

Place: Lurgan 26:10:2006

Reading: Acts 1:12-26

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

2. DICE IN THE PRAYER MEETING

Before becoming a screen star, young Burt Lancaster was a circus performer a job he was fortunate to land, considering his less-than-flawless audition. He was asked to perform on the parallel bars, so he leaped on the bars and began his routine. Because he was nervous, his timing was off, and he spun over the bar, falling flat on his face some 10 feet below. He was so humiliated that he immediately back on the bar. As he spun again at the same point, he flipped off and smashed to the ground once more ! Burt's tights were torn, he was cut and bleeding, and he was fiercely upset. He leaped back again, but the third time was even worse, for this time he fell on his back. The agent came over, picked him up, and said, “ *Son, if you won't do that again, you've got the job.*”

Now doesn't this image of Burt Lancaster spinning, crashing, and coming back for more mirror our own Christian life at times ? With determined self-sufficiency, we leap into this venture and that, teeter, and then flop face-first onto the ground. Then what do we do ? We brush off the sawdust and go at it again, falling even harder the next time. Finally, the

Lord comes over and says, “ *My child, if you won't do that again, you've got the job I can use you.*” After Christ's ascension, the disciples may have been tempted to mount the bars and start performing on their own strength. But they didn't. Trusting God to give them His power according to His plan and His timing, they waited. Is this not exactly what the Risen Lord told them to do ? In (Lk 24:49) He told them, “ *tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.*” In (1:4) He tells them not to depart from Jerusalem but to “ *wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptised with water, but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*”

It was important for the disciples to wait because the Holy Spirit couldn't come until Christ was back in heaven. (Jn 16:7) It is the Holy Spirit who would give the disciples the power to be witnesses to the world. Now waiting is difficult. The sign on the mission guesthouse bulletin board says it all, “ *Lord, please make me patient, and do it now.*” Abraham got weary of waiting for the promised son, so he hurried and took Hagar as a second wife, and she bore Ishmael. Moses got impatient and killed a man. This necessitated 40 years of postgraduate work in the pastures of Midian. Years later, Moses became impatient again, smote the rock and lost a trip to the Holy Land. It was F. B. Meyer who used to say, “ *God's delays are not God's denials.*” My God has His times as well as His purposes. I read a book some time ago entitled, “ *God isn't in a hurry.*” The problem is I am. The psalmist warns “ *be ye not as the horse, or as the mule.*” (Ps

32:9) The mule is stubborn and has a tendency to hold back. The horse is impulsive and wants to rush ahead. Personality differences may enter in here, but we all have the same problem we find it difficult to wait on God. The Lord Jesus had said, “ *tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem*,” and this exactly what we find the disciples doing. Now what happened in this 10 day period between the Ascension of Christ and the Advent of the Holy Spirit ? What were the apostles up to during this time ?

Well, we have entitled our study this “ ***Dice in the Prayer Meeting,***” because this whole passage is soaked in prayer. The incredible thing is that the first Christians who made up the first church, accomplished so very much with so very little. Stop and think what the average church depends on today. For example we depend on ***Organization.*** Some churches think that if they don’t revise the bylaws and the constitution at least once a year, God cannot do anything. The early church had no constitution. We depend on ***Trained Leadership.***

Now I am not knocking Bible Colleges, for I benefited greatly from my time there, but “ *the apostles were unlearned and ignorant men.*” (4:13) This means they had graduated from the accepted rabbinical schools. The early church did not have the trained leadership that we have today, and yet see what they accomplished. We depend on ***Finances.*** We feel we can’t do anything unless we have a big budget, yet Peter said, “ *Silver and gold have I none.*” (3:6) They got together as believers and shared what they had so

that no Christian would have any need. Some Christians feel today that the church must have ***Political Power.*** There is certainly nothing wrong with dedicated Christians getting involved in government, but woe to that church that depends on the government for its success.

The Early Church did not have the kind of organisation or buildings or budgets or trained leadership or political connections that we have. So what was their secret ? The Word of God, the Spirit of God and prayer. They depended on the Spirit of God. They prayed before the Throne of God, and they preached the Word of God. The Book of Acts contains at least 30 references to prayer in many different settings and our study this Is “ ***Dice in the Prayer Meeting.***”

(1) THE WORK OF GOD BROUGHT SUPPLICATION

Many years ago the great Bible teacher William R. Newell was concluding a conference in China for the China Inland Mission and as he left he said to the mission's leader, “ *Oh, do pray for me that I shall be nothing.*” The director responded with a twinkle in his eye, “ *Newell, you are nothing. Take it by faith.*” This Upper-Room fellowship knew this implicitly. They knew that by themselves they could do *nothing.* And in anticipation of the work that lay before them, they bent their knees in prayer. Now one thing they weren't praying for was the coming of the Holy Spirit. My the Spirit’s coming didn't depend on their prayers. (1:4) says that the Holy Spirit was a promise of the

Father. They already had the promise, it was just a matter of waiting. The baptism of the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with your prayers: it is a sovereign act of God that occurs at the moment of salvation.

(Rom 8:9 1 Cor 12:13) You see this was the first time they had been removed from the Lord Jesus, and the only way they could communicate to Him from that point onward was through prayer. Look at,

(a) *THE PLACE OF PRAYER:*

“ *An upper room.*” (1:13) The Greek text says, “ *the upper room.*” Was this the same Upper Room in which the Last Supper was held and where Christ appeared to them after His Resurrection ? (Lk 22:12) Was this Upper Room located in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark ? (12:12) If this is correct it is beautifully fitting that the Holy Spirit was given in the same room in which Christ promised Him.

(Jn 14:16-18) My just as in the life of every believer there must be the *shut door* (Matt 6:6) so in the life of every church there must be the *upper room*. The Christian must know how to pray privately, the church must how to pray corporately. (a)

(b) *THE PEOPLE AT PRAYER:*

It must have been a large room because 120 would soon squeeze in. It will be a great day for the church when its prayer meetings are again as representative as these were. For one thing:

(1) *CHURCH LEADERS WERE THERE:*

Look at (1:13) All the apostles were there. These men had been with Christ throughout His public ministry and recognised the great emphasis Christ had placed on prayer. (Lk 18:1) They had beheld their master, the man of prayer. (Lk 5:16) Now they were seeking to follow in His steps. In the Early Church those in leadership prayed together. Is it not amazing that today we who are in leadership can do so many things together but we cannot pray together ? I mean Christian men who fish together, socialise together, drink coffee together, but they cannot pray together. As a leader in God's work are you an example to the rest of the flock in the place of prayer ?

(2) *LOYAL WOMEN WERE THERE:*

“ *With the women and Mary the mother of Jesus.*” (1:14) “ *The women,*” who had so faithfully ministered to Christ on earth, those who had accompanied our Lord from Galilee saw His crucifixion and burial and rejoiced in His resurrection. (Lk 8:2-3 23:55 24:1) Dear Mary Magdalene, Susanna, Joanna, Mary of Bethany, Martha (in the kitchen no doubt) and Mary the mother of our Lord, quietly taking her place as just another one of them. This is the last we see of Mary in Scripture and *notice that it says that the disciples were praying WITH Mary, not TO her.* For centuries the Roman Catholic Church has taught that Mary is our co-redemptrix that both she and Christ redeemed mankind and that we need to pray to her to get Christ to listen to us. But that's not taught in the New Testament.

My Mary was kneeling in her prayer to her Saviour, just like everyone else. No candles were being burned to her. There is no claim by her to be the “*mother of God.*” Mary was simply another earnest believer. Here were women who were lovingly devoted to the Saviour. What an immense debt we owe to the faithful praying women in our churches. Those women who have a burden for prayer, those women who know how to pray.

(3) YOUNG CONVERTS WERE THERE:

“*And with His brethren.*” (1:14) Now “*His brothers,*” or half-brothers (James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude Matt 13:55) had not believed in Him during His ministry but they had come to trust the Lord after His resurrection. (1 Cor 15:4,7) What a lovely scene there is brought before us here. The apostles who had been walking with Christ for three years, and these new converts who had been saved just a short time, yet both at the place of prayer. Who attended the prayer meeting in the 1st century ? Who needs to attend the place of prayer in the 21st century ? (1) (2) (3) Are you there ? Are you present when God's people unite to pray ? Here they were a bunch of failing, often faithless people. No halos hovered over anyone in this list, and yet they were gathered together to pray ! Did you notice how they prayed ? Look at,

(c) THE PATTERN IN PRAYER:

(1) THERE WAS CONSTANCY:

“*These all continued.*” (1:14) A.T. Robertson says this means, “*they stuck to praying.*” The sense is similar to what we read in (1:13) where it says “*they abode.*” This denotes sticking close to anything or person. They were not spasmodic or erratic. They prayed frequently, constantly and perseveringly. Do you pray with persistence ? Someone has said that our praying is like the little boy who runs the door bell but then runs away before the door is opened.

(2) THERE WAS UNITY:

Do you know what the key phrase of the Book of Acts is ? “*With one accord.*” (1:14) It appears six times in Acts (1:14, 2:1 2:46 4:24 5:12 15:25) This is amazing. Eleven disciples strong-willed men, the kind who argued over who was going to get the best seat in the kingdom, Christ' brothers who had been so perverse as to reject His Messiah ship, His mother and a whole household of women rich, poor, chaste, unchaste “*all,*” of them were “*of one heart and mind.*” Is this not the kind of praying that meets with a divine response ? When all our different concerns are thrust aside and our hearts flow into one main stream. This is when the power of God is manifested and people know that God has taken the field.

(c) THERE WAS FERVENCY:

“*These all and supplication.*” (1:14) The word suggests the petitioning aspect of intercession. It is the laying hold of the Lord which will not let go or let up

until something happens. (1) (2) (3) Are those elements evident in our Prayer Meeting ? My does God's Work bend our knees in prayer ? The Early Church was Prayer Conscious, the Modern Church is Pleasure Conscious. I was thinking about how many believers turn out for gospel concerts to hear good singing and I'm not against that. How many would go if it were a prayer meeting ? (1)

(2) THE WORD OF GOD BROUGHT ILLUMINATION

Do you notice here how the Word of God and Prayer go together ? You cannot separate the Word of God and prayer. If you do you will have problems. What God has joined together we must not put asunder ? Do you recall what our Lord Jesus said in this connection ? (Jn 15:7)

As you go through the Bible, you'll find that God's tools for ministry are the Word of God and Prayer. The Word of God gives Enlightenment. Prayer gives Enablement. When we read the Word of God, our faith is increased because faith comes through the Word of God. Then we pray, and God answers because our praying is guided by the Word of God. In fact, the Word of God and Prayer formed the foundation for the ministry of the Church as recorded in the Book of Acts. (6:4)

Now down through the history of the church there has been lively discussion as to whether Peter was right or wrong in acting as he did. Peter has been criticized for taking charge, but I believe he was doing the will of

God. Peter was “ *first among equals,* ” but he was their recognised leader. Our Lord had given him this commission. In (Lk 22:32) he told him to “ *strengthen thy brethren.* ” In (Jn 21) when our Lord restored Peter to his apostleship, He said in effect, “ *Feed my sheep. Care for my lambs.* ” (Jn 21:15-17)

At this time, the disciples were all probably wondering why Judas betrayed Jesus. Christ had told them that one day the disciples would sit on twelve thrones (Matt 19:28) but now there were only eleven disciples and so Peter directed by the Word of God replaces Judas. Look at (1:16) Peter is here reviewing the sin of Judas and I want you to notice:

(a) THE POINT ABOUT HIS SIN:

(1:16) Peter is simply making the point that what Judas did was prophesied in the Old Testament. Incidentally, Peter believed in the Inspiration of Scripture, for inspiration is when the Holy Spirit uses the pen of a writer. My God's plan was not thwarted because Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus. God does not lose those who really belong to Him. The Lord Jesus says, “ *Those that Thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.* ” (Jn 17:12) Judas's betrayal fulfilled Scripture. That does not mean that God made Judas betray Jesus, it simply means that He used Judas's action to accomplish His purpose ! For God can work through men whether they are saved or not. That is (a)

(b) THE PUNISHMENT OF HIS SIN:

Look at (1:18-19) The money Judas returned was used to purchase the field he happened to die in. According to (Matt 27:5) he hung himself but apparently the rope broke and he fell. Evidently he tried to hang himself on one of the rocky parapets that were round that field, which is somewhere between the Valley of Hinnom and the Valley of Kidron. What an end for the traitor. Indeed in (1:25) Peter says “ *he went to his own place.*” He was hurled headlong into a lost eternity. Did you notice,

(c) THE PUBLICITY OF HIS SIN:

“ *And it was known Jerusalem.*” (1:19) His suicide was common knowledge in the capital. Everyone talked about it at that time. Superstitious notions grew up around his name. The idea developed that he would come back as the Antichrist. Indeed, some Biblical grounds are advanced for that idea because the Antichrist will be called “ *the son of perdition,*” (2 Thes 2:3) and the only other person so named in the Bible is Judas Iscariot. (Jn 17:12) But look at,

(d) THE PROPHECY OF HIS SIN:

Notice (1:20) Now Peter is quoting from two Psalms. The first part of (1:20) was prophesied in (Ps 69:25) To say the habitation of Judas would be desolate is the same as saying he would be removed that he would drop out. The second part of (1:20) comes from

(Ps 109:8) which says that Judas's office (episcopo) or position would be filled by someone else. “ *And his bishoprick let another take.*” (1:20) There are two words for “ *another,*” in the New Testament. There is *allos*, meaning another of the same kind, and there is *heteros*, the word that is used here, which another of a different kind. Judas was replaced not with someone like him, but with another whose heart was right.

Now by quoting these two psalms, Peter assured his fellow-disciples that Judas's departure fulfilled prophecy. It wasn't an accident that thwarted the plan of God. My when Judas betrayed the Saviour, *it didn't foul up God's plan, it fulfilled God's prophecy.* God knew what would happen, and Judas's betrayal led up to the crucifixion of Christ. Isn't it good to know this that no matter what happens God is still in control, God is still running the show, God is still on the throne, “ *the most High ruleth.*” (Dan 4:17) So (1) (2) But notice,

(3) THE WILL OF GOD BROUGHT CONSOLATION

Now again they are some who claim that Peter was out of order here. They say that he should not have conducted this business meeting because Paul was the new apostle who should have been added. They say, “ *They chose Matthias and he was never heard of again.*” My except for Peter, James and John *none of the original twelve are mentioned by name in the Book of Acts after (1:13)* Paul makes it clear in

(Gal 1:15-24 1Cor 15:8) that he was never meant to be a part of the original band of disciples. Indeed if the twelve thought that Paul was supposed to be one of them, they certainly did not show it. In fact they refused to admit Paul into the Jerusalem fellowship until Barnabas came to his rescue. (9:26-27) Now Paul was an apostle, but he was sent to the Gentiles. (Gal 2:1-10) He could never have met the divine qualifications laid down in (1:21-22) for did you notice:

(a) THE CRITERIA:

Look at (1:21-22) Now there were three requirements the new apostle had to meet. (1) He had to be with the other disciples and Jesus from the baptism of John. (2) He had to be a witness of Christ's resurrection. (3) He had to be chosen by God. (1:24) Now do those requirements not make the office of an apostle unique ?

My this is where the charismatic arguments stands or falls. The charismatic's tells us that there are apostles today hence we can have healings, wonders, miracles, and tongues. I would like to ask the folk who claim to be apostles today, did they accompany the Lord Jesus from the beginning ? Did they witness His resurrection ? My these were the requirements that Joseph and Matthias had to meet ! They had to accompany the Lord Jesus during His public ministry: be an eye-witness of His resurrection, and be chosen by God.

You see, Christian service is a matter of Divine

Appointment. Who does the sending ? God. Paul says, “ *How shall they preach, except they be sent.*” (Rom 10:15) There are many people today who claim to be servants of God yet they weren't sent by Him. Do you recall that King Uzziah tried to usurp a ministry he was not ordained for and he was inflicted with leprosy as a result ? (2 Chron 26:16-21) My unless God has called you by putting a burden on your heart (1 Tim 3:1) don't enter the ministry. Paul says in (Eph 4:11-12) that God “ *gave some apostles: and some, prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry.*” The Greek word translated

“ *gave,*” conveys the idea that God appointed those men their roles. My I would not be here among you unless I had a sense of divine appointment. Now two men met the criteria and notice,

(b) THE CHOICE:

That was made. (1:24-26) Notice that,

(1) They chose PRAYERFULLY: (1:24)

They recognised God as Sovereign “ *Lord,*” as Omniscient “ *which knowest the hearts,*” as Gracious “ *show,*” as Omnipotent “ *whether of these two Thou hast chosen.*” Now they didn't choose Matthias and then say, “ *Lord bless him.*” God did the choosing and they wanted God to reveal who He had chosen. My what a difference it would make if church decisions were made in the atmosphere of

prayer. In choosing leaders, deacons, elders, in calling a pastor how important it is for the church to pray. (1)

(2) They chose PURPOSEFULLY: (1:25)

Matthias had a job to do. Now this is the only place in the New Testament where Matthias is mentioned. You see he wasn't necessarily destined to be a prominent minister. Often its the quiet the behind-the-scenes people who accomplish a lot for God.

(3) They chose PRACTICALLY: (1:26)

Was it wrong for these men to draw lots ? Some people say that's a form of gambling and they should not have drawn lots. But in the Old Testament God used such methods to reveal His will. (1 Sam 14:37-42) C. Ryrie explains how this was done. “ *The two names were put on lots, placed in an urn, and then the one which first fell from the urn was taken to be the Lord's choice.*” According to (Prov 16:33) “ *The lot is cast into the lap but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.*” But what about us today ? To find out God's will should we draw straws ? Flip coins ? Throw darts ? No ! My we have the Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to guide us. (Jn 7:17)

(4) They chose PEACEABLY: (1:26)

Did you notice that Joseph didn't become upset. He didn't demand the lots to be cast again or walk out angrily. How did he feel about not being chosen ? Well, look at (2:1) He stayed with the disciples and

continued in the Lords work. The number twelve was complete. Nothing was left to be done except turn the world upside down for Christ. My these early believers had no great cathedrals in which to meet (Rom 16:5) no ritual, no Bible Colleges, hardly any New Testament but these early believers had power, the power of God that came through prayer. Do we as a church believe that we need a move of God ? There's one answer, prayer, much prayer, more prayer.