

How to Wait on the Lord - Acts 1:12-26

Introduction

I believe we would all agree that we have become an increasingly impatient society

I am old enough to remember when a person actually needed to make a trip to the store to see what was available for purchase

Then the Yellow Pages started encouraging us to “Let [our] fingers do the walking” in order to help us cut down our time spent on our shopping trips

Now we have Amazon Prime and free two-day shipping and heaven help the retailer who can’t deliver the goods fast enough because they won’t be in business for very long

Even meal time is a cause for impatience

Drive-through lanes make it so we don’t even need to get out of our cars to procure a meal

And microwave ovens have reduced the time needed to heat up a dish to seconds

Still, we find ourselves tapping our foot while we wait and opening the door with 2 or 3 seconds left on the timer because we don’t want to wait the full 30 seconds that we originally programmed

We are blessed with the miracle of air travel that allows us to traverse the country in hours and not days – or even months if we go back far enough in history

And yet we chafe at departure delays and arrival times that may be only minutes later than our expectations

Tom Cruise uttered the famous line “I have the need for speed” in the movie Top Gun

Now it seems we all have a need for speed and impatience has become our reality

Waiting becomes somewhat more tolerable when we know how long we will need to wait

But two actions are typical when the delay is open-ended and a person is forced to wait longer than they believe is proper

They either seek a shortcut or they abandon their initial goal entirely and go a different direction

So, what do we do when God tells us we must wait and the wait is open-ended?

How do we handle the divine delays that so often are a part of the Christian life?

So often the moment for action seems right to us but God says, “Not yet”

Or we’re facing what seems to be a pressing decision that we need to make but God says, “Hold on”

What do we do when a clear ministry opportunity is before us and we are excited about getting busy with it but God says, “Wait”

The apostles found themselves facing all of those circumstances right after Christ’s ascension

Jesus had told them to return to Jerusalem and to wait there for the coming of the Holy Spirit

And the only timeframe they had for his arrival was “not many days from now”

How they reacted and what they did during their time of waiting is instructive for us

Our passage this morning is about a big decision facing the apostles - the choosing of Judas’ replacement

Within that narrative we see some behaviors that will serve us well as we face choices in the church

As we look at our text this morning I want us to focus on how we can be godly in our waiting and in our decision-making

Please open your Bibles and join with me at Acts 1:12-26

We will be dividing the passage into four sections that represent the Roman numerals on your note sheets

First, we will see that the apostles **Gathered to Wait** in verses 12-14

Second, we will see that they **Looked to Scripture** in verses 15-20

Third, we will see that they **Used Informed Common Sense** in verses 21-23

Lastly, we will see they **Sought Devine Guidance** in verses 24-26

When we left them last week they had been ordered by Jesus “not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father...”

So after witnessing the ascension and being awakened from their sky gazing by the angels we pick up the account today

Please follow along in your Bible as I read through the entire passage

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. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” (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 the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.” And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, 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 eleven apostles.

The first thing we see is that they **Gathered Together to Wait**

I. Gathered Together to Wait (12-14)

In their gathering together during the days of waiting we see them display **three characteristics** we should strive to emulate

A. Obedient to Christ

The first characteristic of the apostles is that they were **obedient to Christ**

They had been ordered to not depart from Jerusalem and they obeyed that command even though the Lord was no longer present

All too often we see that the saying, “When the cat’s away the mice will play” is true

But not with the apostles – they were faithful to do as they had been told and they **remained in Jerusalem**

1. Remained in Jerusalem

Here Luke records that they stayed in “the upper room” but we can’t be sure which upper room it is. Possibly it was the same upper room where they had recently observed Passover with Jesus – it makes for a nice speculation – but we just can’t be sure

It must have been a fairly large space as all eleven of the remaining apostles are listed as staying there. Along with “the women”, Mary, and Jesus’ brothers

And in verse 15 Luke mentions that there were “in all about 120” people gathered together

But we can’t be sure that all of those 120 were staying in the upper room because Luke also states in his gospel account that the apostles spent time in the temple during the days immediately following the ascension blessing God

It’s entirely plausible that the meeting regarding Judas could have taken place in one of the temple rooms as the 120 gathered with them there

2. Waited Expectantly for Holy Spirit

Next we see that they **waited expectantly for the Holy Spirit** to arrive

We began this morning by reflecting on our tendency to be impatient

And often when we grow impatient we begin to believe that what we are waiting on will never come. That’s part of the reason we look for and take shortcuts or change our goal and move on to something else

We saw that tendency just a few weeks ago as we looked at the example of Saul and how he grew impatient waiting for Samuel and went ahead and improperly offered sacrifice to the Lord and how he lost his throne because of his impatience

Just imagine the tension in that upper room

Consider all the apostles, and possibly some of the other joined with them, had just experienced

- 40 days of Jesus’ miraculous comings and goings
- Jesus’ teaching, showing, and revealing things to them
- Their hearts burning within them
- The final instructions from the Lord and his reminder of the promised Holy Spirit
- Jesus’ ascension into heaven in the cloud of glory and the appearance of the angels
- And then...waiting

They could possibly be excused if they had been impatient but what we see instead of impatience is an **air of expectancy** – they truly believed the Holy Spirit was about to arrive bringing power with him
And so they stayed and waited just as they were told – they were obedient

The next two characteristics show us how they were able to wait patiently

B. United in Fellowship

First we see they were **unified in fellowship** with one another

Whereas people today might well be irritable about the wait and possibly even at each other's throats – that was not the case with the apostles in the upper room

1. No Longer in Competition

I find it interesting that Luke names each of the eleven apostles in this passage

Looking at the list we see that these were the same guys who often bickered and disputed with one another over who would be greatest

Peter was the outspoken, sometimes rash guy who denied Jesus those three times not so long ago

John and James were the Sons of Thunder who wanted to call down fire on the inhospitable Samaritan village

Thomas was the doubting pessimist of the group

Matthew was the tax collector who worked for Rome and **Simon** was the zealot who wanted to see Rome removed from power over Israel

They were a group of men who had to get on each other's nerves from time to time

But here we see they are **no longer in competition** with one another

2. Of One Accord

All of that seems to have ceased and now Luke says they were all **of one accord**

Their perspective had changed and position was no longer important

They had a new focus – the coming Holy Spirit and the commission before them

C. Devoted to Prayer

The second characteristic that led to their patience is that they were **devoted to prayer**

1. Committed and Persistent – “Devoted themselves to”

They were **committed and persistent** in their prayers – that's the meaning behind devoted

They didn't idle their time away – they were busy with prayer

As they were waiting for the Holy Spirit to arrive perhaps they remembered Jesus' teaching from **Luke 11:13** where he said –

“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, **how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!**”

Remembering that truth and connecting it to the promised coming Holy Spirit likely gave them the ability to pray with confidence

Maybe they were thinking of the story of the importune neighbor who got the bread he needed because of his persistence and so they devoted themselves to continual prayer

2. Universal – “All”

Next we see that this devotion to prayer was **universal** – all were so inclined

And this “all” included not just the apostles but all those who were also in the upper room with them

Even though they were not commanded to pray but only to wait for the Holy Spirit I’m sure they thought back to Jesus’ own example and his teachings and patterned their behavior accordingly

Their example of obedience and expectant belief that resulted in them all pulling together to persistently pray in harmony with one another is one we would do well to reproduce today when we face those inevitable divine delays that God inserts into our lives

II. Looked to Scripture (15-20)

They also **looked to Scripture** for insight and in so doing they recognized a deficiency to correct

A. Saw the Fulfillment in Judas' Betrayal

Thinking back to the Last Supper that they attended with Jesus in the upper room we will recall that the apostles were mystified when Jesus revealed that one of their number would betray him

We see in **Luke 22:23** that they began to question one another trying to find the betrayer

This tells us that Judas didn't give off any obvious signs that he was the one – he looked and acted the same as the others

Now, when looking back in hindsight Peter stands up in his typical leadership role among them and reveals what he saw in Scripture regarding Judas and his betrayal

Peter saw that the betrayal was not a hindrance to God's plan but the **fulfillment** of it

It was **necessary** for Judas to betray Christ as he did

Peter also saw clearly that Judas was responsible for his actions

Peter says that Judas was "numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry"

Judas was hand-picked by Jesus just as they all were

He had the same opportunities as the rest but he chose differently

Looking ahead to **verse 25** we see that Peter understood that Judas had decided of his own volition to turn aside

And Peter saw that even the details of the betrayal had been foretold long ago as he quotes from the Psalms

The first Psalm quoted was **Psalm 69:25** which showed the detail of the Field of Blood

The field was made twice unclean having been purchased with blood money and then by virtue of Judas' blood being spilled upon it as we see in **Deuteronomy 35:33**

B. Saw the Implication of Judas' Absence

In the second Psalm, **Psalm 109:8**, Peter saw the **implication of Judas' absence** from their number

Peter saw that their number was now incomplete and that they must choose another man to take Judas' place

The reason another had to be selected was because Judas had turned aside and betrayed Christ – Not because he had died

We deduce that because there was no attempt to replace any of the other apostles as they died later

In Luke 22 we find the account of the disciples arguing about who would be regarded as the greatest

And in **Luke 22:30** we see Jesus promise they would sit on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel

The number of apostles who remained loyal unto death so as to be resurrected to judge had to be 12

But Judas had turned aside and was no longer fit to judge so he had to be replaced

The idea of replacing Judas was born of obedience and a desire to fulfill God's Word it was not a product of human invention or of their own desire or design

They clearly saw this step as necessary to fulfill the prophecy of the Holy Spirit given through David

III. Used Informed Common Sense (21-23)

While the need to select a replacement was straight out of the Old Testament the parameters for the selection were determined by using **informed common sense**

God has given us minds and he expects us to use them

The qualifications that Peter lists for selecting the replacement are not stated anywhere in Scripture
But Peter saw a pattern to work from

We also must often do the same as we face dilemmas in our daily lives

Where Scripture doesn't directly address the issue we must look for patterns and principles that God will use to inform our thinking and then we need to use the brains God gave us to direct our actions

Let's look at how the apostles proceeded to solve their problem...

A. Set Qualifications for Judas' Replacement

Peter set **two qualifications** for Judas' replacement

First, the replacement had to have been with them from the time of Jesus' baptism by John through his ascension

Second, the replacement had to be a witness to the resurrection

In other words, the replacement had to have been present during the entirety of Jesus' earthly ministry and had to have seen Jesus face-to-face after his resurrection

The apostles were clearly obedient, united, prayerful, in the Word, and desirous of fulfilling God's will
Because of this God blessed them in their thinking, insights, and deductions

God gave them the ability to think clearly and properly so as to come to the right determination

And we have every reason to believe that he will do the same for each one of us when we are faithful to do the same as the apostles were doing

The reasoning behind the qualifications is this –

The role of the apostles was to be witnesses of Christ and the apostolic message was to be the message of an eyewitness

It had to be a first-hand account to prevent detractors from saying it was mere opinion or legend

Therefore, the first qualification was that the replacement had to be an associate of Jesus during the entire time of his ministry

Then, the replacement had to have seen the resurrected Christ face-to-face in order to dispel the false tales that were going around regarding the disappearance of Jesus' body

The qualifications ensured that the replacement would be able to speak authoritatively and accurately about Jesus' ministry during his life on earth and his resurrection and ascension

B. Narrowed Field of Candidates to Two Men

Looking around and applying the qualifications caused them to **narrow the field of candidates to two men Justus and Matthias**

We know nothing further about either of these two men as neither of them is mentioned again after this incident

Apparently they were the only two who met the qualifications and either would have made a suitable replacement

I find it interesting that the apostles didn't resort to a vote once the two candidates were selected
But this was not a democratic popularity contest so they had to come up with another means of
making the choice between the two seemingly qualified men

So, to make the final choice they turned to God and **sought divine guidance**

IV. Sought Divine Guidance (24-26)

Notice the first thing they did after narrowing the field of candidates

They prayed

We have just seen how they were in committed, persistent, unified prayer as a general rule and now we see that they prayed concerning this specific matter as they asked for God's choice to be revealed to them

A. Looked to What Jesus Had Done

And next we see what was revealed to them through their prayers about how they should proceed First, they **looked to what Jesus had done** in selecting them to be apostles

Look with me at **Luke 6:12-13** where we will see the account of Jesus choosing the twelve

In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles

B. Applied It to Their Circumstance

Having looked to what Jesus had done when choosing them they **applied it to their circumstance**

Just as Jesus had prayed before making his selection of the twelve the apostles now prayed asking for the replacement to be revealed

C. Relied on God to Make the Final Choice

And then they **relied on God to make the final choice**

Jesus had personally selected each of the twelve so they now leave it up to Jesus to select the replacement

And we see that the method they employed to determine Jesus' selection was the casting of lots

Much ado is made about whether or not it was proper for the apostles to cast lots in this matter and whether we should cast lots today

What we need to remember is that the casting of lots was the common way of determining God's will in the Old Testament

Relying on the lot showed a **dependence on God** and a **reliance on his providence**

Proverbs 16:33 says – The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

In other words, man may roll the dice but God determines what numbers come up

Taking that as truth, the casting of lots was an effective and justified means of determining God's will

In fact, casting lots was the method God instructed many times in the Old Testament

Notably when the land was divided amongst the tribes of Israel lots were the method used

The apostles did nothing wrong in casting lots to determine which candidate was proper

The question remains though as to whether we should rely on the casting of lots today

Nowhere in the New Testament are believers instructed to cast lots and casting of lots is not mentioned again after this occasion which leads us to believe that its time has passed

Today we have the completed Word of God and the indwelling Holy Spirit – neither of which the apostles had when Matthias was chosen

It would seem far preferable to rely on their guidance than to look to a coin toss for major decisions

Although I have to admit a chuckle when I read one author's thoughts concerning lots – he wrote

“The casting of lots may be an imperfect way to discern God’s will, but it is much better than the methods many Christians use today; relying on emotions, circumstances, feelings, carnal desires, and so forth.”

I suppose given those choices the reverent, prayerful casting of lots might be the preferable option

Conclusion

There is a fair amount of scholarly debate between godly individual concerning whether the filing of Judas’ position by Matthias was proper or whether Paul was really God’s choice to make the 12th apostle

While I believe they are well-intentioned I just cannot agree with those who say that choosing Matthias was a mistake

As we read Paul’s own writings we see that he repeatedly makes a distinction between his apostleship and that of the 12

He refers to himself not as a lesser apostle in any way but as “one untimely born”

Paul would likely have refuted the idea that he should have been Judas’ replacement as he knew quite well that he didn’t meet the requirement of having been a part of Jesus’ earthly ministry

Besides, look at the steps taken by the apostles as they remained in Jerusalem

- They were obedient to the direct command of the Lord
- They were unified in their fellowship with one another – they were of one accord
- They were engaged in committed, persistent, like-minded prayer
- They were actively in God’s Word seeking to understand and apply it in their lives
- They were openly desirous of God’s will and actively seeking it
- They were using the brains God gave them to make godly, informed decisions
- They were doing what Jesus did in carrying out their tasks
- They were endeavoring to rely on God asking him to clearly reveal his will

After all of that, how can we assume they made a bad decision?

How many bad decisions do you think we would make as individual believers or better yet as a church if we could say that all of those things were true of us when faced with a challenging decision?

The apostles and the others could have been impatient as they were made to wait for the Holy Spirit

They could have spent their time grumbling

They could have been looking for a short-cut

Or they could have cut and run

But they remained faithful and they waited as they were told to do even as they endeavored to use their time in a God-honoring manner

At this point in Acts the place vacated by Judas has been filled but the place vacated by Jesus has not and the apostles are still waiting for the arrival of the Holy Spirit

Next week we will look at **Acts 2:1-13** and we will see the wait pay off as the Holy Spirit arrives in a spectacular fashion

Let’s pray.