

Message Date: 05-03-20

Sermon Series: To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 1: What Happens Next

Message Title: The Prime Directive

SCENE 1

- **Last week we opened our journey into Acts by visiting Jesus and his followers in a room in Jerusalem on the night he was arrested, looked at Jesus teaching in John 14**
- **This is where he told his disciples that Just as the father had been doing his work through Jesus, so soon Jesus would be doing his work through them- and that this is the foundational reality of the church as it was born, to this day.**
- **That same night, the last thing Jesus did before they left – to go to the garden of Gethsemane, was He prayed. Chapter 17, I'm going to read just part of it....**

17:1-3... After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent..."

²⁰ "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

- **Friends, we see- hear- Jesus praying that his followers would come to know- and experience- the essential values of being HIS PEOPLE, of being in relationship with him, not just personally, but as a called out community.**
- **One, the value of prayer itself. Jesus himself, who was-is- perfect union with his father, spend time- lots of time- with his disciples in prayer, just as he did here.**
- **Second, we see the essential value of UNITY. The underlying assumption that to be a disciple of Jesus is to be part of the community of believers, and within that community, we experience UNITY- the example Jesus gives of the unity we have with each other? The unity that HE has with his father.**
 - **Jesus says his glory has been given to us, SO THAT we may be one... think of that... Jesus describes OUR UNITY as a prime marker of HIS GLORY.**
- **THIRD, this unity has a purpose, and it is to reveal God to the world. In this prayer Jesus proclaims that through our union with HIM (The trinity), and the resulting love and complete unity we have with each other, that THE WORLD WILL BELIEVE THAT JESUS WAS SENT FROM GOD, and that God loves them- the world- just as He loves his Son.**
- **You've heard me teach this before, but we can't miss it. Jesus prays that the prime evidence of God's love for this world- the authenticity of the gospel- will be the love and unity we have for each other... and we are able to have this unity with each other because of the love and unity we have with Jesus and with God himself.**

- *In that upper room in Jerusalem, before the cross happened, we see Jesus laying the foundation of the new movement that His death, burial, and resurrection would make possible.*
- *A movement rooted in the essential values of Prayer. Unity. Mission.*
- *This is what we see in our next step into Acts... lets go there now.*

SCENE 2

- *OKAY! LAST WEEK we entered the book of Acts, and we left the disciples on the mount olives, looking up into the sky at Jesus' ascension, when two angles appeared to them and said... "why are you looking up? Jesus is going to come back just as you have seen him go into heaven"*
- *What do you do at that point? Well, they took the first step of obedience to Jesus' last command to them.... They went back to Jerusalem to WAIT. Specifically, to wait for the Gift the Father had promised, the Holy Spirit.*
- *Now, what happened next can seem like a detail to many, and when we think of the story of Acts it's tempting to just skip straight to chapter two, because that's where the story really breaks out.*
- *But this second half of chapter one is very important, because here we see the first community of Christ followers- more than just the apostles- expressing the essential values of what would very soon become the church.*
- *To throw in a Star Trek analogy, this community had just received from Jesus the PRIME DIRECTIVE of their identity as the church.*
- *And now, as they were waiting, they took the first steps in preparation for what this mission would become.*
- *This is recorded for us in verses 12-26 of Acts chapter 1 (SCRIPTURE READING)*

SCENE 3a

- *OKAY... lets jump in...*
- *V12 "Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city"*
- *Luke refers to the limited walking distance due to the laws that had grown up around the observance of the Sabbath. Generally, this was limited to the diameter of your village, or functionally around $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. NOT FAR from place of Jesus ascension back into the heart of Jerusalem.*
- *The upstairs room must have been large, we are told 120 were present. We don't know where this is, and it's unlikely it was the same room where the apostles met on the night of Jesus arrest.*
- *Luke then identifies the remaining 11 apostles, going to very purposeful detail.*

- **THIS IS SUBTLE, but track with me. In this first gathering of what would become the infant church, we are witnessing the beginning of a new era for Israel.**
- **This new era – this new covenant- would be structured very differently than the old covenant structure of God’s relationship with Israel.**
- **Before, there was the structure of the formal priesthood, described by the OT Law, that represented Israel before God in the context of a physical place, the temple.**
- **There was also a political structure of religious rulers, teachers of law, Pharisees and Sadducees, organized into the ruling body of the Sanhedrin. THIS WAS ALL THE VERY COMPLICATED and HUMAN CENTERED STRUCTURE that had rejected Christ.**
- **BUT NOW, in the dawning new Era of the church, there would be a simple and identifiable core of apostles, assembled under the direct spiritual leadership of Jesus Christ.**
- **AND THE EMPHASIS is on the spiritual leadership of Jesus, because even the core of apostles are going to be de-emphasized in their importance as we move through these thirty years.**
- **IN This new Era of God’s relationship with Israel- soon to be with all people- The Old Covenant structure- the ‘Temple model’, IS GONE. DONE. It has been replaced by a new creation, the CHURCH, the BOC, led BY CHRIST.**

SCENE 3b

- **NOW, in verse 14, Luke reveals one of the core values- essential elements of the infant church (really not even born yet)- right here, already in play.**
- **THIS IS A the value of UNITY.**
- **After introducing the 11 apostles, the NIV translates “They all joined together constantly in prayer”, but this doesn’t really capture the fullness of the greek. The NASB, and others, translate this as “These all with one mind/purpose were continually devoting themselves to prayer.**
- **This isn’t just a group of people together in a room praying. More, it is a picture of a unified community, together and continually seeking God’s guidance for what to do next.**
- **Emphasize this!! The apostles were waiting, but their waiting was not passive! They were waiting with expectation, listening, seeking God’s guidance as they prepared to engage the world outside the room, as the witness that god has called them to.**
- **HERE WE SEE beginning of a pattern that will develop going forward.**
 - **The Community Life of the believers. The dynamics of their relationship with each other- how they organized, learned, and adapted as their numbers grew.**
 - **ALSO, we see how this community engaged (or prepared to engage) the surrounding culture as a witness to the gospel.**
- **LUKE DEMONSTRATES THAT THESE TWO IDEAS ARE INSEPARABLE.**
 - **God uses his community- the church- to engage the world around them- this is the MISSION**

- *This mission is able to happen because of how God continually is working to grow and mature His disciples as a community.*
- **CHURCH, we can't miss this!**
 - *God created us- His Body- to be a witness to our community, AND*
 - *We will only be an effective witness when we are growing and healthy in relationship to each other.*

SCENE 3c

- *Okay. Next, Luke tells us the 11 weren't alone- group of women, including Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Jesus, and Jesus' brothers.*
- *We see here Luke pointing out the presence and importance of women to the birth and growth of the church, something he will do on multiple occasions.*
 - *Interestingly, this is the last time Mary the mother of Jesus is mentioned in the New Testament, and I can't pass this without pointing out the mention of Mary's other sons- Jesus' half-brothers. Both in emphasis and in detail, the idea of Mary as a perpetual virgin and a primary mediator of God's presence to the church is simply not biblical- at all.*
- *In total, Luke says the group of believers was around 120 people.*
- *A question that comes up is 'what role, how much influence' did this large group, including the women who were present, have in the decisions that are about to be made. Was this only done by the apostles, with the larger group as a witness, or was everyone part of the discussion?*
- **THE TEXT DOESN'T MAKE THIS CLEAR, but it DOES make clear that everyone present was engaged in the unity of Prayer.**
- **THIS LEADS TO THE SECOND GREAT VALUE** of the church seen here, which is the act of seeking God's guidance through corporate prayer. Multiple times through ACTS Luke will describe how a significant step in the growth of the church was preceded by the disciples being joined together in prayer.
- *The NASB more clearly points out that the believers CONTINUALLY devoted themselves to prayer- this wasn't a one and done prayer gathering- it was the primary activity of their gathering.*
- *We will talk about this much more as we move into the book, but CHURCH- HEADS UP- if we are listening, God is going to use this text to convict us about how we see, understand, and practice prayer as a church body.*

SCENE 3d

- *NOW... this is fascinating... Emerging out of their prayer, and the sense is as a result of their prayer, Peter stands up to address an issue we wouldn't really expect. JUDAS.*
- *BIT of aside... this speaks to the historic authenticity of Luke's writing. Apart from God's guidance, and a heart to be faithful to what happened, we would expect Luke- and the church- to forget Judas as quickly as possible. He was a stain on their reputation, a topic most easily ignored.*
- *But that's not what happens. Here we see PETER- being raised into a place of leadership for the first time, telling us about the fate of Judas, and why this matters.*

- *We learn how, and more importantly why, Judas's role as apostle need to be replaced*
- *NOW- I need to acknowledge here that Luke's description of Judas' fate is a point of great controversy among theologians, when compared with the account of Judas' fate by MATTHEW. I'm not going in-depth on this now (maybe in an addendum if you are interested), but here are a few of the details*
 - *Matthew tells us that Judas hanged himself. Luke makes no mention of this, although he does give us a graphic depiction of Judas' death.*
 - *Matthew tells us that Judas returned the silver to the priests, who then decided to purchase the field where Judas had died. Luke tells us that Judas purchased the field, where he then died.*

SCENE 3e

- *What do we make of this? AGAIN- point that this argues for historic authenticity, because if the account was all fabricated years later to tell an airtight story, then the authors of Matthew and Luke would have worked to get their stories straight.*
- *BUT, if these were written early, by two men who saw these events from their own perspectives, and who wrote with different purposes in mind, then we would not expect the details to line up exactly.*
- *BOTTOM LINE, if you want to investigate this, there is solid biblical scholarship that demonstrates that Luke and Matthew's account of Judas' death is not as irreconcilable as some have accused it to be, and in fact form a broader, and cohesive, story of the end of Judas life.*

SCENE 3f

- *But for all his detail, how Judas died is not Luke's real point, nor Peters.*
- *THE POINT, is that everything Judas did was part of God's larger plan.*
- *WHAT!.... Hear me, because this too is a theme that will recur. What Judas did was cowardly, selfish, sinful, and he bore the consequences of his sin- Luke makes this intentionally clear. BUT, while Judas' actions and sin were HIS OWN, THEY WERE NOT OUTSIDE OF GOD'S SOVERIEGNTY.*
- *When Judas betrayed Jesus, God didn't sit up and say "OH CRUD! I DIDN'T SEE THAT COMING! WHAT AM I GOING TO DO NOW! Oh... he's gonna pay for that...." No. In the mystery of God's omniscience and sovereignty, Judas role was part of God's purpose. And at the same time, Judas was accountable to God for his own sin- In fact, in verse 25 Peter states that Judas left to "go where he belongs", and indication of Judgment.*
- *And, if, like me, you scratch your head and say "That doesn't make sense", then we both need to hear yet another key theme we will see throughout Acts... that God is God, and we are not, and in everything that Satan would use for evil, God is somehow working toward his redemptive plan.*

SCENE 3g

- *Peter continues, and draws from the Psalms to demonstrate two things.*
- *First, that God had prophetically anticipated the betrayal of Judas- this reference is from Psalm 69, and second,*

- *That God was leading them to replace Judas' role with a new 12th apostle. This reference is from Psalm 109.*
- *LOTS we could say there, but I want to sum up with a few points.*
 - *First- the spread of the gospel was not hindered by Judas' disobedience.*
 - *Second- Jesus was not mistaken when he called Judas as an apostle*
 - *Third- it was Judas SIN- his apostasy- NOT his death, that required his replacement as an apostle. In Acts 12 James the son of Zebedee is murdered by Herod, and yet no replacement is made for him.*
- *The importance we see here is not that there were 12 men at the birth of the church, but that there were 12 FAITHFUL MEN, their lives fully devoted to the person and mission of Jesus Christ.*
- *The criteria for the new apostle was both simple and crucial.*
 - *A person who had been with them- been a follower of Jesus- for ALL of Jesus ministry, starting with the beginning of John's baptism of people in the desert, all the way to Christ's ascension.*
 - *This emphasizes the foundational role the apostles had in the beginning of the church. They were to be the initial eyewitnesses to the truth of who Jesus was and what He did, most importantly his death, burial, and resurrection.*
 - *In subsequent generations, no other persons would have these qualifications.*
 - *Who the apostles were, and what God did through them to establish this new movement, was singular and unique in the History of the church. Going forward, we will see the acts of the apostles through this lens.*

SCENE 3h

- *Luke tells us that two men were brought forward with these qualifications, Joseph and Matthias. Evidently these were equal candidates, and thus the disciples prayed to God to show the man He had chosen. They did this by 'casting lots'.*
- *THIS brings us to the first example of the question- is what we see here DESCRIPTIVE or PRESCRIPTIVE. Is the practice of casting lots to make a decision a Biblically NORMATIVE practice for the church, or is it a unique instance that happened in this setting.*
- *Interestingly, the practice of casting lots is seen elsewhere in scripture, in both negative and positive lights. But it is rare, and once the Spirit comes, we never see this practice again. There are subsequent big decisions that are made in the Acts narrative, and these are done only after prayer.*
- *BUT HERE'S THE POINT. The apostles were not resorting to random chance- the picture here is of a unified community sincerely seeking God's leadership, and when faced with a choice between two good options, they trusted God with the final choice.*

SCENE 3I

- *SO, WHAT DO WE SEE HERE, what is God showing US from this story.*
 - *We see, from the very inception of the church, that Jesus' disciples – people who were facing great circumstantial uncertainty- actively and patiently waited with great certainty in God's provision and leadership. BOCK- Everything about this section describes a community walking with God.*
 - *We see them expressing the essential Christian values...*

- **PRAYER-** Continually Seeking God's guidance, looking to scripture
 - **UNITY** – They were of one heart and mind before God
 - **MISSION-** As they waited for God to take the next step, they did so in the ready expectation for the mission God had given them.
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- **CHURCH-** in this time of disruption and uncertainty, may we live in the great **CERTAINTY** that God is sovereign, that He is on his throne,
 - and in that great hope may we be people of **PRAYER-** seeking to walk with God in all things....
 - **OF UNITY...** seeking to be of one heart/mind before God...
 - and of **MISSION...** ready and eager to respond as God opens the doors for us to be a witness of his Gospel and Goodness to this world around us.
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- **OKAY! WHEW!** Let me leave you with this- picture the scene... 120 people, living together in a spirit of prayer, trust, and expectation of what God was going to do... and then, to quote Forrest Gump... **GOD SHOWED UP. DON'T MISS NEXT WEEK**, where we will see the lives of these first disciple's literally set on fire, as we launch in the amazing world changing drama of the **SECOND CHAPTER OF ACTS.**