

2023 Theme - Focus On What Matters

Sermon Series - The Book of Acts/God's Plan for His Church

Sermon Title - Decision Making 101

Sermon Text - Acts 1:8-26

Sermon Presenter - Pastor Larry

“And my heart will sing how great is our God” When you are facing decisions in your life, do you think “How great is my God” and I know He will guide me and direct me, or do you immediately think, “What if I get this wrong” and I don’t know how to find God’s will in this? Folks, I would lose my mind if I didn’t trust in my awesome, great and mighty God to be faithful to guide me! But how do we find God’s will when it comes to life’s most important decisions? Let’s pray and ask God to teach us the principles of decision making 101! Prayer.

Do you ever have a hard time making decisions? The valley of indecision is a terrible place to live. If you stay there long it will seem like death valley. If you believe finding God’s will is important, the question becomes; How do I find God’s will for my life? As you know some decisions are more important than others. Some are mission critical to your life! Decisions that were made in the early stages of the New Testament Church were mission critical to the New Testament Church. They were, after all, the first Church and were going to set the pace and example for generations to come. Every decision at this early stage had great implications. Today we will look at the process they used to make decisions. One of the first major decisions they were going to make was to replace Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed Jesus and subsequently taken his own life. They knew how important this decision was! Our text is found in Acts 1:8-26. Jesus had met with the disciples and some of His other followers, after the resurrection, at a village called Bethany on the Mount of Olives. Jesus ended His conversation with this...

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

Acts 1:10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

Acts 1:11 “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Acts 1:12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city.

Acts 1:13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

So this lists the eleven disciples minus Judas Iscariot. Luke goes on to say...

Acts 1:14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Here's some important background. This is the only time we see Mary the Mother of Jesus mentioned in the Book of Acts and Luke tells that Jesus' brothers were there. Why is this important to the topic of decision making? When you're making decisions, who you let influence and guide you in those decisions is important. And if you're going to trust God to help you make decisions, then you have to have reasons for that trust! Mark's gospel talks about the questions many had of Jesus. Questions that would have to be resolved if someone was going to put their trust in Jesus! Listen...

Mark 6:2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles!

Mark 6:3 Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Mark 6:4 Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor."

John's Gospel actually tells us that Jesus' brothers, during much of His ministry, did not believe Him to be the Messiah.

John 7:5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

And Mark tells us this...

Mark 3:20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.

Mark 3:21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

Why is this important information? Because something so dramatic had happened that they were now willing to join with Jesus' disciples at great risk to themselves, in order to seek God's will in their decisions. Instead of distancing themselves from the brother they at one time thought to be a mad man, the One who had been brutally crucified as a blasphemer, they are now embracing and seeking to discover His will for their lives. What changed their minds? What in the world could have happened to make this difference? Do you think maybe it was the fact that they had personally seen the resurrected Jesus, alive, walking, talking, and then ascending back to heaven? Indeed! And I want you to think about this, I've said it before but it bears repeating because it's so important, especially for a world of skeptics. Many of the disciples and followers of Jesus would face horrible persecution and even death because they refused to disavow Jesus and their belief that He had risen from the dead. Here's the deal: people sometimes die for a lie, but almost always, it's a lie they believe to be true. Very rarely, if ever, would someone be willing to die for something they knew to be a lie! What am I trying to say? If

the disciples had truly stolen the body of Jesus as was rumored, and they knew the resurrection was some kind of elaborate hoax, do you really believe they would have continued to stick by their story when they were being threatened with stoning, or even crucifixion? Do you think they would keep up a lie if their family was standing there before them and about to be put to death if they didn't produce the body of Jesus? One of the most convincing proofs of the resurrection of Jesus is the fact that so many eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection refused to recant or deny the resurrection of Jesus even when facing death! Many of their deaths are not found in the Bible but in other early Christian histories. However, the death of Jesus' brother James was recorded in a non-Christian history written by the Jewish historian Josephus in his Jewish history called "Antiquities of the Jews."

Once again I submit to you that had the disciples simply hidden the body of Jesus, they would have caved under the pressure of knowing they were going to lose their lives! But there was no hidden body! Jesus had resurrected and ascended back to the Father and that's why we see the extreme courage and boldness of their witness. Let's continue with our text...

Acts 1:15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)

Acts 1:16 and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus--

Acts 1:17 he was one of our number and shared in this ministry."

Luke then interjects some commentary for his readers, and it is a bit graphic, concerning the death of Judas, so I'll let you read the end of verse 18 since we may have some little ones in worship with us.

Acts 1:18 (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.

Acts 1:19 Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

Acts 1:20 "For," said Peter, "it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, 'May another take his place of leadership.'

When Luke says Judas bought a field, he was not saying that Judas literally purchased it but that it had been bought due to Judas' actions. His readers would have known, what we know from Matthew's Gospel, that Judas felt remorse for what he had done and returned the 30 pieces of silver to the religious leaders, but they would not take it, so he threw it on the floor of the temple. The priest considered the money to be tainted blood money so they decided to buy a field in which to build a cemetery for unknown people with no family. Evidently they bought the field where Judas died, and thus Scripture was fulfilled. So now the New Church had a big decision before them. How would they make this decision and other important decisions they would face? Let's continue reading...

Acts 1:20 "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, "'May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, "'May another take his place of leadership.'

Acts 1:21 Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

Acts 1:22 beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

Acts 1:23 So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. (Muh ty us)

Acts 1:24 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen

Acts 1:25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs."

Acts 1:26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias (Muh ty us); so he was added to the eleven apostles.

So what do we learn about decision making from this passage? Four major things.

1. Decisions were birthed in unity
2. Decisions were bathed in prayer
3. Decisions were based on Scripture
4. Decisions were by the will of God

1. Decisions were birthed in unity.

Acts 1:14 They all joined together NIV

The King James version says...

Acts 1:14 These all continued with one accord KJV

And the first thing to note about their unity is that their decisions were birthed in a...

Unity of Mission

They had received their mission directly from Jesus. We read these Scriptures last week, but we need to be reminded again of God's mission for us...

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And we see these words at the end of Matthew's Gospel in what is known as the Great Commission!

Mat 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Mat 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Mat 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The church had been given a mission. And if you remember I said last week, that the church is made up of individuals, so the mission of the church is your mission! And here's why this matters...If you don't have a mission in life, every decision you make will be difficult! Why? Because there is no guiding direction or purpose. You will make decisions based on feelings, or what seems good for the moment but not for the long run. Decisions made in this way are ineffective at best and destructive at worst! At Northshore Church we want every decision we make to be based on our God given mission of transforming worship, people and the world! In other words, we want to have worship services that transform people's hearts, and ministries that transform people's lives and people who transform their world! And we must understand that their decisions were birthed in a...

Unity of Mind

I believe the group that had gathered together at that meeting were also like-minded. They had gathered together to talk about all that had happened. They had gathered together to discuss what they were going to do. They had gathered together to pray together and to seek God's will. How does a church achieve unity of mind? Here's how we try to do this at Northshore Church...

The Northshore Process

We encourage people in our Northshore Orientation to...

Come to Worship

Sunday morning worship along with ShoreKids and then Sunday evenings our youth have an additional opportunity to worship together at ShoreStudents! And then we encourage people to...

Connect to a Small Group

This allows us to minister to you and gives you the opportunity to minister to others! It allows us to fellowship and develop the unity God wants us to have and that we need if we're going to transform our world. Connecting to a small group takes you another step towards becoming a participator rather than simply a spectator! And then we seek to be like minded and unified by encouraging people to...

Commit to spiritual growth

Again, we start with Northshore Orientation. Disciple groups will begin again in the spring for new believers and people wanting to grow in their faith. But we always emphasize your need for personal time alone with God. Spiritual growth is most healthy and strong when it is done together with brothers and sisters in the Lord coupled with spending personal time in devotion, study and fellowship with Jesus! And a part of our goal for Unity in the church is so that we can each of us...

Contribute to the mission

"Let's go honey, I knew he was going to ask for money." That's not what I'm talking about! We want everyone to make the decision to get involved in helping us accomplish our mission. That could involve giving, but what we want most is for everyone to use their God given gifts to help us reach people who don't know the good news about Jesus. People who don't know the gospel message of forgiveness and grace and the power to live a new life! And we want people to help us do ministry to the hurting, the broken, the lonely, the confused and the troubled! There is room for various methods within our process, but the key is that we remain unified in our mission and in mind. How do we do this? Paul gives us directions in Philippians 2:1-5...

Phil 2:1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,

Phil 2:2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Phil 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Phil 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Phil 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

But not only were their decisions birthed in a unity of mind, their...

2. Decisions were bathed in prayer!

Acts 1:14 They all joined together constantly in prayer ...

How important is prayer? This is where we seek God's grace, God's mercy, God's wisdom, God's strength, God's will, and God's intervention in our lives! How often should I pray? How often should we pray as a church? Once again, Paul gives us instruction...

1 Th 5:17 pray continually;

Pray continually? What does that even mean? That's not practical!!!! To which I would say, "Yes it is practical, very practical and even mission critical! It's not talking about going to your quiet place or prayer closet 24/7, but it's about walking in a constant awareness of God's presence with you at work, at home, at school, at the gym working out, at the store shopping, on the

soccer field, golf course, or playing an online game with other gamers! It's about setting aside time to pray specifically and intentionally, so that when you are faced with a situation in real life, especially really hard or tragic times, the natural, supernatural thing to do is to talk to God about it! And what did Paul mean when he said...

1 Th 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

You can't be serious! Give thanks in all circumstances? Are you kidding me? Folks, sometimes we just don't take the time to meditate on Scripture and see what God is really saying. Look at the verse again...

1 Th 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Paul didn't say give thanks **for** all circumstances, but **in** all circumstances! Boy, the big difference a little preposition can make! I don't thank God for tragic things, or bad things, but I thank Him **in** those things because I know He's greater, bigger, stronger, smarter, and very capable of getting me through anything! And He's faithful to help me make the right decisions in any circumstance if I will let Him. I love the way the Psalmist put it...

Psa 17:6 I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer.

Psa 17:7 Show the wonder of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes.

Psa 17:8 Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings

Psa 17:9 from the wicked who assail me, from my mortal enemies who surround me.

Psa 17:10 They close up their callous hearts, and their mouths speak with arrogance.

And here's the beautiful thing that can happen when a person of faith faces the harshest things in life but turns to God in prayer and gives thanks **in** all circumstances...

Psa 17:15 And I--in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.

I love the goal of the Psalmists prayer...

"I will be satisfied with seeing Your likeness!"

For some people, the goal of their prayer life is better circumstances, better position in life, better finances, better health, better job, bigger house, better relationships, and the list could go on and on. It's not that it's bad or wrong to pray about these things. In fact it's good to pray about all things, but when our main goal in prayer is a better relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we are truly satisfied when we experience God's presence in our prayer life, then we find true meaning and purpose in life and all those other things become secondary! I love the way Jesus put it in His sermon on the mount...

Mat 6:31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Mat 6:32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Mat 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Mat 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The people gathered in the upper room were seeking the Kingdom of God in their prayers. Remember, the Kingdom of God is anywhere God rules. They were inviting God to rule their lives, to be their Lord, their King, their everything! We will see in the coming weeks, God answered the prayers of those gathered in that upper room in a powerful way, and His presence was manifest in such an amazing way, that these 120 people rocked their world for the cause of Christ! If we are going to rock our world for the cause of Christ, we must bathe everything in prayer. If we are to make good decisions as individuals and as a church we must bathe everything in prayer! It can't just be an afterthought, it must be the thing we think of first, even if people think it's a waste of time, it's not, we must bathe things in prayer! I think some of the most powerful reasons to bathe all of our decisions in prayer are found in Philippians 4:6-7...

Phil 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Phil 4:7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Prayer takes away anxiousness, gives us the peace of God and guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. I don't know about you, but I think those are some pretty good reasons to pray, and great reasons to pray more!!!! Okay, so if the early disciple's decisions were birthed in unity, and bathed in prayer, what did they base their decisions on?

3. Decisions were based on Scripture

Acts 1:15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty)

Acts 1:16 and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas,

And then in verse 20...

Acts 1:20 "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms,

Peter based his interpretation of events on Scripture and their decisions were going to be based on Scriptural principles and direction. Basing our decisions on Scripture gives each decision a strong foundation. Scripture teaches us to make decisions that ...

Are honest/Have integrity/Are selfless/Help us fulfill our God-given mission/Honor and glorify God/Transform lives

Paul told young Timothy...

2 Tim 3:14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,

2 Tim 3:15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

2 Tim 3:17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

You may not find the specific answer for every decision or the answer to your every question in the Bible, but you will find the Godly principles by which you can base every decision you will ever have to make! And you discover principles that will help you with your questions. The Psalmist had the kind of passion for God's Word that should permeate our whole church body...

Psa 119:13 With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

Psa 119:14 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

Psa 119:15 I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

Psa 119:16 I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.

Psa 119:17 Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word.

Psa 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

And this leads us to the last point in decision making 101 that we learn from these early disciples of Christ!

4. Decisions were by the will of God

Acts 1:23 So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias.

Acts 1:24 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen

Acts 1:25 to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs."

Acts 1:26 Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

The disciples didn't know exactly what to do! Evidently these two guys were both good men and could do the job. The disciples knew how important it was that they make the right decision. So what do we do when we don't know exactly what to do? When there is not a clear choice? When both choices are good choices? When you've exhausted all attempts to discern the will of God? This is when you put it in the hands of God and step out on faith, trusting God to keep His

promise to lead you! Then and only then is it okay to just pick something and trust that God will lead your choice. It's not okay to roll the dice on any decision we haven't fully examined and earnestly sought to discern the will of God. Sometimes it may look to the world as if we are being a bit superstitious, but if we know we've done our due diligence to discover and discern the will of God and are still uncertain about our choice, it's very proper to take a step of faith. The writer of Proverbs put it this way...

Prov 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

Prov 3:6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Prov 3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.

Put it in His hands!!! He will lead you! He will guide you!!! He will not let you falter if you truly desire His will! And why choose His will over our own will? John tells us...

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:16 For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world.

1 John 2:17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Why did John give this advice? Because John knew what would happen if our decisions were based on our earthly desires and not God's heavenly design! God gave us life and everything that it takes to sustain it. His desire was to have a meaningful friendship with us. However, humankind became enamored with the things God could give materially, rather than the relationship they could have with Him personally. We became drunk with things. We wanted more things. We could never get enough. Many shunned any kind of relationship with the Giver and did not care that the giver was left heart broken. Sometimes we want our will to be done and refuse to seek His will for our lives. We make decisions based on our selfish wants and desires rather than on His good and perfect will for our lives. And here's the crazy thing...We live according to our own will, do our own thing, reject God's will and His divine principles and then blame God when things go terribly wrong! The writer of Proverbs puts it this way...

Prov 19:3 A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the LORD.

But can we live in the world and not love the things of the world? Let me put it this way: there should be a huge difference between the love you have for God and the desire you have for the things of this world. The love you have for things in this life should pale in comparison to the love and dedication you have to the One who created you, gave creation to you to enjoy, and was willing to die in order that you might live as a new creation! Here's the sad thing! Far too many have decided God has no plan for their life, or they actually think God has it in for them and is against them. Nothing could be farther from the truth, but Satan has deceived so many. We've got to trust that God loves us and has a plan for us and we've got to want it! It is not in God's personality to force His love on anyone who doesn't desire His love. He's heartbroken

when people refuse His loving offer of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and friendship, but He will not violate your God-given right to make a decision! It's decision making 101! But make no mistake about it: God's will is superior in every way to anything you could ever desire. So when you have a decision to make, remember this passage, believe it, and hold tightly to it!

Jer 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jer 29:12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. Jer

29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Jer 29:14 I will be found by you," declares the LORD,

Let's pray!