

Signs of Life: In the Waiting Room

Acts 1:9-26

2/14/2026

Scripture

Acts 1:9-26 (NKJV) [9] Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. [10] And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, [11] who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." [12] Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. [13] And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. [14] These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. [15] And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, [16] "Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; [17] for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry." [18] (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. [19] And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) [20] "For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.' [21] "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, [22] beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." [23] And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. [24] And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen [25] to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." [26] And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Intro:

Last week, we talked about the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit's power in the life of the church. We said plainly that without the Spirit, we can still gather, still sing, still preach, still organize... but we cannot bear spiritual fruit that transforms hearts. At best, we can create activity. We cannot create life.

But here's the question that naturally follows that conversation:

What should a church's posture look like behind the power they receive? What do God's people do in the waiting room of a move of God's Spirit?

Acts 1 answers that question.

This passage sits in a parenthetical gap of redemptive history. Jesus has ascended. The promise of the Spirit has been given. But Pentecost has not yet happened. The disciples are standing in the waiting room of God's promise of power.

And what we see here is striking.

They are not frantic. They are not passive. They are not trying to manufacture momentum. They are positioning themselves in obedience, prayer, Scripture, and trust.

In other words, before the church is clothed with power in Acts 2, it assumes a posture in Acts 1. This text shows us the signs of spiritual life in a church that is waiting on God rather than trying to replace Him.

That's what I want us to see today.

Main Point

Point 1

They lived in expectation of Christ's Return

Scripture

Acts 1:9-11 (NKJV) [9] Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. [10] And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, [11] who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

These “two men” indicate angelic messengers sent to brand into the hearts and minds of the first church the reality that Jesus was coming back. They were looking up into the sky, wondering, perhaps a bit downtrodden by the thought of Jesus leaving them. What an important reminder that they could get to work, empowered by the coming promise of the Spirit, knowing that their work wouldn’t be in vain because Jesus was going to return.

The purpose of today’s message isn’t to teach on the return of Christ or eschatology. That’s what we did in our study of Revelation. But I do want to focus on the one word of the angelic question: WHY? Why do you stand gawking at the heavens? But The promised return of Jesus can be an answer to many of our WHY questions.

Why are you living life as if God has no plan for it? Jesus is coming again. Why are you comfortably entertaining the temporary pleasures of sin? Jesus is coming again. Why are you living for things that perish when eternal work is in front of you? Jesus is coming again.

The return of Christ is not a vague spiritual idea. It is bodily, visible, and prophetic. The same Jesus who bore scars and left the empty tomb is the Jesus who will return in glory to rule and reign.

Scripture

Philippians 3:20 (NKJV) [20] For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...

Scripture

Hebrews 9:28 (NKJV) [28] so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

Quote

— Pastor Josh

“If we lose the expectation of Christ’s return, the church quietly starts acting like this world is home instead of a hallway.”

Application

Our heavenly expectation shapes our earthly posture. People who live as though Christ might return reorder their priorities. They hold sin more loosely and obedience more tightly. Eschatology is never meant to produce charts alone. It produces sobriety, urgency, and hope.

Scripture

1 John 3:2-3 (NKJV) [2] Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. [3] And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The disciples then did not live staring into the sky while doing nothing of any value on earth, but they did live with a constant expectation toward heaven. They went back into Jerusalem knowing history was moving toward a King who had promised to come back.

Main Point

Point 2

They walked in obedience to Christ's Command

Scripture

Acts 1:12-13 (NKJV) [12] Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. [13] And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James.

According to Acts 1:4, Jesus had told them to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father. One of the most important things the disciples did after Jesus ascended was obey His words to return to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is about a half a mile walk from the Mount of Olives. When the Bible speaks of a Sabbath Day's journey, don't think they were walking all day. It was the accepted distance of a walk that one could make on the Sabbath.

Waiting was not their idea. It was obedience. In fact, from a strategic standpoint, Jerusalem was the last place you would expect a fragile group of Galilean disciples to gather. It was the city that had crucified their Rabbi and that threatened their very existence. Yet heres the thing about obedience: it rarely asks whether something feels safe. It asks whether something is faithful.

Notice the quiet detail Luke gives: they return to the upper room. Some scholars suggest there is no god reason not to assume this is the same space where Jesus had washed their feet, instituted the Supper, and spoken of the coming Spirit.

It was here where the journey would begin to the day of Pentecost when the Spirit's power would cloth them for bold supernatural witness to a lost world. Imagine if the discussion was different...

"Well Peter, Jesus said go to Jerusalem, but the Galilee would be safer and more familiar. Here we are in Jerusalem, but nothing has happened, perhaps it's time to take the reigns!" But by this time, the disciples new better than to question or bypass the commands of Jesus. They saw His rise from a grace and ascend in power toward heaven! With that vision in their minds, their mentality wasn't well, Jesus, let's have a discussion or debate about this." No, it was "Jesus said it, we will do it." That needs to be our heart postures today.

Quote

— Pastor Josh

"Many Christians want power before they practice obedience. The order in Acts is the reverse. The Spirit fills those who first obey."

Main Point

Point 3

They practiced united prayer

Scripture

Acts 1:14 (NKJV) [14] These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Upon returning to Jerusalem, the first followers of the risen Jesus have to determine HOW they will wait for the promise of the Father. They practiced the thing that they would have known in their time spent with Jesus. "When we don't know where to go or what to do, we can rely on the surefire practice of prayer."

It should be noted that every chapter in the book of Acts has a mention of prayer. Prayer was the powerhouse supply-line of the witness that flowed from the early church.

They didn't launch into a strategic meeting, though they have their place. They didn't start meeting with all of the officials in Jerusalem. They closed the door and they began to seek the Lord "in one accord." No, Honda cars weren't in vogue back then. This phrase indicates having one mind and one heart. I'm confident there were plenty of things that these people could have divided and complained and fought about. There might have been some baggage from events that took place before Jesus rose from the dead—disciples abandoning, Peter's betrayal, among other things. But one thing they could all agree on was that they should pray and cry out to the Lord.

Quote

— Wiersbe, W. W.

"Prayer is both the thermometer and the thermostat of the local church; for the spiritual temperature either goes up or down, depending on how God's people pray."

Prayer was not the warm-up act for Pentecost. It was the furnace where their dependence on God was purified. They did not pray to summon power within themselves. They prayed because they knew they had no power apart from God.

Quote

— Pastor Josh

You will never go wrong when prayer goes before practice.

Application

Churches often talk about being "Spirit-led," but prayerlessness reveals functional self-reliance. United prayer is a confession that we do not have what we need in ourselves. It's not that it's wrong to do things other than prayer, only to do those things without prayer. The church that prays together learns to listen together. The church that never prays together will inevitably fracture over secondary things because the vision wasn't forged in the presence of God.

Main Point

Point 4

They trusted God's written Word

Scripture

Acts 1:15-22 (NKJV) [15] And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, [16] "Men and brethren, this Scripture (emphasis) had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; [17] for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry." [18] (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. [19] And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) [20] "For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.' [21] "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, [22] beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

Again, we could do an entire sermon right here on Judas, but I want to make sure we understand the picture of what's going on. Peter stands up and interprets Scripture. He frames Judas' betrayal through Psalms 69 and 109—Psalms of King David. The Same David that prophetically spoke about the suffering Messiah in Psalm 22 and the triumphal entry of the Messiah in Psalm 118.

This is not Peter winging it or grasping for straws from the scripture. It is Peter reading Israel's Scriptures through the prophetic lens Jesus had given them (Luke 24:44–45).

Scripture

Luke 24:44-45 (NKJV) [44] Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." [45] And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

The cross and resurrection had opened their eyes to see that Scripture had been telling this story all along. In the waiting, and after praying, Peter went back to what He knew to be true, God's inspired, written Word.

Psalm 69 is a powerful Psalm that outlines the crucifixion and the betrayal of Jesus. Pulling straight from the scripture's context, Peter recognizes that this was speaking of Judas.

In Psalm 109, we see the betrayal of Jesus in incredibly vivid detail:

[Psa 109:2 NKJV] 2 For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful have opened against me; They have spoken against me with a lying tongue.

And the Psalmist then concludes: [Psa 109:8 NKJV] 8 Let his days be few, [And] let another take his office.

And there're a couple of points to clarify...

First, Matthew 27:7 says the chief priests paid for the potter's field, but since it was the money they gave to Judas in Acts 1, Luke says Judas made the purchase. There are also some gory details of Judas' death. upon hanging himself, apparently to rope didn't hold and his body burst open on the rocks below. But the point is, Peter is taking his cues from the Scripture. In reading Psalm 109, he realizes Judas should be replaced... And this is where today's church needs to be getting its guidance - from the Bible!

There are many today that pick and choose scriptures to "prophecy" things according to their own whims, desires or agendas. That is not what Peter is doing. Peter is understanding the prophetic nature of the scripture, but seeing it in its context and applying it to the very real circumstances they were facing.

Application

And no, it's not unspiritual to simply be led by what the Word of God plainly says. The Spirit had not yet been poured out, but the Word had already been opened. The same Spirit who would fill them at Pentecost had already authored the Scriptures they were now obeying. Walking by the Word is not Spirit-less living. In fact, we can safely say that the Spirit does not lead contrary to the Word He inspired. Often His leading comes through ordinary faithfulness to what is already written.

Quote

— Pastor Josh

Many believers want fresh revelation while neglecting revealed truth.

God's will is often clearer than we pretend. The question is not whether God has spoken, but whether we are listening to what He has already said.

Challenge:

Can I ask you today to consider areas of your life where you are experiencing confusion, or perhaps consequences that are a direct result of a lack of submission and obedience to what God has already clearly said in His Word?

Main Point

Point 5

They leaned on God's leading

Scripture

Acts 1:23-26 (NKJV) [23] And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. [24] And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen [25] to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." [26] And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Finally, the chapter ends with, what may seem to many through a modern, western lens, as some mystical hogwash to try and guess at God's will. How will they choose the needed replacement for Judas? By casting lots?

First, there were some practical requirements. An apostle had to be someone who was a firsthand witness to the life of Christ, from the moment he was baptized by John to the moment he ascended to heaven. Among 120 individuals, there were only two that fit the bill: Matthias and Joseph (Barsabas). The steps that follow have been topics of debate among many in the church, but the intent seems clear to me.

Biblically, casting lots (an ancient rolling of the dice) was a recognized means of entrusting decisions to God's sovereign hand (Proverbs 16:33 - The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.).

This is not divination. It is submission. It's not trusting the lot, but trusting the Lord Who causes it to land appropriately. They do not manipulate the outcome. First, they pray, acknowledge Christ as the One who knows every heart, and entrust the final choice to God.

Custom

The selection of Matthias is often treated with suspicion by modern readers. Some argue the disciples jumped the gun, that they should have waited for the Spirit, and that Paul was God's "real" choice for the twelfth apostle. The text simply does not support that conclusion. First, Luke offers no hint of rebuke or correction. In fact, the narrative moves forward without any eyebrow raise. If this were a misstep, Acts would be the place to show it. Luke is not shy about recording failures. The silence here is not awkward. It is approving. Second, Paul himself never claims to be part of "the Twelve." He consistently distinguishes his apostleship from theirs. In 1 Corinthians 15:5–8, Paul lists Christ's resurrection appearances: first to Cephas, then to the Twelve, then to many others, and finally to Paul "as to one untimely born" (or "born out of due time"). Paul places himself in a different category. He is truly an apostle, called directly by the risen Christ, but not a replacement for Judas within the symbolic framework of the Twelve.

Additionally, I believe this is one of the places in the Bible that is descriptive more than prescriptive. This practice scripturally disappears after Pentecost. Once the Spirit is poured out, guidance takes a more internal, Spirit-wrought shape. We read things like "Peter, filled with the Spirit" or "led by the Spirit" or "hindered by the Spirit." But that does not make this moment unspiritual, faithless, or untrusting. It makes it appropriate to its moment and context in redemptive history. They used the tools God had already given them. Before Pentecost, lots were a biblically sanctioned means of discerning God's will. After Pentecost, the Spirit's indwelling guidance becomes more prominent. In both cases, the posture is the same: humble dependence.

Application

We should not demand mystical experiences when God has given us prayer, Scripture, godly counsel, wisdom, and sanctified reason. Sometimes faith looks like making the best decision you can with open and surrendered hands, saying, "Lord, You see what we cannot. I trust you in this decision to accomplish your will." Spiritual maturity is not always marked by dramatic guidance but by quiet surrender. The question is not, "Did I feel something supernatural?" The question is, "Did I submit my decision to the Lordship of Christ?"

Conclusion:

As we step back and look at these five signs of life in the waiting room, a clear pattern emerges.

They lived in expectation of Christ's return. They walked in obedience to Christ's commands. They practiced united prayer. They trusted God's written Word. They leaned on God's leading.

Notice what is absent. There is no hustle to build a worldly platform. There is no attempt to manufacture revival. There is no strategy meeting about how to keep momentum going after Jesus left. Instead, there is a church that believes God is faithful enough to keep His promises without their manipulation.

This is where I think the modern church often gets it backward, I know there have been seasons I have. We want the fruit of Acts 2 without the faithfulness of Acts 1. We want power without posture. We want activity without submission. We want to experience the excitement of God's hand without sitting still under the authority of God's Word.

But Scripture shows us that the Spirit does not fall on chaos. He fills vessels that are already surrendered. So here is the pastoral question I want to leave you with:

Application

If God chose to delay His next move in your life... If the answer to your prayer did not come quickly... If the breakthrough did not happen on your timeline... Would your waiting look like worship, or would it look like frustration? Would your waiting look like prayer, or would it look like panic? Would your waiting look like obedience, or would it look like you taking matters into your own hands? Because the waiting room is not wasted space in the kingdom of God. It is the place where faith is forged, where pride is stripped, and where hearts are positioned to actually receive what God is about to give. And the beautiful truth of Acts 1 is this: The same God who asked them to wait... is the God who kept His promise. He still does. Let's pray.