



Waiting On the Lord

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 1:12-26

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The text that we are looking at this morning is one that is most often skipped over to get to the “good stuff.” This week to 10-day interlude between the ascension of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples is sort of treated as insignificant and easily passed over to get to the action parts of the book. But to do that is a mistake. Clearly if there were nothing important that happened, no lessons to be learned in this interlude, Luke wouldn’t have recorded it.

But he did record it and he did so because there is an important lesson in this text regarding “waiting on the Lord” – waiting on the Lord to move in power, waiting on the Lord to more fully manifest His presence, waiting on the Lord to strengthen and sustain His people, to empower and edify His church, waiting on the Lord to pour out the fullness of His Spirit for the sanctification of His people, for the carrying out of ministry, for the expansion of the gospel and for the sake of the glory of Christ our Lord.

You know, lots of times when talk about “waiting on the Lord” the mental picture we get is akin to someone sitting like a bump on a log waiting for the Lord to zap us, but that is not the biblical picture at all. Waiting on the Lord is an active thing. It is an active waiting. It is an expectant thing. Waiting on the Lord is not passive, not simply sitting and doing nothing. It is an active, expectant waiting. I know that sounds sort of like a contradiction, but it isn’t, and this text shows us why. Let me show you what I mean. Let’s look at the disciples and their response to Jesus when “he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”” (Acts 1:4–5, ESV) In response to the command to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit, Luke tells us: “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.” (Acts 1:12–14, ESV) What do we see from this text? There are three things that we can see from this text immediately. First, in waiting upon the Lord,

They Waited in Obedient Faith. The first thing that we can say about the disciples is that they responded in obedience to the command of Christ to wait in Jerusalem for the descent of the Holy Spirit. There is no overstating the importance of simple obedience to the command of Christ. They might have done other things – gone back to Galilee for instance, returned to their old jobs in order to make some money and squirrel it away for the challenges that they would face in taking the gospel to the world for instance. Maybe they would have faced the temptation to start doing the work of evangelism right away. They could have rationalized a hundred different options or variations on simple obedience to Christ, but they didn’t.

Sometimes simple obedience in the face of the unknown is one of the most difficult things in the Christian life. We naturally want to have all of the details and plans worked out in advance, want full disclosure from God about every possible contingency, but Jesus gives them none of that. He gives them the promise of the Holy Spirit and the command to be His witnesses and that is all. So they waited in obedient faith and trust. And don’t miss that connection. Obedience requires faith, requires trust, requires confident expectation in both the promises and the character of Christ – in His faithfulness and steadfast love.

Make no mistake, they waited in confident obedience because they believed Christ. They believed that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon them and they were filled with expectancy that it would be so. They believed that a great ingathering of souls was to take place through their ministry. They were confident that the power they needed to be given by Christ in just a few days. They expected Christ to be true to His Word and so that faith in Christ drove them to obedience to Him. No wavering. No discussion.

Mark this down beloved; trust in God's promises is always manifested in obedience to his commands. It is a contradiction in terms to say that we trust Christ and trust His rule in our lives if we do not obey what He has said. Our obedience to God's commands is the expression

of trusting Christ. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” (John 3:36, ESV) True love for Jesus is measured by obedience to what he commands: ““If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15, ESV) “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (John 15:14, ESV)

As JC Ryle said: Obedience is the only reality. It is faith visible, faith acting, and faith manifest. It is the test of real discipleship among the Lord's people. He's right, obedience and faith are opposite sides of the same coin. Obedience to God is always for our good and His glory. Every statute, every commandment that God has ever spoken is divinely designed to bring to the heart, of those who are obedient, great joy and satisfaction. The early church was learning this truth firsthand as they waited in obedient faith. The second thing we can say from this text is that:

They Waited in Unified Fellowship Luke makes a point of both describing the group of people that were waiting together in the upper room as well as the making the statement that they were all “with one accord.” Just look at the list of people that he gives as being there together – all of the eleven disciples -- Christ's chosen Apostles – the women who ministered to Christ, Mary – Jesus' mother – and Jesus' brothers. What a great testimony this mixed group is to the powerful effects and the reality of both Christ's person as the Son of God and His resurrection from the dead. Think about it. Here is Mary who had witnessed her Son endure the ignominious death of the cross, convinced that He is truly the Son of God, raised from the dead. Here are the disciples – strong willed men, men who had argued over the best seat in the kingdom, who refused to wash one another's feet, waiting together with the others, transformed by the resurrection of Christ. Here are these ladies, ladies who had ministered to Him in life who are convinced that He has risen from the dead and is alive and is even now to be honored and obeyed as the Son of God. But most striking is the presence of His brothers – who were convinced that He was mad, who rejected His claims as Messiah, changed by His resurrection and the reality that He was just Who He claimed to be.

All of them, Luke says, were in “one accord.” That is such an important phrase, one that springs up repeatedly in Acts, the often overlooked secret to the incredible power of the early church – they were in “one accord.” They were not just simply physically together in the upper room, not just together physically, not that they had no “issues”; they were of one heart and one mind. They were united outwardly and inwardly. That phrase “one accord,” is a musical

term that means to strike the same notes together. There was no discord between them, no divisions, no rivalries, no dissensions, no malicious gossip or unholy alliances – just hearts and souls united in Christ, all looking to Christ together.

Understand the vital importance of this, beloved. It is true that when we stand before God, we are accepted or rejected on the basis of our personal faith in Christ or our lack of it. In that sense, salvation is personal and individual and non-transferable. But when Christ established His church, though He saves people individually, every person that He saves He brings into the body of Christ – His church. When you become a Christian, you do not become one in isolation from other believers. You enter into a body of those who are Christ's disciples and you find your life in them.

We need each other. We need the mutual support and edification and love of the body. We need the corporate strength and community of the church. The beauty of those who dwell in unity, who forgive and love and seek the spiritual well-being of one another as they declare together the supremacy of Christ is beautiful and blessed thing and not to be taken for granted or treated as if it of no consequence. In His high priestly prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus prayed: "And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one." (John 17:11, ESV) "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." (John 17:20–23, ESV) Here was the beginning of the answer to Christ's prayer.

I could not ever overstate the importance, the blessing, the sweetness, and the indispensable value of unity in the true people of God. There is no "church" without it. Without unity, no matter how pure the preaching, the gospel is mocked and devalued. It is not something that I can make someone to see on my own, the Spirit of God must reveal this to you. If you do not see that value of unity in the brethren and are not "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3, ESV) according to the truth of God, you are either out of step with Christ or you are unregenerate and lost. That's how serious this is.

Let me tell you why this is so important for us -- because the calling that we have as the people of God at West Salem Church is bigger than you or me. We are called to worship God, to nurture His church and to be on mission in our world, all of them together. That is what we are about. None of them is an end in itself, they are all intimately related. We are not called only to be a cloister of the spiritually addicted, worshipping God only with no transformation of our lives. We are not called merely to meet every little need that we have within these four walls, or simply to massage one another through life. Nor are we called to simply process a whole bunch of new converts to our way of thinking. We are called to behold God and to commune with Him in worship, exalting Him together, magnifying Him together, finding strength and direction and purpose in Him together. We are called to see flow from that worship, transformational discipleship in which we teach one another and encourage one another into maturity in Christ. And then out of that nurture, fueled with compassion and motivated by the clear truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ to go and reach lost people with the gospel of Christ and teach them to be worshippers and disciples of the Living God. Our calling is bigger than just you and me. It is bigger than our myopic vision, it is God's vision. Because of the calling that God has given to this body of believers. It is essential that we be of one mind and one opinion, one direction and one focus. Unity in this body is essential. Anything and anyone that wars against this true unity rooted in God's truth and Christ's Lordship is of Satan. The early church waited in unified fellowship and that unity of heart and soul led to the third thing we can say about them:

They Waited in Devoted Prayer What was it Luke said: All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer...That word "devoted" is a word that means that they "persisted" at it; they were "diligently occupied" with prayer; they were "obstinately determined" to pray and nothing could stop them. I wonder is that a word that could be used of us. What did they pray about specifically? We don't have an itemized list but it is not hard to imagine what they would have been praying in light of the other prayers we have recorded for us in Acts. They would have been praising God in Christ – as they pondered all the Christ had done, the love and the grace of God in Christ, the restoration, the forgiveness, the life they had been given they could not help but adore Him, thanking Him with hearts full of love; praying as they magnified His glory and made much of Him,; praying for the advance of the Kingdom; praying for wisdom and power, for strength and will to remain faithful; confessing sin – their unbelief, their pride, their cowardice and faithlessness, their sins toward one another; no doubt they prayed for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them. They stayed together, praying with one another. It is a

beautiful picture of the early church, together on its knees, waiting for God, praying in accordance with His promises.

Again I want you to feel the weight of this, how important this is for us. EM Bounds says and I agree with him: The life, power, and glory of the church is prayer. The life of its members is dependent on prayer and the presence of God is secured and retained by prayer. The very place is made sacred by its ministry. Without it, the church is lifeless and powerless. Without it, even the building itself is nothing, more or other, than any other structure. Prayer converts even the bricks, and mortar, and lumber, into a sanctuary, a Holy of Holies, where the Shekinah dwells. You know beloved, joking around sometimes, people will say things like: “ You are the prayingest church around.” Or people will joke with me about the amount of times we pray in a service or the length of my prayers, but I can honestly tell you that we do not pray enough. How much prayer is too much prayer? How much calling upon the Lord is too much? Not that we pray to the exclusion of service or of ministry, or of living life – but honestly, is that a real danger for any of us? I don’t think so. What the church needs today is not more or better programs, not new emphases, not more relevancy; but men and women in whom Christ is Lord, whom the Holy Spirit can use – men and women of prayer, men and women mighty in prayer. The early church had it and we need it.

Men and women who: pray together that God will work with in us a thirst and a deep hunger for communion and intimacy with Himself; who pray together that God would give to us a holy discontent for things the way that they have always been; who pray together that God will work in us and urgency for the need of the Gospel to go forth in power; who pray together that God would manifest His presence in increasing measure, through our being conformed to His will, His glory and His presence with His people; who pray together that God would search us individually and our fellowship and reveal to our hearts sins and impediments to His work in us and give us the will and desire to repent and to be done with sin so that we can be all for Christ; who pray together that God would produce in us a lifestyle of prayer and walking closely with Him, praying for His kingdom and having a vision for church as God describes it to be; who pray together that God would give us an eagerness to serve Him and to obey and trust Him more fully, so that we would live increasingly faithful, fervent, and focused lives. This church was a praying church and a praying church is a powerful church. And their obedient faith, their united fellowship, their devoted prayer led to something more.

Luke 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.) (Let me just address this for a moment...no disagreement between Matthew and Luke) “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.” (Acts 1:15–26, ESV) Now what do we see here? Notice first of all that there was an increase in their number. They increased to some 120 people from the smaller beginnings of verses 12-14. But aside from that, there are two more things chiefly that I want us to see as we look at what the church did as they waited on the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. First see that

They Waited in Biblical Reflection This much is clear in the words of Peter, we just read, that are shaped by and filled with the words of Scripture. It will become even clearer when we see his preaching in Acts 2 as he thoroughly roots and grounds his sermon in the Word of God. Peter at least, and I would expect the Apostles as a whole, spent these 10 or so days pouring through the Scriptures, seeking to know the heart and the mind and the will of God. Like the Psalmist, they could say: “With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes!” (Psalm 119:10–12, ESV) “You have dealt well with your servant, O Lord, according to your word. Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.” (Psalm 119:65–67, ESV) “Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them. The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments.” (Psalm 119:129–131, ESV)

Peter searched the Word, desiring to understand in greater depth the things that Jesus had been explaining, the prophecies concerning His life, death and resurrection, and no doubt he

studied the Word regarding the gift of the Holy Spirit in Joel 2. But in addition to all of that, he studied the Scriptures in order to understand the demise of Judas and he came to this conclusion: “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.) “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.’ We cannot fail to understand how important this would have been to Peter. He, himself, had denied Christ, but he had been forgiven, had repented and been restored. How was he to understand that? Judas had been a party to all that Jesus did, how did he ultimately fall away? As He studied the Scriptures, Peter had to come to this conclusion: Judas was not a true believer. He did not bear the marks of true discipleship. He outwardly conformed but he did not have a supernaturally changed heart and a true and living faith. Just like the truth: Not all Israel is Israel, Jesus taught that there would be wheat with the tares, sheep and goats – not all the church is the church. Outward profession and conformity is no adequate ground of assurance. Every Christian should have a changed life, the true signs of holiness desire for Christ, hatred of sin, repentance, and obedience -- not perfect, of course, but real and lasting. The history of Judas and others like him is designed to keep all true believers faithful, making sure that they are resting their hopes in a true and living faith in Christ.

And this conclusion about Judas, in part, that would lead to such rigorous and continued examination of the reality of true faith, the emphasis on a lifestyle of repentance and a longing to be conformed fully to Christ that so fills the pages of Scripture and the teaching of the church. Where there is not rigorous examination and holding to the teaching of Scripture regarding the character of true follower of Christ, where virtually anyone is affirmed as a believer without the reality evident in their lives, who soft-peddle grace, repentance, faith, Christ-likeness -- that is a church that, however biblical they may be in their professions, is profoundly dangerous and out of step with Christ.

Judas was an apostate, a traitor, pure and simple. Prophecy foretold him and his treachery. But that is no excuse. John Calvin himself, for all of his emphasis on the sovereignty of God wrote: “Judas may not be excused on the ground that what befell him was prophesied, since he fell away not through the compulsion of prophecy but through the wickedness of his own

heart.” From studying the Scriptures, Peter came to the conclusion that it was Judas’ defection, which led to his horrific death, and not only his death that led to the need for a successor. There needed to be a successor for Judas, not because Judas had died but because Judas had been unfaithful. So holding fast to the words of Christ in Matthew 19:28 where: “Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matthew 19:28, ESV) and convinced from Psalm 69 and Psalm 109 which he quotes here: “ ‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and “ ‘Let another take his office. –Peter leads the disciples in their time of waiting to make the proper preparation.

They Waited in Proper Preparation His understanding of the Word of God, his faith in Christ’s earlier words, the falling away of Judas and an active desire to prepare for the fullness of the Spirit to be poured out on the disciples. These factors drove Peter to lead the apostles and disciples to get their spiritual house in order. Some commentators will complain about what Peter does here saying that he jumped the gun and should have waited for the salvation of Paul and his calling into ministry, that he should have been the 12th Apostle. But I completely and wholeheartedly disagree. The argument is usually advances along the lines of something like -- you never hear anything about Matthias again. Using that logic we could say the same about the vast majority of the other disciples as well. Or they will decry the casting of lots, using what is known as the Urim and Thummim, to choose Matthias, but that fails to take into consideration the fullness of what is going on.

The truth is that Peter takes this action after much prayer, after studying the Word of God and roots his decision in biblically informed reasoning. Think about it. He puts forth the qualifications for an Apostle, capital A. By definition an apostle is anyone sent out as a messenger. Barnabas was an apostle in this sense. Our Jonathan is an apostle in this sense. Every Christian should function as an apostle since Christ has given us the Great Commission. But the Twelve were apostles in a special sense. They not only went out with a message, but they had been personally chosen and disciplined by Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, had witnessed His resurrection and they were those to whom the guardianship of the faith was given. Paul was also an apostle in this sense, but his is a special case that we will get to later.

Making this distinction between the Apostles and an apostle helps us to understand the qualifications that Peter and the other apostles put forward. Remember what they were? -- 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. This emphasis on journeying with Christ, on familiar and free and intimate association with Jesus – that’s the idea – shows us that the idea of being witnesses to the resurrection is not simply like being the witness to an accident. Rather Jesus had taught them and trained them for their work. Only two men of their group fit these qualifications -- Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.

But it was not enough to possess the qualifications other apostles had. Judas's successor must also be appointed by the same Lord who appointed the Eleven. And that is exactly what happened. They prayed to the Lord and used a common OT practice to determine the choice and the will of God – because Christ is God. 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.

This instance of casting lots to determine God's will is the last one the New Testament writers recorded. This was not a vote. This was not a game of chance. This was the use of an established method to determine the will of God. It was necessary before the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit; when He came He provided the guidance inwardly that God had formerly provided externally. We don’t do this now since the indwelling Holy Spirit provides that guidance -- objectively through Scripture and subjectively through impressing His will on yielded believers in response to prayer and the study of His Word. This was not presumption or disobedience upon the part of Peter but an earnest desire to be faithful to Christ, to know whom He had chosen to replace Judas, and to get their house in order as they waited upon the coming of the Holy Spirit, to respond to the revealed will of God as they awaited His promise of the Holy Spirit.

What Does This Text Mean For Us Today? Apart from the application that I have already made throughout the sermon, I want us to close today with some serious thought regarding this text. The truth is that in many ways we are very different from the early church in that we have much more than they had – more followers of Christ, a completed canon – they didn’t even have a NT, vast libraries of Christian books, a number of faithful preachers, a building, technology, a number of faithful churches throughout the world, but nothing that really matters has changed. Fundamentally we are the exact same. There is a direct line between

that upper room and WSBC. When we read Acts 1, we're to understand that this is what the church is to be. We're to wait on God, and while we wait, we're to be obedient to the commands He has given us, in faith doing what He said to do – in our personal spiritual lives, in the body and we are to go and make disciples. We are to gather together in worship and prayer—unanimously, harmoniously, continually. We are to be a united people, a people of the Word of God, a people who get our spiritual houses in order and trust in the power and the presence of God to make it so. This is who we are to be.

We talk about the need for revival and we need one. We need revival:

when He is not our first love as He should be...when earthly interests and occupations are more important to us than eternal ones...when our prayer lacks fervency...when we know truth in our heads that we are not living out in our lives...when we keep the gospel to ourselves...when Christ is not evidently and obviously Lord over our everyday living...when we do not tremble at the Word of God ...when believers can be out of fellowship with one other and not feel compelled to pursue reconciliation...when our marriages are failing rather than full of the love of Christ...when our children are left to adopt worldly values, secular philosophies, and ungodly lifestyles...when we tolerate “little” sins...when the pursuit of Christ takes a back seat to other pursuits...when we don't hate and forsake sin as we should... when repentance seems to be extraordinary rather than the regular practice of life...when we don't long for the company and fellowship of God's people...when we expect to be served rather than to serve and pour out our lives as an offering to Christ... when we are not exercising active faith in the promises of God and we doubt His faithfulness and heart for His people...when we lack God's passion for the world – we need a revival.

Look beloved, here is what I know. Revival is not something that human hands or wills can produce; it is something that only God can provide. As G. Campbell Morgan said: We cannot organize revival, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from Heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again.

And that is what this text this morning is about. Let's set the sails. And wait upon the Lord – in obedient faith, in united fellowship, in devoted, desperate and dependant prayer, searching the Scriptures and by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us, conforming to them, and getting our Spiritual house in order, praying earnestly and unceasingly that God would meet us in our desperate need.

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