**THEY ALL JOINED TOGETHER CONSTANTLY IN PRAYER**

May 08, 2016

Acts 1:12-26

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

Last week we started the study of the book of Acts with the key verse; 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 learned that in Greek word “witness” means “Martyr”, one who bears witness by his death. But here remember that it is not by our own human power or strength but by the power of the Holy Spirit that we become his witnesses. In Acts 1:8, Jesus did not say, “You must be my witnesses..” but “You will be my witnesses when the Holy Spirit comes on you…” This is Jesus’ promise for us. Therefore, all we have to do is to rely on the Holy Spirit and surrender to the Holy Spirit absolutely. Then the Holy Spirit will empower us to carry out our task of witnessing of risen Jesus in any circumstances.

So in today’s passage, we will learn about how the disciples and the early church members prepared themselves to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Notice that there was an interval of ten days between Jesus’ ascension to heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in chapter 2. During those 10 days, what did the apostles do (how did they prepare themselves) to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? As we read in today’s key verse, they all joined together constantly in prayer. They studied the Scripture (the Old Testament) and mended the broken vessel by adding Matthias to the eleven. Then the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. Though we are not waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit because we live in the age of the Holy Spirit, we can apply the same principle in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit when we serve the ministry of world campus mission. So I earnestly pray that we may live spirit-filled life as powerful witnesses of risen Jesus through earnest prayer; especially through prayer in one spirit and one mind with sincere study of the word of God

**I. THEY WERE UNITED IN PRAYER (12-14).**

Look at verses 12. “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city.” Their returning to Jerusalem was the expression of their obedience to Jesus’ command to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Of course, they had a lingering fear of the Jews who killed Jesus on the cross. But now nothing could stop them to obey Jesus’ command because they met the risen Jesus and the most glorious and vivid hope of the eternal kingdom of God was planted into their heart through Jesus’ ascension. According to Luke 24:52-53, when they returned to Jerusalem, they returned with great joy (no more sorrow or fear) and they also praised God at the temple. The power of the risen Jesus transformed and overwhelmed their hearts.

Look at verse 13. When the apostles arrived in Jerusalem 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 (13). These are the Eleven, Jesus’ chosen disciples. What did the apostles do while waiting for the Holy Spirit? Did they sit around and do nothing? Or did they have only discussion to decide how to prepare themselves to receive the Holy Spirit? No.

Look at verse 14. “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” Finally, they recognized the importance of prayer. As we all know, the disciples were not men of prayer. In the gospels, we don’t see any scene of prayer by the disciples. But finally the disciples realized that the best way to wait for the Holy Spirit was to pray and especially pray together. Prayer is the expression of total dependence on God. Jesus especially taught the disciples in Matthew 18:20, “Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

When Jesus was not with them in his physical form and they had just his promise to receive the Holy Spirit, they remembered Jesus’ teaching about the importance of prayer and especially united prayer. Now finally they all joined together in prayer. Humanly speaking, it was a miracle. It was an impossible thing to them. To join together is to become one. These eleven men had distinct personalities, and had struggled with one another for more power. They could not become one in their own human character. But now they joined together in prayer. It was because they met the risen Christ and in the risen Christ, they came to know that Jesus was crucified to crucify their sins; their human ambition, selfishness and earth-bound dream. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, they came to understand God’s Agape love; unconditional, sacrificial, and life-giving love. In the risen Christ, they received the same direction and life goal to obey the world mission command. When they saw each other in light of the world mission command, they realized that they were members of the same team, not rivals. So, now they could be one in spirit with a common prayer topic and their common goal. We need to have an individual prayer before God like Jesus who prayed in the solitary place alone in the early morning. But at the same time we need united prayer to obey Jesus’ world mission command. Jesus promised that he would be among us when we pray together. (Matthew 18:20) Individually we are weak. But when we join together in prayer with a common goal, nothing is impossible because the Holy Spirit works through this vessel of unity.

Historically, there have been many examples that when men joined together in prayer to obey Jesus’ command, there was a great work of God. One time in 2010, Dr. Henry Kim introduced the movement of prayer chain done by Moravians in Germany, 1727. Their prayer chain meeting lasted 100 years. Through their prayer chain, God blessed them to send out more than 100 missionaries within 30 years especially to very difficult place to serve. As we know, our UBF world campus mission also began through earnest united prayer among campus students.

These days, in Korea, there has been a great spiritual revival movement through QT-centered church ministry under the leadership of a woman pastor Kim Yang-jae. The one main activity in the church is to join together in sharing sincere QT reflection. They open their life in the light of the word of God before the community of God’s people with sincere reflection and application of God’s word into their practical lives. When they did so, amazing healing and transformation arose in many wounded men and woman. Many broken and suffering people received God’s healing and transformation. Their joining together in genuine sharing with others in words and prayers became very powerful and contagious and now the church has grown up to the number of 10,000 members within 10 years. An amazing thing is that this great work of God began from a small group meeting under the leadership of a nameless lay woman believer who met Jesus personally through deep self bible study and meditation on the word of God and later became a pastor. This exemplary work of God is actually very similar to our UBF reflection writing and sharing ministry and united prayer. I pray that we may keep our precious heritage from our ancestors of faith; joining together in sharing sincere reflection of God’s word and united prayer so that God may use us continuously in saving young students in this campus.

Finally, when they joined together in prayer, how often did they pray? They prayed constantly. As for us, how often do we have to pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Constantly! Unceasingly! Continually! 1 Thessalonians 5:17&18 says, “Pray continually..., ; for this is the will of God for you in Christ.”

**II. THEY MENDED THE VESSEL (15-26).**

While the early believers were praying together, Peter stood up among them to mend the broken vessel among them. Look at verses 16-17. “...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---he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.’” Here we learn that they were still suffering from the tragedy of Judas Iscariot’s betrayal. They had experienced a number of painful events: Jesus’ suffering and death, as well as their own personal failures to follow Jesus to the cross. Through Christ’s resurrection they found God’s victory over the power of sin and death. Through the Risen Christ’s appearances to them they each received his healing power and restored their love relationship. But one thing remained unsolved. It was the problem of Judas’ betrayal. This was difficult for them to digest for several reasons. For one thing, they had a strong human attachment to Judas. He had been with them for more than three years. They had trusted him and shared sufferings together with him. Then, without warning, he not only left their fellowship, but also became a betrayer and died tragically. They had to overcome their deep wounds inflicted by Judas’ betrayal. Sympathy for Judas would ruin the purity and harmony of their vessel. So Peter brought this painful problem to the apostles.

Peter 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---he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.” It is amazing that Peter uses the words, “the Scriptures had to be fulfilled....” These were the same words that Jesus spoke over and over again in explaining his suffering, death and resurrection (Lk 18:31; 22:37; 24:44). Peter learned from Jesus how to see and understand everything that was happening through the word of God. When he brought the painful problem of Judas before the word of God, God gave him a solution from heaven. Look at verse 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.”’” How did Peter find this solution? I think he studied the Bible during 10-day waiting time. Through the Bible study Peter corroborated what Jesus had said---that Judas’ betrayal was according to the Scriptures (Lk 22:22). They could not understand why fully but they needed to accept God’s sovereign rule in the matter and renew their trust and faith in God. On this basis they could trust one another and commit their lives to the Christian fellowship. Their fellowship was not a human fellowship. Their fellowship was governed by the word of God and existed for the glory of God. Even such a painful event as Judas’ betrayal was for the glory of God. When a growing sheep leaves us, we struggle to overcome our sense of failure. We suffer due to nagging feelings of doubt. We are afraid to feed sheep because we think they may leave soon. So why bother? But we should accept even their leaving as the sovereign will of God and learn more about the word of God and grow spiritually more through it. When Peter accepted Judas’ betrayal as the will of God, he was able to mend the vessel of God.

Why is a vessel making important? God pours out his blessings when we have a vessel to hold them. We cannot hold water in a broken cup. The Holy Spirit cannot dwell in us when we have a broken vessel. It is important to recognize the problem of the broken vessel through prayer and Bible study and find solutions based on the Scripture. Sometimes our self-centeredness and selfish behavior hurts the vessel. The vessel of the Holy Spirit is very important in God’s redemptive history. The betrayal of this vessel is the most serious sin and it deserves just punishment. We must know that praying together for the work of God is not just another meeting, like a business appointment. It is forming the vessel of the Holy Spirit for the salvation work of God. So we should honor the forming of the vessel of the Holy Spirit with sincere love and reverence. Then God bless this vessel and use it for his glory.

To press forward with world mission, the apostles had to fill the place of leadership left by Judas. Jesus had chosen twelve apostles. They had to maintain this number as the foundation of the new salvation work of God (Eph 2:20-21). They had to choose someone who had been with them the whole time Jesus was among them, from his baptism by John to his ascension, to be a resurrection witness with them (21-22). They found two candidates, Joseph and Matthias. Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” Then they cast lots, and Matthias was chosen. There was no hint of humanism in their fellowship. There was no discord. They were one in spirit, focused on God’s world mission purpose.

Today we learned that the early Christian church began to obey God’s world mission by preparing themselves in constant united prayer to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Like them, we must join together constantly in prayer. We must listen carefully to God’s word and interpret all things around us based on the word of God. We must honor the vessel of the Holy Spirit. When we do so, God will bless us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, he will empower us to live as powerful witness of risen Christ. May God bless each of us to devote ourselves to prayer life with sincere application of God’s word!