in the process.

Conclusion: Maybe you are in a season of waiting right now. If you aren't, just wait, you will get your turn, don't worry. Maybe you are waiting for something good. Something you have been planning for or dreaming about. Maybe you are waiting for an answer that might not be good. There is some dread and worry in the waiting. Maybe you don't know what you are waiting for, you just feel stuck, life is on pause.

My encouragement to you today is that it's ok. Don't fight it. Don't try to distract yourself. Use the opportunity to wait patiently, wait obediently, pray, remember, prepare your hearts for whatever is next, and do your best to discern God's will for your future.