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The Unstoppable Church

Getting the Right People on the Bus

Acts 1:12-26

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You're probably familiar with a book written by Jim Collins called *Good to Great*. In the book he and his team do a considerable amount of research trying to determine what it is that allows a business or a company to go from good to great and, in essence, to stay in that greatness over a significant period of time.

One of their conclusions is that you have to get the right people on the bus. That's Collins' language for saying you have to get the right people in the right places. You can have a great business plan. You can have a great strategy. But if you don't get the right people on the bus, that bus isn't going anywhere.

That raises an interesting question. Jesus has called us to the most remarkable mission of changing the world. Who would Jesus put on the bus? In other words, who are the right people on the bus? And of course, the logical question: Is there a seat for you on the bus?

Turn to Acts chapter 1 and we'll find out. A little review from last week: Acts opens about 40 days after the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus has spent 40 days pouring Himself back into His leadership team to convince them that the message is true: the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And their marching orders are to take this magnificent message of hope, this life-changing message of Jesus, to every corner of the earth.

Literally, the assignment is to change the world. Jesus has told them the only way this can happen is if they are empowered with the dynamic, explosive power of the Holy Spirit within them to accomplish the mission.

Having said all of that, then Jesus ascended up through the clouds from the Mount of Olivet. Now, I'm guessing if any of these disciples still had some doubts (which is unlikely that this is true), when they watched Jesus literally lift off the earth and go into the clouds, those doubts were put to rest one final time. This is indeed the miraculous Son of God and this is the message of life and hope.

From the Mount of Olives they go about three-quarters of a mile back to Jerusalem, meet together in the upper room, and that's where we pick up the story in verse 12 of chapter 1.

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, 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. (Acts 1:12-13, *NASB)

Now just imagine the emotional dynamic on that walk from the Mount of Olivet to the upper room, and then in that upper room. They had to have been filled with fear, anxiety, excitement—overwhelmed. Jesus has just told them the mission is to change the world. “In a few days My Spirit is going to come upon you in a way you can't even today imagine.” They understand that 43 days ago their leader was executed. So there is reason to be concerned for their very lives.

The dynamics in that room must have been lively, to say the least. Notice that Luke says they went to the upper room. Most commentators believe he's referring to the same upper room that they were in when Jesus had His last Passover meal with the disciples. If so, that would have been the very place where Jesus taught them and said, "Soon will come My Spirit. I'm going to ascend and I'll send back My Spirit." It's the very room where 43 days before they had declared that, no matter what, they would stay faithful and loyal to Him.

It was the room (you remember when we went through the Gospel of Mark) that probably was in the house of Mark himself. An interesting side note is it's likely that Mark was privy to all of the activity that takes place in Acts chapter 1. So there are a lot of dynamics going on here.

It is interesting that Luke takes the time and the amount of print to record the names of the remaining 11 of the leadership team, the apostles. Luke is known for his brevity. Throughout the Book of Acts, one thing we keep saying of the text is we want more details. For example, I would love to know exactly what went on those 40 days from Jesus' resurrection to the ascension. I'd like to know what exactly He taught them and how He taught them. There are a lot of details that we don't get.

Then why does he spend this chunk of this Book of Acts telling us something everybody already knows? The 11 apostles (was 12) are listed in all four Gospels. Luke himself listed them in his Gospel. Everybody knew who they were. This wasn't an unknown detail.

So we have to ask of the text: What's the point? And I think the point is Jesus has just given the marching orders to His leadership team, and now it's about time to accomplish the mission. So you have to ask: Who are these people? Who are these people that are about to change the world? Who does Jesus call to be part of His leadership team?

Luke wants us to remember who indeed they are. They're quite an interesting mix of backgrounds and personalities. They certainly do not represent the people that I would think need to be on that bus. In our language today, we would say they're all new believers, a couple of years at most. Of course, they're in a high stress situation, which intensifies the dynamics. I realize it's easy to say, "Well, these men, probably because they had been with Jesus, had now matured to the point where they were ready."

Do you remember 43 days before this they were in that same upper room, and what were they arguing about? They were arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. Don't tell me these men didn't have baggage. Nobody matures in 43 days.

Now think about the dynamics—for example, Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector. The tax collector was the most hated among the Jewish people. To be a tax collector you literally had to sell your soul to the Roman government. They now owned you. You would collect the taxes of the Romans from your own people, and then you'd squeeze a little bit more money out of them than what was required. And that's what you lived on. So when you see Matthew driving through the streets in his brand-new chariot, you know that the over-taxation bought that chariot. And you hated him for it.

Throughout the Gospels you have a reference to sinners and tax collectors. They were so bad they deserved their own category. You could not have picked a worse person to start a movement to reach the Jewish people than a tax collector. But that's who Jesus put on His bus.

At the other end of the scale was Simon the Zealot. It's interesting in this list of names that Luke keeps that tag on Simon. A zealot was someone who was totally sold out for the Hebrew nation—what we could call today a terrorist. This was someone who would die for the cause of delivering the Hebrew people from the tyranny of Rome—a revolutionary. They would often hide in the hills; they would swoop down; they would cause mayhem and they would disappear again. You couldn't find anybody among the Hebrew people more committed to the nation of Israel than Simon.

You couldn't have found two people that were more polar opposites than Simon and Matthew. And so you're going to put them together on one team to accomplish the mission.

Think about James and John. They were referred to as the "sons of thunder." Let's just say that they weren't prone to sit around and have warm, touchy-feeling meetings. They were more prone to rock the place. Peter was impulsive and never quite in alignment. Imagine trying to pull those men together to be a high-functioning team. Are those the people you would put on your bus? But that's who Jesus chose.

We get some insight as to "why" from the text. There is one attribute of these men that basically precedes the Book of Acts and would be discussed throughout the Gospel of Luke, and that is that each one of these 11 men had made a decision to be a Christ-follower. They had been with Jesus. They knew Him; they loved Him; they followed Him; they were taught by Him. They had dedicated themselves to being a follower of Jesus.

There's a reason why Jesus didn't go to the religious crowd to build His team: because the religious crowd didn't need Him. They were self-righteous; they had no need of a Savior. The only people that get on the bus are those people that recognize their need for a Savior. That's where it all starts. You have to be a Christ-follower. Each one of these 11 men had made that decision. And they were now committed to follow Jesus.

The second characteristic is found in the text.

These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer... (v. 14a)

Stop and think about this idea of "one mind." How do you get this diverse group of 11 men all on the same page? Forty-three days ago they're arguing about who's the greatest in the kingdom. With all of the differences in personalities and background, yet they had come together. They were all on the same page; they were all reading out of the same playbook; they were in alignment—because the one mind was the mind of Christ. And the mind of Christ had just been articulated to them in the statement of the mission.

What is it that unites 11 radically different men to come together with one mind on the leadership team? The answer is the compelling, life-changing mission of Jesus. They had to understand that, *In order to accomplish the mission, we have got to lock arms and do this together.*

Unity is not the goal of the church. Unity is a byproduct of the mission of the church. You don't get people unified by all sitting together and having warm fuzzy discussions of: "How do you feel about that?"... "No, no, how do *you* feel about that?" You bring the church into unity by having a compelling mission that everyone is willing to say, "Yes; yes, that is worth giving my life up for."

Show me a church that does not have a compelling mission, and I'll show you a church characterized by conflict and division. I see this over and over again: churches that get into this spiral that they often never seem to get out of—and ultimately to their demise. It starts when there is no compelling vision; there is no compelling purpose. There is nothing there for people to say, "Yes, I will live for this. I will die for this. I will give my life for this."

When there is no compelling vision, people start looking at each other and complaining and comparing, "We don't like this...we don't like that." And there's conflict here and there's conflict there. So the church sets out to try to resolve that conflict by turning inward. What they think will resolve that has just poured gasoline on the fire—because that is the problem already: they are inward-focused. They've lost sight of the mission. They're all just looking at each other. And no matter how many meetings you try to have to resolve the conflict, it's just going to get worse and worse and worse—because they keep looking inward, inward, inward.

The way to resolve conflict and division in a church is not to have many, many meetings until everyone feels better. It is to go back to the compelling mission of Jesus Christ and remind people: This is not about me. This is not about my ego; this is not about my feelings; this is not about my convenience and comfort; this is not about my insecurities. This isn't about me at all.

This is about recognizing we all come from different backgrounds. We all have different personalities. We aren't going to agree on everything; I understand that. We must all understand that and say, "But there is something very significant at stake here—that is the eternal destiny of the souls of people around us." And that is a compelling enough mission that we say, "We will lay our stuff aside; we will lock arms and get the job done." That brings people together in unity to be of one mind.

Another characteristic is also in the text.

These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer... (v. 14a)

Why do you suppose these disciples were continually devoting themselves to prayer? Do you suppose over this ten-day period that they got together one day and said, "You know, we really should probably have a prayer meeting, because that's the way we're supposed to do it. So how about Wednesday night, 7:00, we'll have a prayer meeting"? And they all said, "That's a good idea. We'll invite everybody to come."

I don't think that's how it happened at all. I think as soon as they got in their room they started to think about what was happening—what they had been called to and what the dangers were. Forty-three days earlier their leader was executed. The reality that they would die for this mission was very intense in their minds. They were fearful; they were lonely for Jesus; they were overwhelmed. He was gone—what were they supposed to do?

They just found themselves on their faces before God, saying, "God, we can't do this. Help!" That's why they were continually devoting themselves to prayer. They had no choice. They were in way over their head. They were desperate. And all they could think to do was fall on their face and say, "God, help us!"

If you find that your prayer life is weak, let me suggest to you it is because your understanding of the mission is weak. If you really understand what you have been called to, if you understand what is at stake, look into the eyes of your neighbor, look into the eyes of that person you work with, look into the eyes of your friends and recognize that these people will spend eternity

somewhere. And you've been commissioned with the assignment to take the life-changing message of Jesus to them.

If that doesn't cause you to fall on your face, I don't know what will—because it is overwhelming. It is sobering to realize the seriousness of what we've been called to. Suddenly I find myself desperate and saying, “God, help me; I can't do this!”—which is exactly where He wants us to be.

Let's imagine that I own a business. I call together my key leaders and I'm going to give them the best motivational pep talk that I can. I need to tell them that we are facing the greatest challenge in the history of our business. And if we pull together and give it our best effort, it's likely that we can rise to the challenge and it will take us a giant step forward. But if we don't give it our best shot, it's likely we won't meet the challenge and that may be the end of our business.

So I fire them up and I give them my best speech, and I'm hoping at the end of my speech they'll all jump to their feet and applaud. And when I'm done, one of my key leaders raises his hand and says, “By the way, Bryan, I was wondering for the next couple of months would it be okay if I just worked half days?” What would I conclude? I would conclude somewhere along the way there was a major disconnect. You obviously didn't hear what I just said!

If you do not find that your prayer life is strong, I would suggest to you there is a major disconnect. Somewhere along the way you missed the message of Jesus. Somewhere along the way you have not understood the assignment—because if you understand the purpose that God has called us to, you will find yourself continually devoted in prayer.

Luke goes on:

...along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

(v. 14b)

This text is primarily about leadership. That becomes obvious in the next two paragraphs. But Luke wants to make sure we understand that the 11 apostles—the leadership team—weren't the only ones there. There were others who were committed to the cause, who also had a seat on the bus. And again, they were the most unlikely group of people.

Ladies, please don't be insulted by this, but in the first century to say “the women” was quite shocking—because nobody in the first century put women on the bus. It was believed that women simply did not have the capacity to accomplish anything of value—except maybe bringing milk and cookies to those riding on the bus. Jesus could not have been more revolutionary when He included women in His movement. This simple statement “the women” would have dramatically affected the first readers of the Book of Acts.

Throughout the Book of Acts you will find that Jesus has a significant role for women in accomplishing the mission. But understand, He was dramatically revolutionary in His thinking. It also mentions Mary the mother of Jesus separately. You might want to make a mental note: this is the last time we hear anything about Mary.

And he mentions Jesus' brothers. You remember His brothers last year when we went through the Gospel of Mark. The last time we saw His brothers was Mark chapter 3. Do you remember how they were responding to the movement of Jesus? They thought He had lost His mind. Jesus' brothers and His mother came for the express purpose of finding Jesus, bringing Him back home—because the poor man had lost His mind.

We know that His brothers didn't believe, and most likely didn't believe until after the resurrection. You talk about new believers, these men had been believers maybe four or five weeks—but it would have been a radical change that their brother, with whom they grew up, was actually God in the flesh, the Savior of the world. Now give them some credit; that would be a little hard to come to grips with. Quite an unusual group of people on Jesus' bus.

At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty persons was there together), and said, "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas.... (vs. 15-16a)

By the way, verse 16 is one of the greatest statements in all of the Bible for understanding the inspiration of the Scriptures—it explains that it was the Holy Spirit speaking through a human instrument.

"For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry." (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.' (vs. 17-20)

Peter stands up in the middle of the upper room and declares that the Scriptures have been fulfilled and they need to find a replacement for Judas to fill out the team. It's very important to Peter to remind them that Judas' betrayal did not catch God off-guard. It did not catch Jesus off-guard. It was predicted for hundreds of years that it would come to pass. You have this tension between God's sovereignty and the choices Judas made that you find throughout the Scriptures—both somehow at work together.

It is interesting in verse 17 that Peter reminds them that "he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry." In essence what he is saying is, "Judas was one of us. He walked like us; he talked like us. We thought he believed; we thought he was a follower; we thought he was committed." None of the other 11 knew that he was a betrayer. None of them knew that he wasn't really buying it, that he wasn't believing it.

I think that's what this part of the text is about. If you read Matthew chapter 27, there's a description of Judas committing suicide by hanging himself. If you compare that with Acts 1, you might say, "It seems like there's a discrepancy. Which way did he die?"

But it isn't that hard to resolve when you understand that in the first century if someone were to hang themselves, they would probably do it on a tree branch and most typically over some sort of a cliff. Because of what Judas did as a betrayer, nobody is going to touch that dead body. Nobody is going to take it down. So it would just hang there. Most likely what happened is either the rope broke or the tree branch eventually broke. And because Judas was well-seasoned, he fell and his body burst open.

Now the reason for recording it differently has to do with the original audience. Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience, and the Jewish audience had strong feelings about suicide. All Matthew had to say is that Judas killed himself, and immediately they would have said, "What a horrible tragic end!" That's all he needed to say.

But the Greeks didn't see it that way. The Book of Acts is written to a Greek audience from a Greek author. The Greeks had a neutral position on suicide. They would have read that and said, "Whatever." It would not have affected them negatively. And so Luke goes beyond that and describes really this ugly scene of Judas dropping and bursting open and rotting there.

Now, when I read through those details, some of you probably thought, *Well, that's gross. Why do they even put that in there?* That's exactly why they put that in there—because they want you grossed out at the tragic end to Judas, the betrayer. What Peter wants understood is that Judas had the opportunity to be part of the greatest movement in the history of the world. He had the opportunity to literally walk with Jesus, to talk with Jesus, to eat with Jesus, to study at His feet—an opportunity we would long for. And yet, instead, he chose not to believe. Rather than experiencing this magnificent experience that's about to unfold in Acts chapter 2, what he experienced was this ugly, tragic end.

There might be some of you that fit into that category. You walk the walk; you talk the talk. Everybody thinks you're one of us. But in your heart you know you don't really believe; you don't really buy it; you're not really on board with the mission. You need to understand you have the chance to be a part of changing the world. God has called you to be a part of the most magnificent mission possible. But if you so choose, you can walk away and you will suffer the tragic end of your decision.

Luke goes on:

“Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us—beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles. (vs. 21-26)

They determined that they must add one more to bring their number back to 12 in order to be properly positioned for what's about to take place in Acts chapter 2. So they determine, “Who will this person be?” The first thought is that it needs to be someone who has been with Jesus, from the baptism of John all the way through the resurrection—someone who walked with Him, who talked with Him, who has been in the inside circle, someone who knows Him, who has been properly equipped, who is ready to take this assignment. So they determine two of those.

They also said, “It needs to be someone who will go with us to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus to the world.” In other words, it needs to be someone who is willing to sell out for the mission, someone who is on board, who is willing to be with us in one mind to accomplish the assignment.

They put two men before Jesus (before God), but they also understand that person has got to have the right heart and be totally dependent upon the sufficiency of Jesus to accomplish this. And only God knows the heart, so they lifted these two men before God. And God chose Matthias to be the 12th apostle to fulfill the team.

This text is primarily about leaders. It's about Jesus putting the right people on the bus, preparing them for the magnificent events of Acts chapter 2. Jesus doesn't put the most

predictable people on His bus. As a matter of fact, He's quite revolutionary in who He puts on His bus.

But there are certain characteristics that are necessary to accomplish the mission. When we talk about leaders, we're not just talking about pastors and board members. We're talking about hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people in our body whom God has called to fulfill positions of leadership, to influence others to accomplish the mission. If God has called you to such a position, you need to process some of these characteristics.

To have a seat on the bus, you have to have been with Jesus. You have to walk with Him. You have to obey Him. You have to know Him. You have to understand your need for Jesus as Savior.

Second of all, you have to be willing to commit yourself to the mission—to understand this isn't about you. This isn't about your insecurities. This isn't about your ego. This isn't about your pride. This isn't about a platform from which you can pontificate. This is about understanding we have a job to do. And I know you have opinions; I know you have ideas and preferences. But let's understand ultimately we have to pull together to accomplish the mission. This has to be your passion. Your job is to influence others to get on the bus and to accomplish the mission.

Let me ask you a question: If God has called you to a role of leadership and I were to ask your spouse, your children, the people you work with, your friends, what is your driving passion in life, what would they say? Do they understand that it is accomplishing the mission that Jesus has called us to accomplish?

And third, there is a need to be totally dependent upon the Spirit of Jesus to accomplish the mission, evidenced by being continually devoted in prayer. The apostles were devoted in prayer because they understood they weren't sufficient for their calling. The problem with us as leaders is we tend to be prone toward self-sufficiency. I'll tell you right now, that is the way I'm wired. And it's a constant battle to realize I can't do this. I have to be surrendered to the power of the Holy Spirit in my life. I have to be Christ-sufficient, not self-sufficient, to get the job done.

It's easy for us as leaders to say, "Well, yeah, I am dependent on Christ." Really? How was that prayer life this week? Do you find yourself on your face before God, recognizing your calling is way too big for you—continually devoted to prayer?

Over the years God has raised up hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of these type of leaders to sit on the seats of the bus to accomplish the mission—that we might influence others to fulfill the mission that Jesus has called us to accomplish.

Our Father, we're thankful that You have called us to be part of changing the world. Lord, not because we're the best or the brightest But Lord, You call us because we've made a decision of our will to be a Christ-follower—that we are with You, we know You, we walk in obedience to You—and Lord, we understand the sobering reality of the mission and we're sold out. We're willing to say, "It's for this purpose I will live," which includes setting aside our own personal preferences and opinions and egos. Lord, we understand the need to be Christ-sufficient. Our calling is well beyond our own capacity and we are dependent upon the Spirit of Jesus within us to accomplish the mission, which is why we are continually devoted to prayer. Lord, I pray that You would continue to raise up such leaders among us that we might be effective in doing our part to get the job done in our generation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Study Questions
The Unstoppable Church
Getting the Right People on the Bus
Acts 1:12-26
Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. If you were starting a business today, what kind of people would you hire? List the top three qualities you would look for in these people regardless of the type of business.
2. List the top three qualities that would certainly disqualify a person from being hired for your company.
3. If you were starting a religious movement to change the world, who would you want on that team?

Would the top three qualities from question 1 be your same three qualities for someone recruited to change the world? Why or why not?

4. Jesus has called you to be part of His Church with a mission to change the world. How would you rate yourself on the three qualities listed in questions 1 and 3?

Bible Study

1. Review Acts 1:1-11. What is the mission of the Church?

What is the key to accomplishing the mission?

2. What do you know about the apostles listed in Acts 1:13?

Why do you suppose Jesus chose these men to lead His movement?

3. Who else is listed in Acts 1:14? What do we know about the cultural view of women in the first century?

What do we know about Jesus' brothers (see Mark 3:21-35)?

4. What is this group of followers of Jesus doing while they wait for the Spirit of Jesus to come?

How does this line up with what Jesus told them in Acts 1:5, 8 (Compare Jesus' words in John 15:5)?

What would be the first qualification for being part of Jesus' team to change the world?

How would this quality manifest itself on a daily basis?

5. In Acts 1:15-20, 25 Judas is presented as an antithesis to the faithful. What is the point Peter is trying to make concerning Judas?

Why does he quote Old Testament Scripture?

Why does he record such gory details about Judas' death?

6. What were the requirements for choosing a new apostle according to Acts 1:21-26?

Why was this important?

7. When choosing a replacement for Judas, the apostles came together and applied Scripture, used common sense and prayerfully sought God's leading. Was the casting of lots a shortcut to determining God's will (see Proverbs 16:33)? Why or why not?

What does this teach us about key decisions we must make?

What do we have today that these believers didn't have in Acts 1 that makes the casting of lots unnecessary?

Application

1. Create a profile for the type of person Jesus can use to change the world. What are the top three qualifications?
2. What would we look for in a person's life to measure if these qualifications are present?
3. How are you doing in the area of these qualifications?

Is there a particular area you need to work on?

How might you go about growing in these areas?