

Waiting

Text:

Acts 1:9-26

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, 11 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. 13 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. 14 All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

15 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, 16 "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. 17 For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." 18 (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. 19 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.) 20 "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.' 21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 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." 23 And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen 25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." 26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Introduction:

We have seen that the Book of Acts is the account of the progress of the message about Jesus Christ during the first thirty years following his time on earth. We have also seen how it progressed from Jerusalem to Rome, looking at five key elements in its progress. Today we begin to study the story itself. It begins with what we call the ascension. This is the moment when Jesus departed physically and definitively from earth. For forty days he had appeared on various occasions to his followers. According to Paul, on one occasion this included more than five hundred people. He had appeared both in Galilee and in Jerusalem. He had convinced his followers that he was alive and had given them final instructions especially what we call the great commission, the command to bear witness to his death and resurrection and to carry his message and teaching throughout all the earth. This commission is found in some form in all four Gospels, and as we have already seen, it is the key to understanding the book of Acts. Jesus' followers are to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.

But before they bear witness, they are to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, who will empower them and guide them in the work that they are to undertake. It is the Holy Spirit who will make Christ present among his followers. Jesus may have physically ascended into heaven, but he had promised his followers that he would be with them to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). They are to do nothing on their own. They are to wait for him to rejoin them when the Spirit is poured out upon on them on the day of Pentecost. His first

command is not to go, but to wait. So today I want us to think about the ten days of waiting between the ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. I want us to first look at who was waiting, and secondly at what they did while they were waiting.

I. Who Was Waiting?

There were more than just the Apostles gathered in the upper room. Luke tells us that in total there were about 120 people. Even this does not exhaust the complete number of disciples. As already noted, Paul says that Jesus appeared to about 500 people on one occasion. Remember that Jesus was a Galilean and that most of his ministry had taken place in Galilee where the majority of his followers would have been found. Even the angelic messengers in our text had addressed the disciples after the ascension as “you men of Galilee”. So the majority, even of the one hundred and twenty who were waiting, were Galileans. We can imagine some of the others who were included in the group. Perhaps Nicodemus, who had come to Jesus by night and had helped Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus, had by now openly identified with the followers of Jesus. No doubt Lazarus of Bethany, who Jesus had raised from the dead, and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were included in the 120. Some believe that the house containing the upper room where they gathered belonged to the mother of John Mark, the author of the second Gospel. We could speculate about others, but sticking to the facts that Luke has given us, we know of five specific groups of people who were there.

First, there were the twelve that Jesus had specifically called to be his Apostles minus Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed him and then taken his own life. They are all named here, and with the exception of Peter, John, and James, this is the only time they are mentioned by name in the book. We will have more to say about them momentarily. Secondly, there was a group of disciples who had travelled with Jesus from the beginning of his ministry, and had been witnesses of his resurrection, but who had not been named apostles from whom Judas’ successor would be chosen. We don’t know the exact number, but we know that it was

more than two, because out of the group two were chosen, Joseph Barsabbas, and Matthias, as possible candidates. The third group Luke calls the women. We have already indicated that Luke is the Gospel of prayer, and the Gospel of the Holy Spirit as he mentions these two subjects much more often than the other Evangelists, now we can add a third title. Luke is the Gospel of women. Luke mentions far more women in his Gospel than the others, and specifically he tells us that there were women among those disciples who accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem. His closing words in describing the crucifixion and death of Jesus in the 23rd chapter of his Gospel are: "And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things" (Luke 23:49). Women have played an important role in the Christian movement from its inception. Jesus was the great liberator of women. Like no one else in history, he raised women to their proper place. Fourth, Luke specifically names Mary, the mother of Jesus. Historically, this is the last time she is mentioned, but in mentioning her here, Luke completes the cycle established at the beginning of his story where he portrays Mary as the obedient handmaid of the Lord who says to Gabriel: "be it unto to me according to thy word." Mary who had now felt the full brunt of Simeon's prophecy: "'Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed'" (Luke 2:35), now knows the deep joy of her Son's victory. Finally, we are told that Jesus' brothers were among the gathered disciples. During his ministry they had not believed in him (John 7:5), but now they are included in the group of believers. Paul tells us that Jesus had appeared to at least one of them, James, who will become a great leader of the Jerusalem Church, and write one of the books of the New Testament, after his resurrection (I Corinthians 15:7). So this is the group that gathers in Jerusalem and waits as Jesus had commanded them. They are exceptional neither in number, nor in status. For the most part they are very ordinary folks from Galilee, fishermen and farmers. What sets them apart is not who they are, but who has called them. Christ has called them to be his witnesses and they will launch a movement that will transform the world.

II. What They Did

Luke emphasizes two things that this assembled group did during the time that they were waiting. The first is mentioned as their habitual activity. He says in verse 14: “All of these were of one accord and were devoting themselves to prayer.” We have already seen how Luke emphasizes prayer in his Gospel, and how it is one of the five key elements in the progress of the Gospel. Here he wants us to understand that the Christian movement is born in prayer. With Christ physically ascended into heaven, prayer becomes the primary link of communication between him and his followers on earth. We pray to stay in contact with our Commander in Chief. We pray so that we might do His will as we are empowered by His Spirit.

The second activity recorded of the waiting church gives us a concrete example of prayer in action. At some point during the ten days of waiting Peter stands up and addresses the assembled group. First, he tells them that Judas’ act of betrayal and death had been a fulfillment of prophecy, and that now according to the Scriptures they must choose another to take his place. The way in which Matthias is eventually chosen as the twelfth Apostle can be instructive for us. We will never have to choose an Apostle because they were a unique group, but as Christ’s church, his people, we are called upon, like these first disciples, to seek his will. We may summarize the process they used as follows:

First, qualifications for the office were clearly established. There were two. First, he was to have been a companion of Jesus and the other Apostles from the time of the baptism of John until the Ascension. This was important because in bearing witness to Jesus the Apostles were to teach those who would become followers of Jesus “to observe to do all things” that Jesus had commanded them. They were the living link between Christ and His Church. Later when we examine the testimony of the Apostles as it is recorded in the Acts we will see that this is the pattern that they followed. The message begins with the baptism of John and tells the story of Jesus up to his resurrection as ascension. These sermon summaries in Acts follow the story of Jesus as it has been preserved for us in the

Gospel of Mark. The second qualification was that they were an eyewitness of the resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is the great founding fact of the Christian movement. Only those who were fully convinced that Jesus had conquered sin and death and was alive forever more could be the kind of witness that would go out and convince the world that God had acted definitively in human history for the salvation of mankind.

Secondly, the field was narrowed to two candidates. There were undoubtedly more than two qualified, but by some process not described in the text, the field was narrowed to two.

Thirdly, they prayed (vv. 24-25). While, as we have been emphasizing, Luke places a great deal of emphasis on prayer both in his Gospel and in Acts, this is one of only two actual prayers that he records, the other being found in chapter 4. This being the case, it is evident that this prayer is, for him, of great importance. The emphasis of the prayer is that God's will be done, that the right choice be made, that the final decision be left up to God: "Thou Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these thou hast chosen." In the final analysis, only God who truly knows the hearts of men, is qualified to place leaders in his church.

Forth, they cast lots. While casting of lots was a somewhat common practice in the Old Testament, this is the last and only time it is used in the book of Acts. The impression seems to be that once the Holy Spirit had come, there were more sure and direct ways of knowing God's will.

Fifth, they were of one accord. All were assured that the final choice had been made by God, so that no one was offended and all were in agreement. Thus chapter two begins by stating that they were all gathered together in one place and were of one accord. This may be the most important observation to be made from this passage. However we go about seeking God's direction and making decisions, in the end, the assurance that we have made the right decision comes from the unity coming out of the decision, the conviction that God has directed our action and that we are doing his will.

