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THE FIRST GREAT MISTAKE THE CHURCH MADE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF THE ACTS
NUMBER 4
ACTS 1:12-26

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We have studied the pre-ascension briefing. We listened to Christ as he gave the promise of the Holy Spirit. Every believer is in union with Christ through the Holy Spirit. Relying on this power within, we are to be witnesses. It is not who and what we are but who and what God is. The church began on schedule. Sometime between the Ascension and the founding of the church that little group of 120 made a terrible mistake. Later on the mistake was over-ruled by God. It was a sincere mistake, a mistake of zeal. God's grace is always a marvelous over-ruling factor in our lives.

Acts 1:12 "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey." The Ascension is over. They had seen him go and had heard the message of the angels. The hall where they are meeting is probably the banquet hall where Jesus had that last discourse with them and where they had observed the Passover and the Lord's Supper.

Acts 1:13 "And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James." This means they resided there. It was something like a motel or hotel. They had all been drawn together and for the time being were living there together. The eleven were named. They all saw the Ascension. Now they must select someone to take the place of Judas.

1 Corinthians 12:11 "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." This verse tells us that the Holy Spirit is to appoint those who exercise spiritual gifts. Now these people are going to elect the twelfth Apostle but they make a terrible mistake. For you see, the one the Lord chose is not even converted yet and will not be converted for five years. He was living in Jerusalem at the time. He was a Pharisee. He was a brilliant young man and the most legalistic person alive. The Bible tells us he was the worst sinner who ever lived. He was the most religious and the most moral, self-righteous man that ever lived. Saul will become Paul. Notice that morality was not the issue, but Christ was the issue. Saul was the worst sinner that ever lived and he is going to become the greatest believer of all time for he was to be perfectly oriented to the grace of God.

Acts 1:14 "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." All were in harmony with one another. There were 120 of them and they were well equipped to face the next ten days. There were fifty days between the First Fruits (day of resurrection) and Pentecost. Pentecost means fifty days away. He Ascended ten days before Pentecost. They are all in one accord.

Now, these people had been given the Holy Spirit, yet they made a terrible mistake. You see, they didn't depend on the Holy Spirit within, neither did they depend on their walk with the Lord. Most of all, they didn't know doctrine and this is the reason for their mistake. Notice that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is in this group. She was not the Mother of God, but the mother of the human side of Jesus.

Acts 1:15 "And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)" Peter made an erroneous suggestion. Peter was guilty of sin and failure but still God is going to use him. So Simon Peter stood up and made a beautiful speech and then there was a beautiful prayer. Most people will always fall for these things. But we need to remember that the Will of God is made plain through the Word of God.

Acts 1:16-20 "Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take."

Notice that in this speech of Simon Peter he has said these things:

This prophetic Scripture about Judas must needs be fulfilled, and of course it was fulfilled to the letter.

Though Judas was numbered with them, he was not really one of them, was never converted and was not a genuine Apostle. After Judas had betrayed Jesus he saw he was wrong, but regretted what he had done too late.

Judas died a violent death at his own hands. In verse 20 Simon Peter quoted from two passages in the Psalms.

Psalm 69:25 "Let his habitation be desolate".

Psalm 109:8 "And let his office another take."

Acts 1:21 "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us." Here is where Simon and the other of the 120 are going to get in trouble. They had forgotten one thing - that the selection of an Apostle belonged to God, and to God alone.

1 Corinthians 12:28 "And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."

Ephesians 4:8 "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."

Ephesians 4:11 "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."

1 Corinthians 12:11 "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."

The Trinity is involved in the election of apostles. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts. Remember that God, the Chief of Staff, is going to choose this replacement of Judas. Judas has been called the worst of sinners but God chose one who was worse than he was, and God took this worst sinner and by his grace made him the greatest saint. God wanted to demonstrate to the world the meaning of the grace of God. This explains the election of Paul. Judas Iscariot is the worst man of all. But Saul of Tarsus was the worst sinner, but by the grace of God he is to meet Jesus on the Damascus Road and we will hear him say "Lord (Kurios) when have I persecuted you?" And the Lord reminded him that when you touch a believer you touch the Lord. "Why persecutest thou me?"

So Paul is to be the Twelfth Apostle, but the church failed to elect the right one.

Simon Peter shows great zeal, but he is five years too soon with his suggestion. Peter quoted Scripture but misinterpreted it. There was no Scripture that gave them the right to hold an election like this. You see, in a democracy, the democracy falls apart if the people are wrong. Democracy is not the greatest form of government. The greatest form of government is a Theocracy with Jesus Christ as Lord.

Peter, in substance, says this - Here we are, all 120 of us, and we have 120 votes. But to vote right THEY MUST KNOW DOCTRINE. God is the one who is going to elect this twelfth apostle and all the beautiful speeches and prayers and voting won't make it right because they ignored doctrine.

Illustration

In one of our southern states a church called a man to be a Pastor who had been called of the Lord to be an evangelist. The little church gave him a unanimous vote. But remember, Pastor and Teacher is one gift, and the gift of evangelism is another gift. In the course of time the church saw their mistake and released their young preacher, Billy Graham. The point is this, by an election you can't make a man a Pastor and Teacher, or an evangelist. The Scripture we have quoted above proves that God alone calls a man into a specific work.

Acts 1:21-26 "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

In these verses we have the complete story. By vote and with beautiful prayers Matthias is elected. But the point is, they got the wrong man. We never hear his name again. He is phased out of the story. The point is this - no church, no priest, no council, no legislative body can give spiritual gifts. Gifts come from the grace of God. I am a Pastor and Teacher because God gave me that gift. That is why I cannot explain how or why I became a preacher. It was the work of God.

1 Timothy 1:12 "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry."

Now notice what Paul was before this happened.

1 Timothy 1:13 "Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief."

Now notice what the grace of God did for him.

1 Timothy 1:14 "And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

That next verse tells us that Paul was the chief of sinners. In the above Scripture we saw that an Apostle had to be chosen of God, and had to witness the resurrected Christ. Look how Paul filled this requirement.

1 Corinthians 15:8-10 "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

So here is the Twelfth Apostle, and not Matthias. This man, Paul, would give the world more interpretation of Christian doctrine than any man that ever lived. He will go farther in showing the grace of God than any other man in the earth.

THE GREAT MISTAKE

So here is a great mistake before the church ever got started. But on the day of Pentecost the plan of God for the church moved right on in spite of their human blunder. The frailty of man didn't stop the plan of God. The lesson is this - don't let your failure stop you. Get up and move right on in his service.

God uses men in spite of their failure. His love never changes even though we fail. God loved the 120 in that Upper Room because of who and what he was. God's love never depends on us but upon his own inherent qualities. He may discipline us but he goes on loving us.

1. These early Christians made a mistake trying to elect a man when only God can do this.
2. The call of a man is the work of the Trinity - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
3. Men always get in trouble when they superimpose their will over the Will of God.
4. The election of Matthias proved to be useless for we never hear of him again.
5. God's plan is often slow and when we fail to wait on God we always make mistakes.
6. God doesn't give up when men make mistakes - God simply cancels out their actions and moves on with his plan.