

Go... and Wait

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[0:00] All right, good morning, everyone. Good morning. Hi, so we're continuing through the book of Acts today.

! We're focusing on this scattering.

Acts is about the start of the church, how a small, persecuted Jewish sect of a few tens of men that grew and scattered such that 2,000 years later, across the world, here in Hong Kong, we're sitting here today, along with, united with the rest of the church around the world.

That's Acts. And how does Acts inform the way that we gather and scatter as a church today? So we left off last week with a little bit of drama.

Jesus was talking to his disciples, and then once he was done, a cloud came and took him off to the sky, took him to heaven. That's not something you see every day. And on top of that, angels appeared right next to him, right next to the disciples and said, Christ will return, but until then, you have work to do.

[1:19] The church has work to do. You must go make disciples of all nations. We must preach Christ locally here in Hong Kong, wherever we are, our Jerusalem, but also to the ends of the earth so that the whole earth, the whole world will be filled with the glory of God.

So there's much to do. We must go. But before that, before the early church went, Jesus gave a command to his apostles. He told them, wait, wait for the Holy Spirit.

You can't do anything without the Holy Spirit. So wait for him. And that's where we pick up this week, in the waiting period. Coming up, the church has a huge task to do, a big mission, but they also have this promise that they will receive the Holy Spirit, God on the move, God dwelling in them, and the Holy Spirit is even better than the presence of Christ physically with them.

That's coming up, but for now, they're going to have to wait. Waiting. Can any of us relate to that? Maybe you can't wait to be done with exams or to go off to university away from home.

Maybe you're waiting to find a stable job, husband or wife. Maybe you're fired up about this whole talk is gathering and you just want to go now. And you're asking, what should I be doing now?

[2:33] So I'm sure we've all been in a situation where we really wanted something to happen, but we need to wait. Today, we'll see how the early church waited as they looked forward to the promise of the Holy Spirit and to scattering.

Today in Acts, we'll see that the early church, as they waited, they weren't just passively waiting, but they were actively seeking God's will in their waiting. In their waiting, they were looking to God's will in three ways.

They were asking for God's will in prayer. They trusted God's will as revealed in scripture and they discerned God's will for this 12th apostle. So we'll read from where we left off in Acts chapter one, starting from verse 12.

So Acts chapter one, verses 12 to 26. Please stand for as we read scripture out of reverence for scripture. Let's stand together as we read the word of God. Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room where they were staying. Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, the son of Alphaeus and Simon, the zealot and Judas, the son of James.

[3:48] All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the woman and Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers. In those days, Peter stood up among the brothers.

The company of persons was all in 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 God to those who arrested Jesus.

For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in the ministry. Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.

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. 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. So one of these 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.

[4:49] One of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection. And they put forward to Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justice and Matthias. 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.

And they cast lots for them and the lot fell on Matthias and he was numbered with the 11 apostles. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. Okay, so again, we're looking today at how the early church waited and we'll take this verse by verse, picking up from last week as Jesus ascended into heaven.

So verse 12 says, all this happened, Jesus ascended on the Mount called Olivet, also known as the Mount of Olives. This was about a Sabbath day journey away.

So now the Jews had developed laws around the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a day meant for rest. And to avoid working on the Sabbath, they limited how far they could walk and decided about a kilometer was fine.

So that's what a Sabbath day journey is. The point is that the disciples were close by in Jerusalem, a half hour walk away in Jerusalem's backyard. And so after they see Jesus lifted up into heaven, after they're done staring into the sky, they turn around and take a short walk back to town.

[6:09] Then verse 13, and when they had entered, they went to the upper room. They went up to the upper room where they were staying. This may or may not have been the upper room where they ate the last supper before Jesus was betrayed.

The location isn't really important. The point, what's relevant is that they were all staying together and gathered together in one place. Now here in verse 13, we start to see a hint of trouble.

So who's gathered together in the upper room? Verse 13 says, there's Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, the son of Alphaeus and Simon, the zealot and Judas, the son of James.

Now this kind of sounds like the list of Jesus's 12 disciples, but if anyone were counting, you would have just ran out of fingers and got to 11, not 12. One disciple is missing from the list and that disciple is Judas.

Judas Iscariot, to be precise. There's another Judas present, Judas, the son of James. He's also sometimes called Thaddeus. Thaddeus was fine. Judas Thaddeus, he never hurt anybody.

[7:12] The one disciple missing here is the other Judas, Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus, Judas the traitor. So we're short one disciple here. There's 11 instead of 12, and that will be important later.

But for now, we'll move on. There's others gathered together with the 12 minus one disciples. Verse 14 says that. They were together with the woman. That's probably the woman who accompanied Jesus and his disciples, some of which saw the empty tomb.

And we also see there's Mary and some of Jesus's brothers. We know a bit of Jesus's family in Mark, Mark chapter 6, which tells us that Jesus had at least four brothers and two sisters.

Earlier, they were skeptics. John 7 says that not even his brothers believed in him. But after they saw him rise from the dead, now they're here. They're gathered with the disciples. They believe.

And aside from the people named here that we've talked about, there's some others because verse 15 tells us that in total, there were about 120 followers of Jesus total at the time gathered together.

[8:14] So there's 120 people waiting for, followers of Jesus waiting, waiting for the arrival of the spirit. But while waiting, they weren't just waiting passively.

They weren't on the couch scrolling through reels. They're making good use of the time. Verse 14 says, all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.

As the church waited, they were devoting themselves to prayer together. That's the first way they were looking for the God's will in their waiting. They devoted themselves to prayer together, asking for God's will.

Now, they weren't just dabbling in prayer. They were devoted to it. To be devoted to prayer, we need both purpose and conviction in prayer. It's easy to dabble with prayer and pray half-heartedly every now and then.

We can all do this. But we can't be devoted to prayer without both purpose and conviction. The church had purpose. They waited with purpose. They were preparing for a mission.

[9:12] They weren't just waiting for nothing. They were preparing themselves to receive the Holy Spirit and then to go proclaim Christ to all the earth. They had a purpose. And they also had conviction. They had this deep belief.

But it's not just that praying is good. We need to pray. Acts shows us that the church had a firm belief that what we're doing, this conviction, what we're doing is not our mission.

No, instead, it is God's mission. We're not working on our own. It's his work and he will see to it that this work gets finished. We want the world to know Jesus.

But how much more does the father who sent his son to die for the sins of the world want the world to see his son and believe and be saved? Our God will surely make this happen.

And all we need to do is ask and obey. That's the conviction that makes them devoted to prayer.

And we can see this conviction later in verse 24 when they're praying for Judas' replacement.

[10:11] Look at their huge view of God. God is not small to them. He is God in heaven. They pray, you, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show us, show which one of these two you have chosen.

They're saying, you, God, you have a perfect plan. Show us who you've chosen. We want your will, Lord. That's all. And later in Acts 4, authorities, they're threatening the church to stop them from preaching about Christ.

And they pray. Verse 24 in Acts chapter 4. They say, sovereign Lord who made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in them. They're saying, you're the sovereign Lord of all. Yes, there's guys hunting us down.

They're trying to stop us. But you're the Lord of all. They can't lay so much as a finger on us if you don't want them to. And in verse 29. Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness as you stretch out your hand to heal.

They're saying, God, your will be done. We're preaching your word. We're doing your mission. And so we trust that you will stretch out your hand to accomplish your will.

[11:10] We just need to ask. That's the purpose and conviction we need in order to be devoted to prayer. Our classmates, our coworkers, our friends, our family.

God wants them to know him. They want them to experience the fullness of life. They want them to know Christ. God wants them to know Christ so much more than we want them to.

And he can make it happen. So let's ask him. John Piper says that weakness in prayer is often due to neglecting the fact that we are at war.

That we have a mission. We're fighting a spiritual battle to advance the kingdom of God, as we talked about last week, into all the earth. And God gives us prayer like a tactical radio that soldiers carry on the front lines so that they can ask the commander for marching orders or for enemy intelligence to accomplish their mission.

That's one purpose for prayer. This military communications. And sometimes we miss the purpose of prayer when we forget that we're at war. Instead of fighting, we're at Five Guys.

[12:17] Prayer is meant for soldiers on the front line to ask their general to rein and airstrike down in enemy positions. But we want to pick up the military radio to say, hey God, can I get a cheeseburger and fries?

If that's the attitude, of course we can pray. We won't need prayer. If prayer is more like the intercom at a drive-thru than a direct line to the situation room, then yeah, we won't have this conviction in prayer.

We won't be devoted to prayer if our main concerns are these civilian pursuits. Just having better grades, we gain a nice job, get a larger flat, and then the cycle repeats again for our kids. We'll only be devoted to prayer by holding on to our purpose that Christ has sent us out and with a firm conviction that God will get the glory that he deserves.

And of course, God isn't just this general, but he's our loving father. He's a father who sent us out. And so we can have confidence that he'll have our backs. He'll make sure that we succeed. He doesn't leave us out to dry. And that's why Jesus said in John 15, I chose you that you should go and bear fruit so that whatever you ask my father in my name, he may give it to you. [13:28] That's the confidence we can have in prayer. That's the purpose and conviction that pushes us to pray. So what can we do? Right? Verse 14 says, the early church was with one accord.

They were united. They were devoted to prayer together. Not just praying individually, which we should do on our own too. Or praying together. So how can we be a church devoted to prayer together? Here's one step.

Here's one invitation to you. I'd love for all to join for prayer together. Every Sunday at 1030 in the morning, we gather together in prayer before the rest of our worship service.

So normally we start at 11, but you can come just half an hour earlier, 1030. Even if you want to sleep in, you can still make it for 1030. It's not that early. So I'd love for all of us to make prayer together a habit.

And we'll commit to making our weekly prayer gatherings meaningful and on time and just respect everyone's time in it. But I'd love for everyone to join in prayer together. Having this purpose and conviction that we need to do this.

[14:29] Let's pray together. And now as we're talking about scattering, as we're going through Acts, I admit that as a church, we don't have that many, we don't currently have that many organized ways for us to go out, serve Hong Kong, serve the world together.

It's perfect because now is the perfect time to pray. This is a perfect opportunity for us as a church to ask God together how we are to scatter. Just like what the early church did.

I'd love for us to come together with this conviction and purpose that God, he wants to work through our church here in Hong Kong, and he wants to do his work all around the world. If only we would ask him.

So can we be devoted to praying together? So in their waiting, the church was devoted to prayer, asking for God's will to be done. Next, they also trusted in God's will.

They trusted God's will as revealed in scripture. As they were waiting and praying together, Peter stood up and said in verse 16, he said, Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas.

[15:33] First, notice how Peter thinks about scripture. Peter thinks that scripture is God's word spoken through man. Scripture was spoken by the Holy Spirit, who is God, by the mouth of man, in this case, David.

Peter later quotes two psalms. He affirms that those psalms are written by this man, the King David, yet it was inspired by the Holy Spirit to be exactly the words that God wanted.

Scripture is God's word spoken through man. And also, Peter believes that God's word won't fail. It will not return void, but shall accomplish its purpose.

Peter says, Scripture had to be fulfilled because God is true and can't lie. His word stands true and his promises will come true. And his promises have come true in Christ.

Peter goes on and says, Scripture had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who became a God to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.

[16:34] Now, this brings us back to the problem earlier in verse 13, that there's 12 minus one disciples. We're missing one disciple because Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus. People wanted to kill Jesus and Judas Iscariot told them where they could find Jesus and arrest them.

So Judas teamed up with those guys who arrested and killed Jesus. And as a result of his betrayal, we learn that Judas met quite a gory end, to be frank.

That's in verse 18. Now this man, who is Judas, acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness. And falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.

And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that the field was called in their own language, a keldama, that is field of blood. So his gods burst open and everything leaked out.

Field of blood indeed. Field of blood indeed. Now, there's another account of Judas' death in the book of Matthew. And quite frankly, it's a bit different from the recording in Acts, what we read here in Acts.

[17:37] And in fact, people have pointed at times to Judas and said that there's contradictions in the Bible, looking at Acts and Matthew. And we can't trust the Bible. But I'd like us to see how these differences, not contradictions, instead serve to highlight what Luke is trying to emphasize in Acts.

So Matthew, this Matthew 27, verse 5, says that after Judas betrayed Jesus, Judas got cold feet. He saw what he did and he got a bit of cold feet.

He threw the blood money back at the religious leaders and then he went away to hang himself. Now, the religious leaders in Matthew, they take the money and then buy this field that's now called field of blood.

The difference between Matthew and Acts is that in Matthew, the chief priests are the ones who buy the field, while in Acts, it says that Judas acquired a field. In Matthew, Judas goes and hangs himself, while in Acts, his guts just burst open and everything leaks out.

But so one reason for this is throughout the book of Matthew, one focus, Matthew's focus is on Jesus criticizing Jewish religious leaders.

[18:50] That's one of Matthew's emphasis that these religious leaders, they're phonies. They're leading people astray. And so it's no wonder that Matthew, he chooses to record one part of this story, which is the chief priests, their guilt, they're the ones buying the field.

It highlights their role, their role in Jesus's crucifixion, their complicity in it. In Acts, the emphasis is instead on Judas's guilt and wickedness.

That's why Luke focuses on this fact that the field was bought with Judas's blood money, with the reward of his wickedness. So reading both accounts together, we can, we know that the chief priests were the one, they took the money and bought the field, but using the money that Judas threw back at them.

So in a way, Judas, through the chief priests, acquired this field. And while Judas hung himself in Matthew, Acts shows us God's judgment upon Judas, to highlight that God is the sovereign God and that he's in control and he's the one who judges.

Elsewhere in Acts, we see that God brings instant judgment upon people. For example, Acts 5, Ananias, Sapphira, they lie to God and instantly they're struck dead. In chapter 12, King Herod, he pats himself on the shoulder.

[20:02] He says, I'm a God. And then instantly, angel of the Lord strikes him down. He breathes his last and worms eat him up. The same idea is emphasized here, that God judged Judas guilty for what he did.

And that divine judgment, guts burst open, everything spilled out. The point in Acts is that God is in control. Judas's betrayal wasn't an interruption to God's plan, but in fact part and parcel of God's plan as foretold in scripture.

Judas was not an interruption. So how does that relate to us in our waiting? Put yourself in the disciples' shoes. We always talk about the fact that Judas betrayed Jesus.

Yeah, he did. But also think about this. Judas was with these disciples for three years. It's like how us, we know each other. We've been with each other for maybe almost two years since we've come to this space.

Longer for other of us. But Judas was with the disciples for three years. He was their friend. They ate, drank together. They ministered together side by side. They trusted him.

[21:10] He handled the money even. Judas betrayed Jesus. He betrayed the disciples also. Imagine how the disciples would have felt there too in that room.

They were probably a bit confused and hurt themselves at what Judas had done. There's often tension and hurt in our waiting. If you're waiting, pleading for God for a job, a husband or a wife, or you're faithfully telling people about Jesus, but so far no one's turning to him.

Rather, they're turning against you. Or maybe instead, you've been hurt by people in the church. Just like how Judas was stabbed in the, Judas stabbed the apostles in the back, stabbed Jesus in the back.

You possibly were hurt by people in the church too. Maybe it's abuse of authority. People misreading scripture, twisting it for their own purposes.

Sexual scandals, misconduct. The sad reality is that those things do happen in the church. And too often too. And it can be very confusing and disorienting to see that.

[22:17] It could be confusing to our faith to see that from people, that behavior from people claiming to be followers of Christ. Just like it was for the apostles serving alongside Judas.

But let's follow the disciples' lead and grieve without being shaken. We spoke about lamenting several weeks ago. Can we grieve as people with hope?

The disciples who saw Jesus and served alongside him too. He maybe saw Judas do miracles, casting out demons, healing the sick. Yet betrayed them.

The disciples kept their eyes on God and what he did. Judas' betrayal led to the most heinous act in history. The greatest act of injustice even.

The crucifixion of the son of God. Himself on the cross. Even that was part of God's plan. And God meant for good. And if he is Lord over the cross.

[23 : 18] Sovereign over the greatest evil in the world. I can believe that he's at work in my current situation too. 2 Corinthians says, This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

We don't know exactly why tragedies happen now. And I don't claim to begin to imagine what some people here have been through. But we can trust that even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

That God, you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. We can trust that God is working for the good of those who love him.

Because he turned Judas' betrayal and Jesus' death even for good. And one day he'll bring justice. Even if we don't see it now. God brought justice to Judas.

And he will bring justice to our situations too. So let us trust God's will as revealed in scripture. Just like the early church. In their waiting, they prayed.

[24 : 24] They trusted in scripture. And lastly, they discerned God's will. They discerned God's will for the 12th apostle. Peter continues speaking in verse 20.

He says, 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. So, first, they're again discerning God's will as revealed in scripture.

They're looking to scripture. Again, we're facing the problem of the 12 minus 1's disciples. Peter, he's quoting Psalms 69 and 109 here, which are psalms of lament.

Lamenting over God's people being attacked by their enemies. So Peter saw that these psalms were fulfilled in Christ. That Jesus represented all of God's people as the true righteous one.

And Jesus was betrayed by his enemy Judas, fulfilling some of these psalms of God's people being attacked by their enemies. And just like all of God's enemies, Judas was destroyed for his sin.

[25 : 24] And looking at this, Peter concludes that someone needs to take Judas' office and replace him as one of the 12 apostles. Scripture tells us another reason why there should be 12 apostles.

There are 12 of them to symbolize that the church is the new Israel, is the new assembly of God's people. There were 12 tribes in Israel, and these tribes were the foundation of the Old Testament people of God, the people of Israel.

In the same way, these 12 apostles will now lay the foundation for the church, which is the new assembly of God's people ever since Christ's death and resurrection. And with that, Peter gives us now three criteria for the 12th apostle.

Number one, so he lays out some criteria. If we are to choose a replacement, then you need to fulfill these criteria. Number one, this guy had to be a follower of Jesus during his entire earthly ministry. Peter says this in verse 21. He says, We need to pick 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.

[26 : 32] So the 12 apostles, they all had to be people who accompanied Jesus during his entire time of ministry, starting from when John was baptizing people in the Jordan to make straight the way for the Lord up until his ascension when Jesus was taken up into heaven.

That's what we read last week. Number two, the apostle had to be an eyewitness to the resurrection. One of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.

The 12 apostles have to, they had to have seen the risen Christ in the flesh. And number three, he had to be specifically chosen by Jesus. That we see back in verse three from last week.

Jesus gave commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles, specifically the apostles whom he had chosen. So not all eyewitnesses of Jesus who fulfilled the first two criteria became apostles.

The 12 were specifically chosen by Jesus to lay the foundation for the church. And on that note of apostles, the topic of apostles is quite relevant to us now recently.

[27 : 34] Because this coming Wednesday, May 7th, 135 cardinals will gather in Vatican City to enter a conclave, participate in a conclave, and elect the next pope, which the Roman Catholic Church believes to be the successor of the apostle Peter.

So there's some substantial differences between what the Roman Catholic Church teaches and what we believe. In large part though, a lot of these differences hang on this doctrine of apostolic secession.

Which is, the Catholics believe that after the apostles died, their authority was passed on to these successors. People that followed the apostles, successors. And when they died, when each successor died, it'd be passed on to subsequent successors.

Up to the present, where now this pope, which is being elected, is the successor of the apostle Peter, who is, as Catholics believe, the chief apostle and has authority over all apostles.

So that, according to the catechism of the Catholic Church, the pope has full supreme and universal power over the whole church. A power which he can always exercise unhindered.

[28 : 44] Now there's lots more that Catholicism teaches, but they're largely based on this assumption that the church, under the pope, has authority to dictate true doctrine.

They believe that the church can dictate what the apostles teach, determine what the apostles teach. On the other hand, we believe that God placed that authority in his word.

That the scripture contains the apostles' teaching. The church doesn't dictate, but rather submits to scripture and the apostles' teaching. That's sola scriptura from the Reformation.

And now one classic Catholic argument for apostolic succession comes from this passage, that just as Matthias replaced Judas, there should be successors for other apostles also.

But that's not really valid. I don't think that's a good argument because, number one, Judas wasn't really a true apostle. Judas, or any other successor later, so Judas didn't satisfy the criteria to be an apostle.

[29 : 45] He didn't see the risen Christ, and he definitely wasn't there for the resurrection because he was dead. And secondly, Judas didn't receive the Holy Spirit like the rest of the Twelve.

Again, because he was dead by that time. And thirdly, later when the apostle James dies in Acts 12, there's no record of naming another successor, which is a pretty big detail to neglect if that's the foundation of a lot of other doctrines.

It's a big detail to neglect if it's such an important one. So all that's to say, if the church is built on apostolic succession and stands on shaky foundation, rather than the apostles' teaching, we should be a little careful and take things with a grain of salt.

So that's a side note on apostolic succession. But anyways, back to verse 23. They need 12 apostles to complete the 12. They need one more to complete the 12.

And so they nominate two men. Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and another guy called Matthias. These two men followed Jesus for three years along with the other 11 apostles, and so they fit all the criteria.

[30 : 59] They checked the two boxes. They followed him around the whole time and also saw his resurrected body. But then there remains this third criteria, that apostles had to be specifically appointed by God.

And so the church, they turned to God in prayer in order to discern his will and figure out, to see who God had appointed. So in verse 24, it says that 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.

So the church, they pray and ask God to reveal his will to them. They say, we're not the ones choosing God. You're the one choosing. Apostles have to be chosen by you. Not our will, but yours be done.

So show us your will. So far, so good. But then the church, they do something a little bit strange to us, a little bit weird, foreign to us. Verse 26, he says, and the church, they cast lots for them.

They cast lots. So to pick between these two guys, they cast lots. That's similar to maybe tossing a coin or rolling a dice in order to determine the outcome.

[32 : 12] So heads, it'll be Joseph, tails, Matthias. That's sort of like what the church did. And we learned that the lot fell on Matthias and he was numbered with 11 apostles.

So the coin landed tails and that's how Matthias was chosen. Okay. So that might seem a little weird to us because most of us now, we don't cast lots to discern God's will.

That's not something we're really taught to do. Right. We should pray. We should read scripture. But no one says cast lots. So was the church correct in casting lots?

And if they were, should we imitate them and cast lots today? We'll start with that first question. Was the church correct to use lots? And some people have said no. Which, judging from modern practice, that might seem right.

But no, they shouldn't have cast lots. They made a mistake in picking Matthias. And we know that because Matthias doesn't appear in the Bible later. He's just a minor character. Actually, after this, the only two times he appears is in these verses here.

[33:16] And he doesn't appear again. So that's just some indication that Matthias might have been a mistake. They rushed it. And yeah. Yeah. And instead, the apostle Paul, he, later in the second half of Acts, he takes a big role in Acts.

And he writes, actually, about half the books in the New Testament. So, actually, maybe Paul should have been that 12th apostle later on. And they rushed it a little bit. So that's one thing people say.

I don't think that's quite right, though. One reason is that many others of the 12 disciples, they only make a small appearance later in the New Testament also.

So Paul takes a big role. But a lot of the other apostles, they probably in Acts had a huge role to play. But they're not mentioned that much. Okay. That's the first reason.

And second reason is that Paul, apostle Paul, he doesn't meet that first criteria of being this eyewitness of Jesus throughout his entire earthly ministry from the time of John's baptism.

[34:17] So instead, I think that Paul should be considered a special apostle in addition to the 12 appointed by Jesus to reach the Gentiles. And also looking at this passage, there's no indication that the church did anything wrong.

There's no rebuke. The scripture doesn't say they were wrong in casting lots. It records that they did it. And actually, by the looks of it, they're doing everything else right. They're praying.

They're in the word. They look in every way like a community that is looking to God, obedient and seeking his will and obediently waiting for the spirit. And also casting lots, it's not something that we do.

But it's an Old Testament practice that's actually endorsed by God. It's rooted in this high view of God's sovereignty that every cast of the lot, every time you throw the lot, that falls under God's sovereignty.

When you roll the dice, it lands on four just because God has ordained it. God is in control of absolutely everything. And so the church, they're trusting that God is in control, even over the roll of a dice.

[35:18] And he would make sure that the result is what he wanted. And casting lots, it's actually in the book of Joshua, they cast lots in order to divide up some of the land.

So casting of lots has this role in the foundation of Israel also. So I believe that the church, they were obedient in casting lots. That was something fine for them to do.

But the second question is, if they were correct to do it, should we also use lots to discern God's will today? Is that something we should do today? Now remember, the church back then, they were in this period of waiting.

They were commissioned by Jesus to go, but they were waiting for something. They were waiting for the promise of the Holy Spirit. And the arrival of the Holy Spirit, that marks a completely new way in which God relates to us.

This practice of casting lots, it belongs to this old era, the old covenant. So after the Spirit comes, which is next week in chapter two, God relates to us in a new way.

[36:20] And after the Spirit comes, we don't see any other record of the church casting lots anymore. They don't use this way to discern anymore. They're still praying. They're really intently seeking God's will in prayer.

And actually, before every major turn in acts, almost always the church is in prayer. They're seeking God's will, but doing so through the Spirit rather than this roll of the dice.

So same for us now. We should keep praying, holding fast to Scripture. But rather than casting lots, we have something better. Something better than throwing a dice. And that's the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is just more personal. Gives us wisdom. That's just a better and more personal way of making decisions than by throwing a dice. That's the way we make decisions now.

Romans 12 says, we do so by being transformed in the renewal of your mind. That's how we make decisions. So that by testing, you may discern what is the will of God.

[37 : 18] What is good and acceptable and perfect. Have our minds transformed such that our desires, they're aligned with God's desires. And our choices are aligned with God's choices.

That's what the Spirit does in us. Transforming us so that we make decisions like God. We want what is pleasing to God. And so we don't need to read tea leaves because now with the arrival of the Spirit, God speaks to us personally and he guides us personally.

So last year when I proposed to my wife Jojo, I took her on the scavenger hunt. That's how I proposed. So we used to live close to each other in the Jordan TST area. And I guess now we still live close to each other in Taiwai.

But anyways, I took her on scavenger hunt around different spots that we used to hang out. Spots that are memorable to us. So one was Donkey.

That's where we first met for an accidental first date. And then Avenue of Stars where I accidentally took her for this romantic light show. And then this park where we broke up once, which is a long story.

[38 : 25] A story for another time. But yeah, I'll tell you, I know quite a bit about waiting. Until at last, I brought her to the roof garden in my clubhouse.

And that's where I finally proposed. But imagine if Jojo instead, she just rolled the dice. And she's like, oh, clubhouse. I'm going straight there. And just made a beeline to that roof garden all by herself.

That'd be a pretty lame proposal. I'd be hearing about it for months. That'd be pretty bad. No, it was better, actually, for us to take our time, spending time together, laughing, enjoying the afternoon together, me by her side, holding her hand every step of the way.

She wasn't lost guessing also at what I wanted her to do, where I wanted to go. Because at each stop, there's this clue telling her what's next. She had to do some work to figure it out.

But yeah, there's some guidance telling her what's next. And if she was totally stumped, I was right there. She could just ask me. And I could give her a hint. And she didn't have to worry about where she was heading.

[39 : 31] Because even if she got totally wrong and went the wrong way, I'd just take her by the hand, spin her around, and say, hey, actually, babe, it's that way. And also, she knew I was going to propose that day.

There's no doubt there. She knew where she was heading. And she knew I would make sure I got her there. That's how God guides us now by the Spirit. He's by our side.

And not just by our side. Even better than that. He dwells within our hearts. So we don't have to worry and be anxious about tomorrow. We can be free to simply enjoy. We can enjoy the journeys taking us on, looking to Him.

Right? There's decisions to make. Which school, which job, which person. But we can make those decisions freely, knowing that He's guiding us every step of the way.

That He wants the best for us. He's guiding us to do His mission. And He wants the best for us. We just need to walk humbly with Him.

[40 : 29] In step with Him. Looking to Him for guidance. He gives us wisdom in Scripture. Revealing to us who He is and what He wants. And so we can conform our mind to think the way He does.

He also answers us when you ask for direction in prayer. We can ask for His will. And He speaks to us by the Spirit also. And we can have confidence in seeking Him out.

Because we know that Jesus loves His bride. He loves His church. And He will see to it that we make it home safely to this wedding feast of the Lamb. So let's keep that in mind when we wait and seek God's will.

When we need to wait and make decisions. That God loves us. He is for us. When we wait, let us be devoted to praying together. 1030. I want to see you there.

If you can make it. But let's be devoted to prayer together. If not that, just have this conviction that this is God's will. That we have a purpose here. And He wants to show our church how we are to scatter and reach the nation.

[41:34] And how to glorify Him. It's His battle, His mission. He cares about winning this war far more than we do. So let's be church that's devoted to praying together. And let us trust in God's will as revealed in Scripture.

Knowing that He is Lord of all. Every trial in this life. Every bump in the road. Every twist. They are all part of His plan. And one day, looking in heaven, we'll be looking back.

We'll look back on all those. And there'll be stories that we'll tell. To praise God for all that He's done. That He was with us even in our darkest moments. And He brought us safely home. And let us also discern His will.

In freedom, without fear. We don't have to worry. But keep our eyes on Him. Because His Spirit dwells within us. So that's how we wait in God's will as we prepare to scatter.

That's how we look to God's will in our waiting. What a blessing it is to have God's Spirit. Better than the roll of a dice. But more on that next week as we get to Acts 2.

[42:37] Which is the arrival of the Holy Spirit. This pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost. That's coming up next week. Until then, we wait. Let's pray. Lord, we look to you.

You are the sovereign Lord over all. And, yeah. You love your church. You will see to it that we make it home to you in heaven.

And that we bring every one of the sheep that you died for. You know your sheep. They hear your voice. Lord, as we prepare to scatter. As we're thinking about scattering.

Would you guide our church? Show us where it is in Hong Kong. Who it is around us. Our friends, family, coworkers. Random people on the street. As we're walking along.

Show us by your spirit. Who it is that we can share Christ with. Show us how it is as a church we can organize. And go out. And also, Lord, give us a heart for the nations.

[43:38] And give us ways. Show us how we can be supporting your work around the world. Lord, we look to you. Make us a church that truly believes. That this is your mission.

You will accomplish it. That you love us. You want to work through us. Make us a church that is devoted to prayer. That trusts in your word. And show us your will, Lord.

We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's stand and respond in song. God, we know the battle does belong to you.

Amen. We know that whether we're in a season of waiting. A season of trusting your hands to lead and guide us.

We don't necessarily maybe know where we're going. But we know you do. And so we're trusting you. Whether we're in a season of absolute clarity in our life.

[44:46] And we're living our best life right now. We know that no matter where we're at. That the battle does belong to you.

That you are fighting with us. That you are fighting for us. That you are speaking. That you are leading. That you are guiding.

And that you are for us. That you are for us. And that you care for us. And that you love us. And you see what it is that we're walking through.

let's just sit here for a minute maybe we can sing the song one more time and I want to encourage you with wherever you are at if you are in a season of waiting and trusting God in the midst of uncertainty and you need prayer ask a friend beside you to pray for you and if you're like oh shoot I have no friends here today well we're all your friends ask someone beside you or come up ask Pastor Gabe or someone but we do want to make a space that we realize life is real and hard and good and we have a God who is fighting with us and for us and sometimes we just as Gabe talked about we just need to come to him in prayer and so as we sing the song one more time if you need prayer ask for it if you feel God speaking to you about your friend who needs prayer go and pray for them but let's spend a few minutes in prayer today and so God we lay all our fears at your feet today we lay them at your feet and we trust you with them and we say take them take our fears and carry them for us take our uncertainty take our lack of faith we trust you with it Father and as we go out today we know that you go before us and that you go with us into whatever we're walking into and we praise you for that and we rejoice in that so may this not end here but may it continue throughout our weeks in our workplaces may we know you're moving in our lives in your name we pray amen amen