

AMC Sermon- Between Promise and Fulfillment

Scripture: Acts 1:12-14

Sunday, May 30, 2021

As we started our journey into the book of Acts, the first thing we observed is that Jesus used the 40 days he had on earth to prepare his disciples. And to prepare them he exposed them to all the defining moments of his life like his baptism, death, resurrection and ascension. Secondly, He reminded them about the essence of what he taught which is about the kingdom of God. Finally, He told them what he expected of them, which was to be his witnesses everywhere when the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them. After that He ascended into heaven.

Immediately after Jesus Christ left earth, the disciples were in this unique season between Christ ascension and Pentecost. At this point Christ was not there to tell them what to do and the Holy Spirit was not given who would guide them. But Christ did give them specific instructions for this time as well. He told them that they have been given the task of waiting in Jerusalem until further instructions. Today we are going to focus on what they did during that 10 day period because it was crucial to the birth of the church.

In verse 4 of this chapter, Jesus had told his disciples not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the gift that His Father has promised to give all Christ followers.

What actually happened is described in verse 12 to 14. This is the more ordinary part of the Acts narrative. Nothing spectacular happens and so we tend to read these verses almost like transition verses from the spectacular event of Christ's Ascension to the spectacular event of the Pentecost. But the fact is, real life is not a series of spectacular events. Most of our lives are lived in ordinary seasons and uneventful periods. But just because a period is ordinary or uneventful, it does not mean it is not important.

What happens in verse 12 to 14 is important because we get to see what the disciples did when things were “uneventful”. Because that will help us to figure out what we should do in the uneventful seasons of our lives as well, which is most of the time.

The first thing that strikes me about what the disciples did is that they **obeyed** what Christ told them to do and waited in Jerusalem. They were asked to “wait in Jerusalem” in verse 4 and in verse 12 we are told that when the disciples came back from the mount of Olives where Jesus had ascended to heaven, they all stayed together in one home at the time. Not sure what kind of home this was or whose home it was. But we do know that all the disciples stayed put in Jerusalem obeying Christ even if they had to all share a home. Who all were there? Well, since the author has listed a bunch of names we know that it was all the remaining 11 male Apostles. We also know that Mary the mother of Jesus was there who was the only female who was named. We are also told that Jesus’ brothers and sisters were there as well as other disciples who Jesus has interacted with throughout his ministry. And this whole group was 120 strong at this point. And this entire group of 120 people stayed in Jerusalem. In fact all the core disciples literally stayed in one house and all 120 of them met and fellowshiped together regularly.

Secondly, what did they do when they met? I am sure they talked, and ate as they hung out. But verse 14 tells us something else. It tells us that they were constantly united in prayer. This entire group of 120, not just the 11. This is really significant. They were constantly united in prayer. That means they prayed often and they were united in this effort. That means it was not just some people who were meeting to pray but the whole group. Was it daily? Possibly. Was it multiple times a day? Yes, possibly multiple times a day.

So what were they praying about? Well, they were praying for this gift that the Father was going to send them. The gift of the Holy Spirit that in verse 8 Jesus Christ had told them about. We are not told exactly what they prayed because those prayers never got recorded. However, we can be sure that they were praying to be prepared to receive such a gift of the Holy Spirit. Did they know what it was like? No they did not know because nobody had received such a gift in their lifetimes. But they must have had some idea because individual prophets had received the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. Many judges, warriors and prophets in the Old testament had talked about the Spirit of God entering them and causing them to do different things. Joshua, Othniel, Gideon, Samson and Saul are all examples. Then of course we have King David in 2 Sam 23:2 who declared that ***the Spirit of the Lord spoke by me and His word was on my tongue***. Prophet Ezekiel in Ez 2:2 also reported to have the Spirit enter him. So these disciples would have known that God's chosen people in years past has testified to the Spirit of God coming upon them and they spoke God's words and did what God wanted them to do. So when Jesus told them that His spirit would come upon them giving them the power to be his witnesses everywhere they would have some idea of what Jesus was talking about. At the same time they could not have known what to expect because they personally had never experienced anything like it before. Also, it is God's spirit we are talking about here so who can predict what God's spirit will do, right?

But Jesus also told them that when God's spirit came on them they would get a new power. And power has to be used well and for the right purpose. If it is not then you can do more harm than good right? So, when the spirit of God comes on them you can be sure that God would want his disciples to be well prepared to receive this power. And the disciples too would want to be well prepared. How would you prepare for a new power? Like with any power, you can be prepared by being very clear in your mind what the purpose of that power is. The purpose of God's power coming upon his disciples is so that they can be God's witnesses to Christ to every category of people. Christ has

made the purpose clear **before** He gave them the power. And we know that between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost there was a period of 50 days. So they had 40 days of after the resurrection and 10 more days after Christ's ascension to pray and remember their life's mission before they received the promised power at Pentecost.

And what would they pray about during this 10 full days of immersive prayer retreat? They would have prayed that God would strengthen them for the task ahead. God would mentally, emotionally and physically prepare them for the task of being witnesses to Jesus. They may have prayed for help in engaging in battle with the spiritual forces. They would have prayed for wisdom as they teach about the kingdom of God and they may have prayed that God would go ahead of them and chose disciples who they would now have to work with, teaching them to obey everything that Christ had taught them previously to obey.

And during this time there was no divisions among them, no quarrels, no politics, no seeking after personal gain. They only had unity. The funny thing is they had better unity at this time then they would have a few years after the church was established. Well, don't ask me how this is possible. I am only observing what I see written. But the important thing is that this 10 day prayer retreat was a powerful time. There was Unity, there was purpose and there was excitement because everybody knew that God was about to do something big in their lives any minute. When I started working on this I was wondering what would they pray for, for 10 continuous 10 days. But as got into their shoes I began to wonder how they were able to be prepared for so radical a change in their lives in just 10 days of prayer!

Well the million denarii question is what does examining what the disciples did during those 10 days mean for us?

Let me just highlight two implications. The first is the obedience piece. These 120 disciples clearly were willing to turn their lives upside down to obey what Christ had told them to do. You have to remember that most of them did not live in Jerusalem. They only visited on major festivals. So for them to stay that indefinitely to wait for the Holy Spirit to come on them was certainly a serious act of obedience. For us, we have to look at the passages that we are reading in the Bible on a daily basis and obey it sincerely. That is the first and most important piece.

The second part of this is the “extraordinary prayer” piece. We have to pray, not just for our laundry lists but pray to spend time with God where we get to synchronize our heart with God’s heart. Pray to ask God what He expects of us. Pray to listen. Pray in anticipation. Pray in expectation. Pray in preparation. At the end of our prayer time, we have to change in some way, grow in some way and be prepared for God’s work in our lives in some way. That is the kind of prayer that God can use to direct our lives. If God is the shepherd and we are his sheep, we need to get our direction just from him. If not we will be lost. Let us learn to pray in ways that channel the kind of prayer these disciples did before Pentecost that prepared them for handling the power that would come upon them so that when it did happen they knew what to do with it.

In the days to come let’s obey what God is telling us through scripture and come together regularly to pray and wait for God’s instructions to us. I believe God has great plans for each of us. But we have to be willing to prepare ourselves for God’s next move. Are we willing to pray in that kind of prayer?