

When the Kingdom Fit Into a Room

Acts 1:12–26

The Second Sermon on the Acts of the Apostles

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Have you seen a house being built or participating in building a house? Before the roof is shingled, before the walls are framed, before any paint is used, what must first be built? The foundation. Why? A foundation supports a house.

The New Testament describes the church as a house in which God dwells, with each of us individually being like stones used to build its walls (1 Peter 2:5–10; Eph. 2:11–22). But what is the foundation? The New Testament also describes the apostles and their doctrine as the foundation that supports and strengthens the house (Eph. 2:20; Acts 2:42). Before the Spirit can come and dwell within the house of the church, a foundation must first be laid.

As we continue through the Acts of Jesus by the Spirit through his Apostles tonight our text chronicles a time when God’s international, inter millennial kingdom began in a living room. And it was in **the upper room** (v. 13) that the building of the foundation of God’s New Covenant house, his church, began. But notice something very important: the builder is not us; the builder is Christ. We see this in Christ’s promised to baptize his church with the Holy Spirit; therefore the church prays to him (v. 14). We see this in the Holy Spirit’s speaking in the Scriptures that Judas would apostatize and that a replacement must be found. (v.

16). We see this in the church crying out to God alone for this replacement (v. 24). We see this in the use of the ancient practice of casting lots (v. 26). As the Proverb says, “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD” (Prov. 16:33).

So as Christ is building his kingdom, what is the church doing? What kind of church do we need to be to experience the baptizing of his Spirit today?

1. ***Devoted to Prayer (1:12–14, 24–26)***
2. ***Governed by the Word (1:15–23)***
3. ***Surrendered to the Lord (1:24–26)***

Devoted to Prayer (1:12–14, 24–26)

The first thing we see here in the days *when the kingdom fit into a room* is that the church was *devoted to prayer*. Notice verse 14 especially: **All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer**. As the onehundred and twenty were awaiting the gift of Christ’s Spirit they prayed. And there are two things we learn here that are essential to true prayer as a congregation.

First, the church was engaged in *unified prayer* as it prayed **with one accord**. This is a phrase Luke uses elsewhere of united prayer (4:24) as well as coming to a united decision (15:25). When we pray our own prayers apart from each other, we sound like an old radio dial that as it was turned made that merging sound of many different stations all coming in out of tune. But when we pray in a united way, coming together, sharing our burdens, and praying with purpose for

the coming of the Lord's kingdom through us, we sound like a station that is in perfect focus and tune.

Second, the church was engaged in *unceasing prayer*: **devoting themselves**. Again, this is a phrase that Luke uses elsewhere of the church being devoted to prayer in 2:42 and the apostles being devoted to prayer in 6:4. And I want you to notice something spectacular here. This infant church was praying for the Spirit that Christ had promised them. And knowing that he had promised the Spirit did not lessen their devotion to praying for the Spirit, but actually increased their devotion to praying for the Spirit!¹ The great English preacher, Thomas Brooks (1608–1680), said that we should pray to God so often and so shamelessly that we would make God ashamed to look us in the face if he did not answer us!² Is that our devotion as a church to public prayer here on the Lord's Day and at special services? Is that our devotion to mid-week gatherings? Is that our devotion at home?

Governed by the Word (1:15–23)

Notice a second characteristic of the church's response to Christ's building of his kingdom. *When the kingdom fit into a room* the church was *governed by the Word*. They were devoted to prayer and the Word. As Dr. Guy Waters recently

¹ See the comments in Waters, *Acts*, 64.

² Thomas Brooks, "Heaven on Earth," in *The Works of Thomas Brooks*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 6 vols. (1861–67; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2001), 2:492.

wrote, “Where these traits are lacking, we cannot expect the church to flourish.”³ And the reverse is true. Where we are devoted to prayer and the Word we should expect to see God’s Spirit poured out upon us.

How were they *governed by the Word*? We read that Peter stood up and addressed the congregation (v. 15): “**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**” (vv. 16–17). As Peter read the Scriptures of the Old Testament after Jesus had instructed him for forty days after his resurrection, he heard God say it was necessary for Judas to apostatize (vv. 16, 17) and to be replaced (v. 20). How did he know God was speaking? Because he was reading his Bible, to put it in our terms! He read Psalms 69 and 109, in particular. If you want to hear a fresh word from God for your soul, pick up your Bible and read aloud! You see this in his equating **the Scripture** with the voice of **the Holy Spirit** (v. 16). In commenting on this, John Calvin said, “Since therefore our dullness is such that we ascribe far less authority to Scripture than we ought, we should take careful note of expressions of this kind and make ourselves familiar with them, that our faith may be confirmed by constantly remembering the authority of God.”⁴

³ Waters, *Acts*, 64.

⁴ John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles: Volume 1*, trans. W.J.G. McDonald, ed. David W. and Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (1965; repr., Eerdmans, 1982), 6:41.

I was asked this afternoon over lunch with someone totally new to the Reformed expression of Christianity, “What makes your unique?” I said the first thing was that we self-consciously seek to be governed by the Word in everything we believe and do as a church. We’re not perfect, but we are zealous for the Word because it is God living and active Word to and for us. And Peter was seeking to lead the infant church by the Word of God.

Thus he applied what the Psalms said to Judas and the necessity of another twelfth apostle. His application was that another take his place who had **accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us** (v. 21) and who himself saw the resurrected Christ: **one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection** (v. 22). Why was there a need for the church to have twelve apostles? Because the church is the continuation of the true Israel of God, and just as there were twelve tribes as the foundation for the ancient expression of the church so now there must be twelve apostles for the new expression of the church. And how many foundations does a house have? One. Thus the apostolate—the group of the apostles—are a unique and unrepeatable redemptive historical occurrence. And therefore that church that follows the doctrine of the apostles is an apostolic church.

Let me make one application of this principle of being governed by the Word from Peter’s conclusion. We need to be convinced of the importance of the visible church but also of its government in our time. So many well-meaning brothers and sisters think it is fine to be lone ranger Christians or even to gather as

lone rangers in house churches out of the reaction to bad churches. But what happens in these situations? Someone inevitably asserts his or her influence and it takes on the same character of a church. The only difference is that there is no accountability with a self-appointed leader. And without accountability, there is worse damage.

Surrendered to the Lord (1:24–26)

Finally, we see that *when the kingdom fit into a room* that the church was *surrendered to the Lord*. They were praying for the Spirit and they were following the Word, but ultimately, they gave themselves to God. How so? We read in verse 26 of their nominating two men to replace Judas. How did they know which one was *the one*? **And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.** Casting lots was a way to discern God's will without human interference. As Calvin said, Christ appointed the twelve directly so when the church nominated a new twelfth lots was a way of showing that the decision came from God and not men.⁵

Jesus was building his kingdom in a living room then. He is here tonight building it in this room among us. What do you want to be known for? If you want to be known for being a true expression of the kingdom, pray to the Lord, follow the Lord's Word, and give yourself to him in every way. Amen.

⁵ Calvin, *Acts: Volume 1*, 6:45.