

Part 2: A Christian Guide to Waiting

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As we near the end of graduation season, it's fitting to open with a stanza from Dr. Seuss's book, "O the Places You'll Go." The good doctor warns us of the "waiting place." In his own words, it is a place where everyone is "waiting for a train to go or a bus to come, or a plane to go or the mail to come, or the rain to go or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow or waiting around for a Yes or No, or waiting for their hair to grow. Everyone is just waiting."

In our experience, most of our life is waiting. In football it's called running out the clock. In revenge, it's called biding your time. In the workplace it's called working for the weekend. In school it's called senioritis. For some of us this waiting produces something called boredom, for others, it's called anxiety.

The author William Faulkner once said, "And sure enough, even waiting will end...if you can just wait long enough."

We have recently finished Luke's gospel, and have just begun Luke's second book, the book of Acts. And in the ending of the gospel and the opening pages of Acts, Jesus instructs his disciples to wait. In Luke 24:49 he says, "Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high," and last week as we opened to book of Acts Jesus, "ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4).

The first chapter of the book of Acts spans 50 days. 40 days of Jesus' post resurrection ministry, then 10 days of waiting before the day of Pentecost which we will look at next week. Our passage this morning highlights those unique 10 days of waiting. This might be the oddest time period in the history of the Christian Church—they've got no Christ on earth, nor fullness of Spirit from above.

To us it might seem like a blank page in the story of God's salvation, but there are no blank pages when we worship a sovereign God. By examining how these disciples filled their time before they were filled with the Holy Spirit we can find encouragement in our own waiting for Christ to come again.

It was nearly 2,000 years ago that Jesus told John in the book of Revelation, "Behold, I am coming soon." And we certainly need help to manage our own waiting in the meantime. The instructions we see today save us from static boredom, and from anxious toil.

Our sermon title today is simple: **A Christian's Guide to Waiting**. Or an alternative title, "A Christian's guide to working." For the pattern we see today is fruitful work even while we wait. In our passage we will examine three habits of a church in waiting. First we will see a commitment to **Relying Upon the Father in Prayer**, then a consistent **Hearing the Holy Spirit in Scripture** and lastly a **Submitting to Jesus through Apostolic Ministry**.

I remember when Sarah and I left the hospital after we had our first child. As we walked away from the doctors and nurses we both looked at each other with a similar realization: "They just let us go? Are we ready for this?"

The truth was, we were not! We had just moved into a new house and were busy unpacking boxes when Sarah's water broke. But as we returned from the hospital—we found members of our church family already working to unpack our boxes and stock our fridge. One couple, kindly showed us that we had already strapped our son into his car seat the wrong way.

Similarly, Jesus' last interaction with the disciples showed that they didn't fully understand what was happening yet—and then he himself just left. Yet even before he gave them his Spirit—he had given the pattern of his teaching and each other. And it's in this community of the church that Jesus so trusted the growth of his church. All the patterns we see today are patterns of a community.

And we see this chiefly in our first point this morning as a diverse community is seen, **Relying Upon the Father in Prayer. (Acts 1:12-14)**, "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."

Here we see the disciples practicing in Jesus' absence what he had been preparing them to do in his presence. No gospel writer stresses Jesus prayer as much as Luke. It was Jesus' disciples who appealed to him in Luke 11, "Lord, teach us how to pray." I think it is a genuine mark of a growing Christian that the closer we are to Jesus, the more natural prayer becomes.

And there's hope here for all of us, remember it was only a month or so ago that Jesus took his disciples on a prayer retreat to Gethsemane and they all fell asleep. This prayer didn't miraculously grow, but instead by constantly submitting themselves to what was work—it became naturally wonderful.

And we can see three attributes of their prayer life which is helpful for us both in our study of Acts and in our own lives.

Notice first, the ***fellowship of their prayers***.

Luke begins by showing us the remaining 11 apostles were together, but then he shows us the broader community involved in this fellowship of prayer: the women, Mary Jesus' mother, and his brothers. We can probably assume by the word "brothers" showing up in verse 15 again, that it is certainly broader than Jesus' half-siblings born of Mary and Joseph.

Luke uses a phrase that will come up several times in our first two chapters today. Here that phrase is translated "one accord." They were "with one accord" in prayer. The verb stresses a unique togetherness, a wonderful unity and a deep fellowship.

In the temple structure there were all these courts, segregated based off who you were. The gentiles had to pray in the court furthest out, then there was the court of the women, further in the court of the men, and then finally the court of the priests. But here the priesthood of the believers were together in one accord.

It's been often reported that when new members would visit Spurgeon's church he would take them downstairs into the basement and show them the prayer room calling it the "engine room" or "boiler room" for the church. Saying that "if this were to stop, the whole mill would grind to a stop."

Often when we don't know what to do, it is the fellowship of the believers who encourage us by drawing us together and to the Lord in prayer. Men, we have a prayer breakfast coming up—and I would encourage as many who can to attend. In your weekly discipleship, is prayer present? Are you asking the Lord to help you discern what to do, and how to help each other? Spurgeon once said, "I'd rather teach one man to pray than ten men to preach."

Often it is the reality of our waiting which forces us to appeal to the God who is always working, and there our hearts find both rest and clarity.

But we can also discern *the fervency of their prayers*.

Luke tells us they were *devoted* to prayer. One commentator said of the Greek verb "it means resolute, sometimes obstinate, persistence."

The Puritans famously summarized their doctrine of prayer with the phrase, "pray until you start praying." In the arena of fitness, if we all waited until we felt like working out to work out—no one would work out. But the best trainers help their clients establish a pattern of going to the gym, even just to walk around, knowing that over time those patterns which are at first forced will become more frequent and more fervent.

Fervent, devoted prayer is not easily satisfied prayer. If you asked most Christians which book is most helpful to their prayer life, nearly all would say the Psalms. But if you asked Christian the reason why most do not pray, is that they feel it's not working. But if easy prayers answered with immediate effect were the motivation of a healthy prayer life there would be no book of Psalms! The Psalms are filled with devoted prayers, fervent prayers, prayers when it feels God is not listening, prayers when they know not what to do, prayers when it seems things are going wrong!

And remember here that our company of believers are devoting themselves to prayer with such fervency before the Holy Spirit even fully indwelt them! How much more ought we who have the Holy Spirit pray with such fervency. Sometimes we are lead to pray because we feel carried by the power of the Spirit. But other times, we are lead to pray by feeling the burden and limitation of our humanity, and our surpassing need of a sovereign God.

And it's on this point that I think it's helpful to speak to those who are not believers here. What we see here are genuine believers praying, but praying without the immediate comfort of the Holy Spirit. It's on this ground that I would encourage you to pray. It's my hope that in seeking questions and clarity you continue to come here and listen, and to ask the members of this church for help in understanding. But God desires to answer the prayers of those who are still finding their way to him. Ask the Lord for clarity, bring your questions to him, he is not intimidated and gospel reminds us that he desires to move towards those who are far from him.

Lastly, note *the frequency of their prayers*. The word "devoted" implies this but notice how verse 15 opens up with the phrase, "in those days." In other words this prayer meeting of fervent fellowship was not a one time event, but these days were typified with such concerted work.

They were patterned in it.

This is why we see every Sunday as a prayer meeting in combination with the other prayer events of the church. This is why our pastoral prayers are designed to go just far enough to force you to focus, to call you to encounter the “prone to wander” nature of your heart and to frequently work to build a pattern of this.

Let us be a church who in our waiting, and in our working, is filled with prayer.

Second, we see what such a life of prayer often produces. This is our second point: **Hearing the Holy Spirit in Scripture**. Notice how a church devoted to prayer produced two wonderful results. First, they are able to properly understand the Bible. And second, they are properly able to apply the Bible to their own moment in time—brining clarity for faithful work even while they faithfully wait.

Luke continues, **(Acts 1:15-20)**, "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, the 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.'"

From a big picture perspective, what we are seeing is the reasoning and justification of why another apostle needed to replace Judas. We will talk more about that in a moment, but I don't want to miss the deeper beauty of this text.

Contextually, what is going on in the life of these followers of Jesus? Well, Jesus had just spent two years teaching and traveling with them. Both in sermons, parables and conversations he taught them about the kingdom of God. Then after his resurrection he spent another 40 days teaching them. In **John 14:26**, he told them that when the Holy Spirit comes, “he will teach you all things, and he will bring to remembrance all that I have said to you.” But then the teacher left, and this helper still hadn't come.

And in the midst of this waiting, Peter stands up among this broader prayer meeting and notice what he says: **Acts 1:16**, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas.”

Jesus is gone. The Holy Spirit hasn't come. But God is not silent. He is speaking, through the Holy Spirit in his word! Through the scriptures God speaks what we need to know even when it feels like we are empty and God is far from us. **Proverbs 25:11**, says “a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”

And while the Holy Spirit indwells all believers after Pentecost, here these pre-Pentecost believers are experiencing God himself inspiring and standing by his word through the Holy Spirit. He makes the whole of scripture “words fitly spoken.” It is inspired by God himself—living and active as the author of

Hebrews says. Just as the words of a coach are inspired to bring clarity to a downtrodden team—God inspires his own word through the Spirit.

The fervency of their prayers didn't reveal new secret knowledge, instead it pointed them back to the perfectly inspired knowledge they already had—Scripture itself.

This is why I would encourage you to have a Bible reading plan that brings you through the whole Bible. I imagine if Peter were tasked to give a devotional to a lonely and slightly confused church—he wouldn't have chosen Psalms of betrayal. But God's word, rightly interpreted, brings right clarity, right when we need it.

For example these past few months have been wearisome for me and my schedule. And I've talked to many others, and I've even prayed about it—wanting to be wise. And just this week, I was reading in Lamentations 4:10 where Jeremiah says, "The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food during the destruction of the daughter of my people." And I loved it.

Why? Because here was Israel, lamenting over God's judgment of them, not able to understand it—and yet God's judgement exposed that those who seemed "compassionate" were quick to cannibalize even their kids. Suffering and trial expose the problems that are already present in my heart. In the midst of my own trials, God would have me to look at the fruit of it, repent over what it produces and trust his help in the midst of it. Trust that God's word, when submitted to prayerfully, will do what the Holy Spirit has inspired it to do: lead us to Jesus and change our lives.

It's Peter's Jesus centered reading of scripture that brought clear application into the specific work God was doing in the apostles. Peter quotes Psalm 69 and Psalm 109, perhaps because Jesus himself had taught from them about these very issues.

He says that the disciples must replace Judas for two reasons. The first is that Judas was a false guide, guiding wrong thoughts towards Jesus, and guiding himself to his own death. Judas followed Jesus for money, but money couldn't save Judas.

Psalm 69 includes messianic prophecies which Jesus fulfilled on the cross. But then it speaks of the judgment the messiah calls on his betrayers: **Psalm 69:24-25**, "Pour out your indignation upon them and let your burning anger overtake them. May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents."

Judas needed to be replaced because the wages of sin is death. In our world there is one Judas, but there are many who are guided by Judas—and all deserve the same end. To come to Jesus in any other way than to worship him is to betray him to death. We all kill Jesus. We either kill him to be saved from him, or we kill him to be saved by him.

This is the second reason why Judas needed to be replaced—there was hope for restoration! What was broken was going to be put back in order. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Peter reminds us that Jesus didn't just have twelve disciples because it was a good number. As we saw in Luke 22, Jesus meant for these 12 Jews to be the full restoration of the 12 tribes of Israel who like Judas were led astray. All Israel condemned Jesus to die, but these 12 heads, handpicked by Jesus were the new heads of his spiritual people.

They had to be restored in number because that's what the gospel does. It restores hope to the hopeless and makes saints out of sinners.

That's why Peter says this next: **Acts 1:21-22**, "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 the resurrection."

There must be a 12th because it finalizes the restoration of God's spiritual people. And here's our last point this morning: The church in waiting prepared for **The Ministry of Christ through the Apostles**.

Luke continues, **Acts 1:23-26**, "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."

If you let Google define for you what apostolic ministry looks like, you'll probably find lots of fun, mysterious, and wild things. But here we see a definition of what apostolic ministry looks like according to the Jesus who chose and established apostolic ministry.

Now first, what is an apostle? The Greek word simply means, "sent ones." The Bible speaks of three categories of apostles: God's apostle, God's great apostles, and God's general apostles.

Hebrews 3:1 tells us God's apostle is Jesus, the Son of God sent by Triune will on the world's greatest rescue mission. God's great apostles fall into two categories: the 12, and the others. Paul, Barnabas, and James (Jesus' brother) are all called apostles in an official sense in the New Testament. All meet in unique ways the qualifications listed here—and while genuine in their apostleship are not counted among the 12. God's general apostles are all the rest of us who are saved. The ESV translates this as "messengers" or "sent ones." Most of the time when Jesus "sends" people out, whether the 12 or the 72, the verb is "apostello." To be a Christian is to be a little "a" apostle.

But in speaking of the specific office of the 12 apostles, Peter gives us four characteristics.

First we see their **qualifications**. They were to be eyewitnesses of the ministry and teaching of Jesus from his baptism through his ascension, and they must also be witnesses to his resurrection. In fact that last category is not just the qualification but actually the tone of the apostolic office. The apostles were to be the chief witness bearers that Jesus is alive. These are not special men, but instead these are men who had a special relationship and witness to Jesus Christ.

Second we see **their captain**. This Jesus, the special one, the ultimate "sent one," is the one who would choose this new apostle just as he chose the rest. The church is not a human lead institution. Human leadership failed in the Old Testament and will fail in our world today. But the leadership of these men is the leadership of Jesus. Peter called them to select, but he asked Jesus to choose. They didn't need the best in terms of human categories, they needed the one who Jesus wanted.

This leads to thirdly, **their quality**. In English it sounds like they are praying to the Lord who knows the hearts of all. But it's a single noun: knower of hearts. Men are called to discern hearts, but only God can know hearts. Jesus didn't select sinless men, but he did select sincere men. Jesus didn't have to squint

and look past prideful, narcissistic hearts in order to find men able to lead the church. I think this is why Jesus didn't include Paul in the initial 12 apostles. Paul was crushing it. He was the cover picture of TIME Magazine's Jew of the Year edition. Instead, lest we think God wants only the talented—he chose those whom the world lamented—fishermen, simpletons, and conspiracy theorists. He wanted men of pure hearts—imperfect men who are wholly devoted to their perfect savior.

One pastor writing in the 4th century wrote to those who denied miracles and said the greatest miracle Jesus is what he did through these twelve men! “For this would be the greatest of miracles, that without any miracles, the whole world should have eagerly come to be taken in the nets of twelve poor and illiterate men.” (Chrysostom)

And in this we see their **commission**. Five times in this passage we read about a ministry, an office and a numbering among this group.

Jesus entrusted these 12 men in specific to be a new foundation of God's people. That's why in Revelation the foundation of the Holy City is the 12 tribes of Israel—but the gates are the 12 Apostles. How do we get into the promise of God's kingdom? By coming to the message of the apostles, repenting and turning to Jesus. That's why Paul is able to say that the church is (**Ephesians 2:20**), "built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus being the cornerstone."

Through these great apostles, Jesus would guide the church into the knowledge and wisdom it needed to be the church that Jesus saved it to be. These teachings have been preserved for us in God's word. It's why the church throughout history has defined itself as “one holy, catholic, apostolic church.”

It is founded on the apostolic message. But you'll notice that it's the message, not the ministry which Jesus and the apostles expect to endure. As the book of Acts goes on, we see apostles like James die, but we don't see a call to replace him. In fact, after the first 15 chapters of Acts, we rarely hear of see of these 12 men at all. Why is that?

Because the office of apostle was not meant to be a perpetual one. Apostles don't lead the church. Jesus leads the church. Apostles established the teachings of Jesus, often inspired in a unique way by the Holy Spirit—such as we have in scripture. And then they died. Just like building a home, you don't need more foundation, you need to be built on the foundation.

How do we become an apostolic church today? We submit ourselves to the ministry of Jesus who, though his apostles are long dead, continues to lead and guide his church through circumstances that seem bleak and beautiful and worrisome and wonderful.

So, how might we as a church, how might you as a Christian wait? Are you wondering what God has for you? Are you filling your time with anxious work trying to find meaning and purpose? Are you waiting for the next big thing? The church is it! This is where God is working, and we can find our greatest clarity by joining ourselves to his people in prayer, in word, and in work.