

THE POWER OF A PRAYING CHURCH Transcript

By Dr. Ron Jones

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Well, the McDonald's corporation years ago advertised their iconic burger called the Big Mac by saying it was made of this. See if you can say with me. Two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame seed bun. Wow! Can you believe that? But we remember that. And part of the reason we do is because it was brilliant marketing. What the McDonald's corporation was trying to do was to single out their burger from every other burger out there. And they said, "Our burger has a special sauce." Think about it. All the other ingredients anybody could find. Two beef patties, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions, sesame seed bun. Anybody can put together a burger like that. "Ours has a special sauce." The question is, what's the special sauce? Well, McDonald's won't tell us because if the special sauce ceases to be a secret sauce, then it's no longer a special sauce and every other burger can taste just like the Big Mac, right? I'm starting to sound like a McDonald's salesman, and that's not my intention this morning. But you understand what I'm saying.

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We're in a study of the book of Acts. And when I read the book of Acts and I read the story of the early church and its explosive growth, it makes me wonder, *what's the special sauce?* What was so special about those times back then? How did these early followers of Jesus who were powerless and penniless and fearful...how did all of this happen? How did it explode in growth? How did it take off in such a way that it even fulfilled the dreams of its founders to have a worldwide impact, and here we are 2000 years later? I mean, most of us have heard stories about companies that started in somebody's garage and became, you know, a big company, but none that have lasted 2000 years. How did this happen? What's the special sauce?

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Well, a casual reading of the book of Acts leads me to three, kind of, ingredients in this special sauce in the early church. The first, of course, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You know, let's just be honest. The church would have never gotten off the ground, never out of the first half of the 1st century if the resurrection of Jesus Christ had not in fact taken place. And the early apostles were eye witnesses to this. They went around saying, "We saw the risen Christ with our own eyes." And they went all the way, according to tradition, to a martyr's death believing that and proclaiming it. So the resurrection message was part of the secret sauce.

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The second is the Holy Spirit. He comes in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost, the birth of the church. And what we're gonna find as we read through the book of Acts just tracing His activities through the book of Acts...you just pay attention to the Holy Spirit. You've gotta understand this thing called the church, which we're still a part of today, would have failed were it not for the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is why Jesus told His disciples, "Go back to Jerusalem, sit tight, wait and pray for the promised Holy Spirit that'll come not many days from now."

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But, again, reading casually through the book of Acts you notice a third ingredient to this secret sauce. You know what it is from the title of the message, “The Power of a Praying Church.” I’m talking about prayer. The early church was a praying church. And you find prayer mentioned in some way, shape or form 29 times in 28 chapters. That’s, on average, a little bit more than once a chapter we find the early church in prayer. One author says, “Prayer saturates the book of Acts like salt saturates the ocean.” That’s a great analogy. Everywhere you turn the page, the early church is in prayer. And we find them in a prayer meeting in the upper room in Jerusalem right here in the first chapter. I mean, we don’t get 11, 12 verses into the first chapter but that we find the early church in prayer. In chapter 2 we find them praying again. They’re praying before, during and after Pentecost, by the way. This isn’t just a before Pentecost thing or a day of Pentecost thing. Prayer saturates the early church and the story of the early church in all 28 chapters. Peter’s first sermon that we’ll get to in chapter 2, I mean, the response, the powerful explosion and catapulting of the early church from the first day it was born. Yeah, it had to do with the resurrection message that he preached, the power of the Holy Spirit, but the power of a praying church as well. You can’t discount that.

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You read on in the book of Acts, and when they face their first conflict with the Jewish leaders we find the early church in prayer. Acts 6, when they’re choosing what we call the first deacons, the apostles said, “We must give ourselves to prayer and to the preaching of God’s Word.” And they established these leaders in the church. Paul and Barnabas later are sent out on their missionary journeys, and we find the church coming together to lay hands on them and to pray them out. Peter is thrown into prison by the opposition to the early church. And what do we do? We find the early church in prayer, begging God to miraculously release him from prison. And the Bible says an angel of the Lord showed up, and there are Paul and Silas singing these hymns at midnight. And the gates open, and it’s just a marvelous scene there.

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It’s no secret that the early church was a praying church before during and after the day of Pentecost. And all these three ingredients that are in the secret sauce, by the way, we have them today. We have the resurrection message. We have the resurrected Jesus living in us in the person of the Holy Spirit. The question is, are we a praying church? These three ingredients to the secret sauce are kind of like, if I can change the analogy, a three-legged stool. You take any one of them away, and you have a powerless church. But a church that stays true to the resurrection message, that is filled with the Holy Spirit, and that prays, oh my! Watch out what God does in a place like that.

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So I want to talk to you about the power of a praying church. No secret that the early church prayed. No secret that Jesus prayed. That that was an important part of His spiritual discipline. You read the gospel accounts and you pay attention to the disciplines and the activities of Jesus. You’ll bump into Mark 1:35, one of my favorite glimpses into the disciplined life of Jesus. Mark says, “And rising very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.” Listen, friends. This is obvious, but let me just say it. If it was important for Jesus, the Son of God, the Son of Man and the

Savior of the world, to spend time alone with the Father in prayer, how much more important is it for us? And Jesus told us that “if you want to be one of My followers, you have to deny yourself.” And here we see Him denying His flesh, the extra hour of sleep that He wanted. And He gets up before everybody else gets up. The sun hasn’t even come up. And He wanders off to a lonely place, a desolate place. And He spends time with His Father in prayer. That’s some of the secret sauce of Jesus’s life and ministry. And don’t mistake it.

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So much so that the disciples came to Him and said, “Lord, would You teach us to pray?” Not “teach us to teach,” not “teach us to perform miracles,” not “teach us any of the wonderful things” that He did. But, “We’re seeing something secret. You go to secret place, and we’re seeing that as part of the secret sauce of Your ministry.” And so He taught them to pray. Gave them what we call the Lord’s Prayer. It’s really a model prayer, the disciples’ prayer. And if you read about that in Matthew 6 in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount where Matthew records it, you’ll find some words of preface that He gives before He gives them the Lord’s Prayer. He tells them how not to pray in a couple of ways. He says, “Don’t be like the hypocrites who go out into the public places and pray for everybody see them.” He says, “Instead,” verse 6, “when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” The secret sauce of the Christian life ... Are you ready for this? It’s finding a secret place where the Father will share His secrets with you in prayer. Do you have a secret place like that? A quiet place where you meet with the heavenly Father?

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I’m an early riser, which means I’m early to bed. But I’m an early riser, and the rest of my house, they’re night owls, all right. So I get the early morning hours to myself. And I have to fight against every temptation to grab my phone and, you know, social media channels and all that, and for the first moments of my day to grab my Bible and get alone with my heavenly Father. Because I know that if there is anything He ever does through me, the secret sauce has something to do with meeting Him in the secret place and to be a praying person. Same is true with you. Same is true with us corporately as a church. Okay?

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Jesus had a secret place, a desolate place that He went to in the early morning hours. He also had a place called Gethsemane. On the night before He was crucified, He went to that secret place, and they found Him there. And He went deep into that place with three of His disciples, Peter, James and John. The disciples had a secret place and a quiet place, too. It was called the upper room. And in Acts 1 we find them, at Jesus’s command, going back to Jerusalem to wait. To wait and pray, to pray and wait. And they were in the upper room. Probably the same room that they acquired during the Passover. We’ll just assume it was that same upper room in the old city of Jerusalem where Jesus met with them on the night before He was crucified. But they go back there to pray and to wait.

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And I see in Acts 1 two kinds of praying that we can do and should do. I label the first one this way- the prayer that waits on God. Let’s pick it up in verse 12 and read how the

apostles and the early followers of Jesus prayed this kind of prayer. Verse 12, “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.” Now, a verse or two later Luke tells us that there were about 120 of them in this upper room. Small church. You know, the average church today is a hundred people or less. But this is where the church started, 120 people. And he lists the disciples there. He mentions the women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Jesus’s siblings. That’s a whole story in and of itself. Now they’re calling Him Lord, not just brother. They’re calling Him Lord and Christ.

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But they go to the upper room to pray and to wait. Jesus told them to wait. Now, I don’t know about you, but I’m not very good at waiting. I’m the guy that if you’re driving 5 or 10 miles an hour lower than the speed limit in the right lane, I’m the guy behind you honking my horn or speeding around you, saying, “Come on now, get it on a little bit,” okay, because I don’t like ... I’m very impatient that way. I don’t like the wait. I’m not very good at waiting. But we’re talking about praying and waiting on God. A late pastor and wonderful Bible expositor named Harry Ironside was reflecting on this scene in the early church. And he says, “When God is going to do something great or do some great thing, He moves the hearts of people to pray. He stirs them up to pray in view of what He is about to do so that they might be prepared for it. The disciples needed the self-examination that comes through prayer and supplication, that they might be ready for the tremendous event which was about to take place- the coming to earth of God the Holy Spirit to dwell in believers and empower them to witness for him.” What a great description of what’s going on here. They were praying. They were waiting. They were waiting and they were praying.

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It’s not an easy thing to do, especially when you don’t know how long you’re supposed to wait. It turned out to just be 10 days. From day 40 after the resurrection where Jesus ascended to the day of Pentecost it was only 10 days. But Jesus told them, “Go to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, the promised one, not many days later.” The hardest thing about waiting is not knowing how long. It’s like your kids in the back seat of the car saying, “Are we there yet? Are we there yet?” “We’re almost, we’re most there.” Five minutes later, “Are we there yet? Are we there yet?” The disciples were asking the same thing. “Is this the time? Is this the time?” “No, go to Jerusalem, sit there, wait and pray. Not many days from now.” Really? How many days are not many days? That’s what I’d be asking. Because I can read in the Old Testament about people who were sent to God’s waiting room and waited for a long, long time.

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Let me give you one example. That’s all I have time for. Abraham and Sarah. Abraham was 75 years old enjoying his retirement in the Ur of Chaldees, modern day Iraq, when God showed up and said, “Abraham, I got a plan for you.” They were childless at the time. He says,

“Well, you’re gonna have a child, you and Sarah. But you’re gonna have to leave this place and start traveling toward a land. And I’ll tell you when you get there.” It’s kind of like saying, “You jump, and on the way up I’ll tell you how high.” You know, how about that for walking by faith? So they set out in faith. They left a comfortable, wealthy retirement and set off as sojourners traveling toward this place with a promise they held onto for 25 years. That’s how long they were in God’s waiting room. So when we see the early church being told by Jesus to go and wait in Jerusalem, they go there to pray the prayer that waits on God.

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Are you waiting on God for something right now? Maybe for employment. Maybe for a spouse. I don’t know what you’re waiting on right now. I’ve been in God’s waiting room before, and the hardest thing is I don’t know how long I have to wait. But I’m supposed to pray and wait, pray and wait, pray and wait. The hardest thing is that I become impatient, and I confuse faith with wishful thinking. And after a while I say, “Well, I prayed and I prayed, and nothing happened. I guess prayer doesn’t work.” And I give up. I give up after a few days, a few hours, maybe a few weeks.

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How do we pray the prayer that waits on God? How do we do this? Write this down. It’s really simple, but it’s complicated. The prayer that waits on God does so expectantly. We pray with expectation. We pray with the expectation ... hear me on this ... that God has heard our prayer. With the expectation He has heard us because we are children of God and He says, “Come boldly into the throne of grace.” We belong there not because of our own merits, but because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He invites us in to have a conversation with Him. We pray with expectation that He has heard our prayer and that the answer is on the way. It’s sort of like a pregnant woman. Ladies, mother, do you remember when you first got news that you were pregnant? And then you began to say ... maybe the first thing you said to your husband was, “Honey, we’re expecting.” And he’s, like, “Expecting what?” “No, no, we’re expecting,” right? That’s how we describe a pregnant woman who is pregnant with expectation that the child, the promised child is coming. Oh, you have a due date, but you don’t know the exact day and the exact hour. But you pray and you plan and you wait with a sense of positive expectation that that child is on the way. You have ... what do you call those things? Baby showers. Yeah, it’s been a long time, folks. We had them way back when. But it’s been ... yeah, baby showers you plan. You put together a nursery with your husband. You paint the walls, and you buy little decorations. And you buy a crib. You plan and you order your life with the expectation this is going to happen.

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That’s not the way most of us pray though. We lose patience in our praying. The faith that is required to wait on God until the answer comes. And a lot of our praying is wishful thinking. And when it doesn’t happen in our time frame, we give up. We fail in our praying. There’s a great example in the Old Testament of the prayer that wait on God. And this is what Daniel...Daniel 9. And Daniel was fasting and praying, the Bible says, for 21 days. Do you have enough faith to wait on God for 10 days, let alone 21 days, let alone 25 years? Well, Daniel was praying and fasting for 21 days. But the answer didn’t come, and it didn’t come, and it didn’t come, and it didn’t come. The answer came on the 21st day. And the Bible says that the

angel of the Lord showed up and said, “Daniel, when you started praying on day 1, we heard you, (0:19:00.0) and we dispatched the answer.” And the angel goes on to describe...and this is one of the wonderful glimpses we have into the heavenly realms and into spiritual warfare. He says, “As the answer was coming, the demonic spirits got in the way and interrupted it. And there was a battle between Michael the archangel and this demonic spirit. And we couldn’t get...but you continued to pray. You continued to fast until there was a breakthrough. And the answer came on day 21.” That’s how we pray as a church that prays the prayer that waits on God. It’s up to Him to determine the day or the hour. We pray and we wait on God for the return of Jesus Christ, but we don’t know the day or the hour, do we? But we are to be the church that is waiting for Him, praying with a sense of expectation. It could be today that the promised return of our Lord Jesus Christ happens. So we pray the (0:20:00.1) prayer of waiting on God, and we do so with expectation.

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There’s another prayer that happens as we read on a little bit further. And I call this the prayer for wisdom when choosing leaders. Let’s pick it up in verse 15. It says, “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, Field of Blood.)” Peter goes on to say, “‘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.’ 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 his resurrection.’ 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.”

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You ever read something and later you discover there is more to this than meets the eye? That’s the way we must read these verses here. It sounds just, kind of like, a church business meeting after prayer meeting, right? We got some leadership issues to deal with here. Peter addresses the elephant in the room. You know, “Judas is not with us.” Luke lists all the apostles in the earlier verses. And if you count them, there are 11, not 12. And Peter addresses that elephant, and he links it to Old Testament prophecy, by the way. That “this was prophesied about one of us,” And Judas was the fulfillment of that. His tragic death...I mean, he betrayed Jesus, regretted it, took his own life. Judas tragic death was prophesied in scripture. And Peter deals with that in the business meeting here.

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But then he does some math. He realized we need 12, not 11. Well, why not go forward with 11? Well, maybe he remembers that Jesus said some time during His ministry with the disciples that “One day you all will sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel.” They had 11, not 12. It didn’t take a calculus major to figure that out. And so Peter says, “Now we must find the twelfth apostle.”

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Now, here is where it goes from a rather benign business meeting to...I’m gonna take you into the deep end of theology, because there’s more going on here than what meets the eye. Peter does several things. First, he establishes the criteria by which this replacement disciple and apostle would be chosen. Then they pray. And then they do something really weird at the end that I’ll address at the end here. But he establishes the criteria. He says, “The man who is qualified to fill Judas’s role and join us as disciples, he will be a man who has been with us from the beginning, from the beginning of John’s baptism all the way to the ascension.” There was a larger group of followers than just the twelve, and it needed to be somebody who could say, “I was there in the beginning.” And also somebody who could say, “I saw the risen Christ with my own eyes.” Why was that important? Well, because in a Roman culture, the minimum requirement for a credible witness in a court of law was an eyewitness. And this was part of the authority by which the disciples and the early apostles went into, you know, their culture. They could say with spiritual authority, “We were there from the beginning, and we saw the risen Christ with our own eyes.”

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Now, when Jesus was here and ministering—you read it in the Gospels—His spiritual authority was challenged many times. People would come to Him and say, “Jesus, why do You say the things that You say, and do the things that You do.” And He would always point to the Father who sent Him, and also to the signs and wonders and miracles that He performed that Old Testament prophecy said would happen Messiah comes. But they challenged His spiritual authority. Prior to the coming of Jesus, the spiritual authority by which God’s representatives came in the Old Testament was what we would call prophetic authority. A prophet of God would show up and say, “Thus saith the Lord.” How did you know whether he was authentic or not? The criteria was 100% of what he predicted in the future must come true. Anything less than that, he’s a false prophet. He spoke with prophetic authority. Jesus spoke with His own authority that He described.

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Now we’re about ready to birth the church. We’re about to enter into the apostolic era. And the early apostles went in what we call apostolic authority. “We were there from the beginning. We saw the risen Christ.” And their message and authority was confirmed with signs, wonders and miracles.

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Now, friends, we do not live in the apostolic era. Here’s why. There’s not one of us that fits the criteria. We weren’t there in the beginning, from the beginning of John’s baptism. We have not seen the risen Christ with our own eyes. That was the criteria by which an apostle was identified. The era—what we call the apostolic era—ended with the death of the apostles.

Today it would be wrong for me to stand up and say, “I’m Apostle Ron.” I would be claiming a false apostolic authority. I wasn’t there. I didn’t see the risen Christ. It would also be inappropriate for me to assume that my ministry should be confirmed by signs, wonders and miracles. That was for the apostolic era.

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We don’t speak...the church today does not speak with apostolic authority. We speak with biblical authority. We have what the apostles did not have the 1st century. It was still in process of being written. We stand up and say, “The Bible says...” Okay? We don’t have apostolic authority, but we have the apostolic accounts- the 1st century eyewitness accounts of what happened. And we have the completed canon of scripture.

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Now, let me be very careful about what I say here. And I don’t want any misunderstanding here. I am not saying that God is out of the miracle business. He’s not. God can do whatever He wants to do. But you study miracles in the Bible. They appear, they disappear. They appear, they disappear. Moses performed miracles before Pharaoh. But the patriarchs didn’t perform miracles. You know, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph. They didn’t perform miracles. Elijah and Elisha performed miracles. Elisha two times the miracles that Elijah performed. But not every prophet in the Old Testament...in fact, most of them did not perform miracles. Miracles would cease to be special and would not have the ability to point us to something new that happened if they happened all the time. The Old Testament prophecies concerning Messiah say when He comes, look for the signs, the wonders, the miracles. And that carried on through the apostolic era until biblical authority was established. Okay? Now, God is still in the miracle business, all right. But not for the purpose that He as during the apostolic era to confirm the apostolic authority of the apostles who didn’t have the full canon of scripture. Does that make sense? You with me so far?

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Now, let’s fast forward through church history. Let’s go all the way up to the 16th century when, over time, the church kind of lost its way. We call it the Dark Ages. And the church, quite frankly, became corrupted. And papal authority superseded biblical authority. By the 1600s and the Protestant Reformation it was no longer what the Bible said, it’s what the pope in Rome said. It took the Protestant Reformation to rescue the church from papal authority and restore biblical authority. The Protestant Reformation, one of the cries of the reformers was *sola scriptura*. It was Latin for “by scripture alone.” They were saying, “Listen, we have lost biblical authority, and it’s been superseded by the pope.” And what the reformers said was, “If it ain’t in the Bible, I don’t care what the pope says.” And they reestablished what we call biblical authority. And the church continued on from then. And here we are today, again, speaking with biblical authority. I’m not an apostle. I don’t meet the criteria. I’m a pastor and a teacher. And you ask me, “Ron, why do you say the things that you say and do the things that you do?” I say because the Bible says. Because this is the Word of God.

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Friends, in all of this, you know, theological debate and discussion in the church today, understand this. God would much rather us believe Him because we take Him at His Word than

believe Him because we saw some sign or wonder out there or miracle. And you study the life of Jesus in the Gospels. He was very hesitant to perform miracles for people who said, “Oh, You claim to be the Messiah. Prove it to us with some wonder, some sign, some miracle out there.” When the religious leaders did that, He said, “No, I’m not a circus act. But I’ll tell you. I’ll point you to Jonah in the Old Testament. Three days and three nights in the belly of a fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” He used the opportunity to predict His own resurrection and, in a sense, said, “Listen, if you don’t believe Me when I walk out of that grave, no sign, wonder or miracle will get you to believe.” So today and after the apostolic era, after the death of the apostles, the church goes forward in biblical authority with a resurrection story and gospel message, the Holy Spirit living inside of us—now we’re on this side of Pentecost—and the Word of God in our hands. And this is our authority.

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Now, one other thought here. There are challenges to biblical authority in every generation. And there are three that I see in our time. One is a continued challenge by papal authority. Now we have the divide between Protestants and Catholics. And the Roman Catholic Church, still papal authority, kind of supersedes biblical authority. The other is when people in our day and age, even Protestants, try to act like the apostles, pun intended. They act like the apostles and assume that their ministry should be confirmed by signs, wonders and miracles. And there is a subtle attack on biblical authority there.

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One of the questions we have to ask ourselves when we’re studying the book of Acts, one of the understandings, is that Acts describes a transitional time in the program of God. We’re transitioning from the Old Testament and the time of Jesus’s ministry to the church age. And is the book of Acts at any point...is it descriptive or it is it prescriptive? Does it describe the acts of the apostles, or does it prescribe how we are to act like the apostles? You follow me on the difference there? And that’s an important question to ask in any place, and especially in Acts 1. Because I said when they were choosing leaders, the new leader, the new apostle, Peter does three things. He establishes the criteria for apostolic authority. You have to have been there. You have to have seen the risen Christ. And then they pray.

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And then they do something really weird. It’s like they say, “Hey, pull out the bingo cards. Let’s roll the dice.” Because their criteria and their praying brought them to two equally good options- a guy named Justus and a guy named Matthias. They fit the criteria. And they prayed and they said, “Wow, we got these...either one of them would be good.” And they pulled out the dice, and they rolled the dice.” Now, is that descriptive or prescriptive? Should we become the First Baptist Church of the Dice Rollers? Is that how we’re to make decisions today? That’s an important question to ask. No, it’s descriptive. And here is why they did it that way.

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Before Pentecost, before the Holy Spirit came, casting lots was a common way to discern the will of God after much prayer. And this is what the early church does. And you see some of this practice at other things even in the Old Testament. But you never see the early church

rolling the dice again or drawing straws or flipping the coin to make decision. Never again in the book of Acts do they do that. Why? Because after Pentecost they have the additional resource of the Holy Spirit living inside of them to discern the will of God, whether it comes to choosing leaders or whatever decision they come to. So by Acts 6 when they're choosing the first deacons, they pray and they look for men who are filled with the Holy Spirit. But there's no rolling of the dice. There's no drawing straws. There's no flipping the coin. And this is important for us to remember. You've got to be very careful in how you understand and interpret the book of Acts before and after the day of Pentecost and before and after and during the apostolic era. That's the deep end of theology for the morning, and I hope I didn't lose any of you there.

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The big picture is this. This church prayed. The prayed. Before Pentecost casting lots was a way to discern the will of God after much prayer. After Pentecost I say the best chance of making a wise decision in the absence of prayer and the absence of the Holy Spirit is not better than a gamble. If you're not going to seek God in prayer and the discernment of the Holy Spirit, then just draw straws or flip a coin and take what you get. But that's not how we are to discern God's will as New Testament believers today. We have that additional resource of the Holy Spirit that comes in Acts 2. They were a praying church. They had a resurrection message. We have a resurrection message. They eventually had the Holy Spirit. We have the Holy Spirit. They were a praying church. The question is, are we a praying church? Is prayer more than just something we dabble in? Is it something we are devoted to? I always say we can always do more after we have prayed, but we should never do more until we have prayed. That's true in your individual life, in my individual life. It's true of us corporately as a church and important, important lessons for us to take.

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