

ACTS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Acts chapter 1 as we continue our study through the Word of God. And keep in mind that the book of Acts picks up where the Gospels ended. It truly is the story of the Church and how God has empowered us to move the Gospel message forward, to the ends of the earth!

Think about it. The Gospel of John ends and without the book of Acts we would come to Romans and a man named Paul. Who is this man? Where is he from? So many questions and the book of Acts answers those and many more questions for us.

William Barclay put it like this, “A great New Testament scholar has said that the title of *Acts* might be, ‘How they brought the Good News from Jerusalem to Rome.’”

How true that is. Keep in mind this Christianity was all new. And how this faith went from Jerusalem to Rome is amazing. Boice puts it like this, “Humanly speaking, [Christianity] had nothing going for it. It had no money, no proven leaders, no technological tools for propagating the gospel. And it faced enormous obstacles. It was utterly new. It taught truths that were incredible to the unregenerate world. It was the subject to the most intense hatreds and persecutions.”

That truly is amazing, and we will see how this Gospel message went forward, not by the power of man but the power of God’s Spirit empowering them and us to move the Gospel message, as I have said, to the ends of the earth!

To sum up this book, I like the way that W. Graham Scroggie put it. He said, “Christ is the theme, the church is the means, and the Spirit is the power.” Exactly!

As we will see, Luke is the writer of this book of Acts and we will dig more into that in a few minutes, as we look at verse 1 of Acts chapter 1. But keep in mind that Luke was probably a Gentile, the only Gentile writer in the New Testament. He wrote the Gospel of Luke and, like I have said, Acts.

The timeframe for the writing of Acts has been debated by scholars but if you look at how the book ends, I think it gives us a clue to when Luke wrote this.

The book of Acts ends with Paul in Rome awaiting his trial. There is no mention of the persecution under Nero that took place in 64 A. D. or even Paul's death that occurred somewhere around 68 A. D. Nor is there any mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple that occurred in 70 A. D.

Thus, the logical conclusion is that the book of Acts was written by Luke before Paul's trial in Rome in 62 A. D. as Luke does not mention the outcome of Paul's trial!

Now it is kind of strange the way that Luke ends this book. In Acts 28:30-31 we are told, **“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”**

Why did the Holy Spirit end there? Why don't we know more of what happened to Paul? It just does not seem like a proper ending! Are we missing something?

I believe we are. You see, the book of Acts did not end, it is a continuing story of the Holy Spirit empowering the church to move the Gospel message throughout the world! You see, the work that began in Luke's day continues on today!

In a sense, we are writing the story of Acts today as the Holy Spirit is working in us and through us, bringing the good news, the Gospel message to the lost!

In Acts 1:8 we see how this book is divided up for us. Jesus said, “**But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**”

In Acts chapters 1 through 7 we see Luke record for us the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles in *Jerusalem!*

Then, in Acts chapters 8 through 12 we see the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles in *Judea and Samaria!*

And the remainder of the book, Acts chapters 13 through 28 we see the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles to *the end or uttermost part of the earth!*

I like an easy division like that and we will see that played out as we go through this book over the next few months!

Also, keep in mind that what Luke records for us regarding the Church covers a period of some thirty-three years, that is it. And I think J. B. Phillips nails it when he speaks about all that happened during this period of time and how we have not seen anything comparable since that time, not that we can't, I just think we are not willing to walk by faith.

He wrote that we have not seen “any small body of ordinary people so moved the world that their enemies could say, with tears of rage in their eyes, that these men ‘have turned the world upside down!’”

How did they do it? By the empowering of the Holy Spirit that came down upon their lives and that power that they received to move the Gospel message forward is there for us as well.

How do I know that it is for us and not just for the early Church? Because Peter tells us in Acts chapter 2, **“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.’”** Acts 2:38-39.

Now, what is the **“promise of the Father”**? Some say it is the Holy Spirit coming inside a believer at the time of conversion. I disagree, I believe it is more than that; it is the empowerment with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit coming upon a believer.

In John 20:22, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, on the evening of His resurrection we see Jesus come before His disciples and He breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit. It is at that point the Holy Spirit came in them, they were New Testament believers.

Now prior to His ascension He told His men in Luke 24:49, and this relates to what we read in Acts chapter 2, **“Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”**

That is what we see here in Acts chapter 2 and it is a promise not only to the first century Church, but to every believer, it is a gift that is received by faith, the power of God to be witnesses of Him! And we will look at this more as we get to Acts chapters 1 and 2.

What about the historical accuracy of the book of Acts? Those who have studied history have come to the conclusion that Luke was one of the greatest historians who has ever lived. He has given us an extremely accurate and reliable historical record of the early church as well as an invaluable bridge which spans and connects the gospels with the epistles.

Let me show you what I mean. Back in the Nineteenth Century it was widely believed that the New Testament was an invention of the Second Century church.

Sir William Ramsay, who began his historical research toward the end of the Nineteenth Century, was taught that the New Testament was not historically reliable.

As a young historian, Ramsay was determined to develop an independent historical/geographical study of First-Century Asia Minor.

To his dismay, there was little usable information regarding this area and that period of time.

So, reluctantly, he consulted the book of Acts for help. What he discovered was remarkably accurate and true to first-century history and topography. Isn't that interesting, he went to the Bible to see what was taking place during that period of time, historically speaking and it was accurate.

Also, Sir William Ramsay said this: "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy . . . this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians . . . Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness." You see, Luke wrote this book, it was written in the first century, and historically speaking, it is accurate down to the tiniest detail, so the evidence supports its claims!

Don Stewart, in speaking of Ramsay, stated, "Since many historical details, national boundaries, and government structures in Asia Minor were different in the second century from what they had been in the first, it is reasonable to conclude that the actual author of Luke and Acts was a first-century author, not a second-century one." Exactly!

We have spent 1½ years looking at the four Gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And we have all the information, doctrine that Jesus has given to us in those Gospel's! Now, with all that we need the empowering of God's Spirit upon our lives to move the Gospel message forward and that is what the book of Acts is all about.

And, since we have the information, since we have the power of God's Spirit upon our lives, now we need to move! May we be spurred on as we go through the book of Acts to bring the Gospel message forward from our Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth!

With that as our background, let's begin reading in Acts chapter 1, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word!

ACTS 1

VERSES 1-2

We see here that Luke, the author of this book is writing a second book, or letter, an account to a man named Theophilus. First of all, let me deal with Luke and then we will look at who this Theophilus is.

Luke, the writer of this book was a physician, according to Colossians 4:14. Now there is some debate about Luke being a Gentile or a Jew. I believe he was a Gentile. In Colossians 4:11 Paul mentions some men by name and says that they "**are of the circumcision**" or they are Jews.

Then, in Colossians 4:14 we are told, "**Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.**" No mention of Luke or Demas being Jews, "**of the circumcision.**"

Some feel that is a weak argument, and it may be. But, we know for sure, Luke was a physician and probably a Gentile but again, it has been debated by some.

And we know that he was a devoted companion of Paul and we can see that in Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24 and II Timothy 4:11.

In regard to his writing, not only the Gospel of Luke but the book of Acts, Unger wrote, “The Acts of the Apostles is now generally agreed in scholarly circles to be the work of Luke, to belong to the first century and to involve the labors of a careful historian who was substantially accurate in his use of sources.”

As I have said, Luke was a physician and we tend to think about doctors today that they are distinguished and looked up to, but not so in Luke’s day, it was much different in Luke’s day.

You see, they were slaves, owned by a master who they would care for. And thus, these masters were usually wealthy!

And that brings us to this man, Theophilus, it may give us a clue to who he is. You see, many scholars and historians believe that Theophilus was Luke’s owner. That means that Luke witnessed to Theophilus, whose name means “God lover” interestingly enough, and he came to know Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior. After he is saved he allows Luke to travel with Paul to spread the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. It does seem to fit.

Now Luke opens up by speaking of the “**the former account**” that he made to Theophilus. Now you don’t have to be a Biblical scholar to figure out what the other account was, we have talked about it, the one prior to this one. It is the Gospel According to Luke. How do I know that? How can I be so sure?

By reading these verses and then looking back at Luke 1:1-4, which says “**Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.**”

If both these books were for Theophilus, and they were, then why didn't Luke just put them all together into one book?

That is a great question and I think Boice explains it very well. He wrote, “Ancient books were generally written on papyrus scrolls. It was practical to have a scroll about thirty-five feet in length. When it got any longer it got too bulky to carry around. This physical limitation has determined the length of many books of the Bible.”

In other words, because these are two long books, Luke used two scrolls to tell his story, and one we call “*The Gospel of Luke*” and the other we call “*The Book of Acts*.” It is as simple as that!

So, the first book, the Gospel According to Luke was written to show us “**all that Jesus began both to do and teach**” and it ended as we see in verse 2 “**until the day in which He was taken up.**” Now we come to the next chapter you might say, the history of the church, with its beginnings and, as I have said, it continues on today!

VERSE 3

This is so important to us and thus, Luke speaks about it, the Lord's post-resurrection appearances. Why is this important. Because it attests to the reality of the Resurrection. Christ gave many convincing proofs of this.

In fact, as Luke speaks of the post resurrection appearances of Jesus he speaks of many unmistakable "**proofs**," TEKMERIOIS. And, in the Greek, this word speaks of not only an eyewitness account, but they touched Him, felt Him and yes, they saw Him, He was real! The resurrection of Jesus Christ was proven by: sight, touch and feel. (Luke 24:39-40, I John 1:1)

Not only that but the Greek word for "**seen**" is OPTANOMAI, (op-tan'-om-ah-ee) and from this Greek word we get our English word ophthalmologist or eye doctor from.

What is the point? It literally means Jesus was being "eyeballed" by them, "stared at," or "scrutinized."

The disciples didn't gaze at Jesus with wispy, dreamy looks. No, they stared at Him. Hey, wouldn't you do the same? Think about it, if your leader had been crucified but came back on the scene from time to time, wouldn't you eyeball him? Of course you would!

Not only that, but Paul, in speaking of His resurrection appearances, makes this very powerful point in I Corinthians 15:5-8, "**and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.**"

You see, there were many unmistakable proofs of His resurrection; it was not a fabricated story as some like to say.

Let me explain. In our court system we use to prove a case the eyewitness testimony. Now, if you were to place the evidence for the resurrection in our court system, it would win because of the evidence of the eyewitness testimony, over 500 brethren He appeared to at one time!

Now some of you may be thinking that the eyewitnesses are all dead, and that is true. But think about most of the historical things that have occurred, were you there?

Not at all and yet you have believed them because of the eyewitness testimony and yet you reject the resurrection that has many eyewitnesses.

You see, you can't have it both ways. And if you want to reject the resurrection, then you have to reject most of the history and do away with the way our court system works. The resurrection was real and to deny it you must suppress the truth!

It is as Thomas Arnold of Oxford University said, "I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."

In fact, if Christ didn't rise from the dead we would still be dead in our trespasses and sins.

Paul elaborates on that in I Corinthians chapter 15, **“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up - if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”** I Corinthians 15:13-22.

So, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is important, and the proof of the resurrection is overwhelming!

Now Luke also tells us, **“being seen by them during forty days”** and that tells me that we are some ten days away from the Feast of Pentecost. You see, this Feast takes place fifty days after the Feast of Firstfruits takes place. Jesus rose on the Feast of Firstfruits which took place exactly 50 days before Pentecost. He spent 40 days appearing to His disciples after His resurrection speaking to them about the Kingdom before He ascended to heaven.

That would have left ten days before Pentecost which they spent in the upper room praying and waiting for the Spirit to be poured out. Thus, just about a week from the Feast of Pentecost, which we will get into as we move into Acts chapter 2 next time.

VERSES 4-5

Before Luke moves on, he covers some of the material from the end of his former account, The Gospel According to Luke. And what were the disciples to do? They were to wait for the promise of the Father, the outpouring for service with the Holy Spirit!

Where did this take place. It is possible that what Luke is speaking of here took place on the Mount of Olives. This was the spot from which the Lord Jesus went back to heaven (Luke 24:50-51)

And maybe they thought about this outpouring of the Holy Spirit before the Lord comes back to set up His Kingdom. They may have been thinking of the promise of Joel 2:28-32. Now this was to begin on the day of Pentecost, but they were not aware of that yet. They just knew the promise of Joel.

And Joel tells us, **“And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, As the LORD has said, Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.”**

Keep in mind that in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit came upon certain individuals to empower them for the work they were called to do like Moses, Joshua, Saul and David for examples.

Remember, in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit never came into believer's lives, but upon them. There is a difference and this indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a New Testament teaching. In John chapter 20, after His death and resurrection, we are told that Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**" At that point they were New Testament saints as the Holy Spirit indwelt them.

But this promise from Joel is to all who believe, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and thus, you and me! Jesus told His men to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. We don't have to wait or tarry in Jerusalem for this outpouring for this gift is received by faith either by asking or the laying on of hands or both.

Here in Acts 1:5 Luke speaks of the baptism of John, which is different than this baptism with the Holy Spirit.

For John the Baptist was the baptizer, the water was the element and the issue was the repentance from sin.

In regard to the Holy Spirit, Jesus is the baptizer, the Holy Spirit is the element and the issue is love, the fruit of the Spirit.

Notice I didn't say speaking in tongues, or any of the other gifts, why? Because without love these other gifts are meaningless! If you are lacking this gift, this power then what will be manifested in your life will be anger, bitterness, sarcastic comments, hate, and just plain ugliness.

The solution is to repent and to ask God to fill you with His Spirit, so love will be manifested in your life!

Make no mistake about it, this would mark the beginning of a new era for the people of God, we call it the “Church Age” the time from Pentecost to the Rapture where the Spirit of God would be working in the world through the Church in a unique and powerful way.

Jesus tells them this will happen shortly, “**not many days from now**” or in about a week. You see, as I have said, Pentecost took place 50 days after Feast of Firstfruits, and as we will see next time, it will correspond to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Zola Levitt tells us regarding these Feasts,

For believers in Jesus the Messiah, the dating of Pentecost is one of the most exquisite examples of type and fulfillment in the Scriptures. Pentecost means fifty, and is actually fifty days from another feast, First Fruits. These calculations are explained in Leviticus 23:10-11, 15-17. The feast of First Fruits was to occur on the day after the Sabbath (verse 11), which was always the Sunday of Passover week. Pentecost, then, was the day after the seventh following Sabbath (verses 15–16), which would be the fiftieth day after First Fruits and also on a Sunday.

- <https://www.levitt.com/essays/pentecost/>

Notice how they respond to what Jesus is saying here.

VERSE 6

Remember before the death and resurrection of Jesus that His disciples were always thinking about Jesus establishing the Kingdom. In fact, they were jockeying for their positions in the Kingdom.

And now that Jesus has spoken of this coming of the Spirit, this outpouring of the Spirit, I am sure they thought about what Joel said and how this fits in with the Messiah’s reign.

That means that the Lord would set up His Kingdom shortly, “**not many days from now.**” That is why they are speaking of the restoration of the Kingdom here in Acts 1:6.

Stott put it this way, “The verb *restore* shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun *Israel* that they were expecting a national kingdom; and the adverbial clause *at this time* that they were expecting its immediate establishment.”

But listen to what Jesus has to say and we will try to clarify His Words here because some have taken them out of context to say that we are not to be looking for the coming of the Lord. So, this is important!

VERSES 7-8

Now let me share this with you and you see if this is what Jesus is saying. In the *Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren writes,

When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. He said in essence, “The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I have given you. Focus on that!”

- Rick Warren, Purpose Driven Life, p. 285

Is that what Jesus is saying? Absolutely not, it would go against what the Scriptures teach us. We are to be looking for the return of Christ. Then what does Jesus mean here?

The Lord did not correct them for expecting His literal reign on earth because such a hope was and is justified. What He did tell them is that they could not know when His Kingdom would come. The date had been fixed by the Father's sole authority, but He had not chosen to reveal it. It was information that belonged exclusively to Himself. And that fits in with what the Scriptures tell us regarding prophecy. I hope that is clear!

Paul put it like this, **“looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.”** Titus 2:13-15.

You see, we are to build people up in the faith, encourage them, correct them with the authority of the Scriptures and we are not to let people discourage us from doing this or stop doing this. The Lord is coming back, let people know!

Now, Acts 1:8 is foundational for the rest of the book. You see, the disciples of Jesus had all the information and yet, they lacked the power to run with it. Remember what Zechariah 4:6 says, **“... ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the LORD of hosts.”**

The baptism with the Holy Spirit, the empowerment to do the work, and Jesus speaks on that here in Acts 1:8, this promise of the Father!

As I have said, these men had all the tools to fulfill the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”**

The problem was they lacked the power to run those tools and now Jesus is promising to give them that power by pouring out upon them the Holy Spirit.

We have seen in our study of John that the Holy Spirit comes alongside a person, He is *with* them, PARA in the Greek, drawing them to Jesus.

Once a person comes to Jesus the Holy Spirit comes *in* them, EN in the Greek.

Now, here in Acts we see the third Greek preposition used for the Holy Spirit, EPI or *upon* them empowering them for the work.

Now what happens in our life when the Holy Spirit comes upon us? We will become witnesses of Jesus, not a command but a simple fact.

You are not to go out and witness, that is not what this verse is all about, but your life will be a witness to others of Jesus! Jesus said “. . . **you shall be witnesses of Me . . .**” that is what will flow from your life as you live for Him!

Let me explain by giving you this example. Sir Henry Stanley said this of David Livingstone after discovering and spending time with him in Central Africa, “If I had been with him any longer I would have been compelled to be a Christian, and He never spoke to me about it at all.”

You see, Livingstone’s witness went far beyond words, he lived what he believed and so should we, but we can’t accomplish that on our own, we need the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives!

How do we know when we are running low? As I have said, by the way you treat people. If there is no love, we are short with them, sarcastic with them, biting people’s heads off, don’t have time for them, and-so-on, you need a filling!

What is the cure? Ask God to fill you and believe it by faith, apply it to your life, live what you believe!

As you look at the work of the Holy Spirit today, or should I say what some people call the work of the Holy Spirit, you see them tooting their horn, all kinds of bizarre behavior.

That is not the work of the Holy Spirit.

Think of it like this. The steam in a locomotive does not exist to toot the whistle but to power the engine down the track, to move it along, and the Holy Spirit does that with us, moving us along for God to use, not to toot our whistle but to move us!

And notice how the Gospel message will move out. As I have said, that it began in Jerusalem, which we will see in Acts chapters 1-7.

Then to Judea and Samaria, in Acts 8-12.

And finally, to the ends of the earth, Acts 13-28.

How does that apply to us as individuals? Your home is your Jerusalem, and before you spread out you must take care of your home, your family.

Then from there your Judea and Samaria may be your neighbors.

Then from there, to the uttermost parts of the earth, it may be your work. It may be missionaries you support.

I think you get the idea. And the same is true for us as a church.

We have our Jerusalem, Manitowoc.

We have our Judea and Samaria, the surrounding communities.

And we have our uttermost parts of the earth, this state, this nation and even this world!

Jesus empowers us and then sends us out into the world with the Gospel message. May we go!

VERSES 9-11

According to Luke 24:50-51, as He was blessing them He was taken up from them in a cloud, and these guys just stood there staring like deer in your headlights!

Now I can't blame them for that, I would do the same! Now why didn't Jesus just disappear? I think He wanted them to know that this was it, He was ascending to the Father, and remember what He said in John 16:7, "**Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.**" Now they would see that promise fulfilled!

Now for those who reject the return of Jesus, I think this should put an end to that! You see, just as Jesus ascended up into heaven He is going to return again, physically, visibly and on the Mount of Olives.

In Revelation 1:7 we are told, "**Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.**"

And in Zechariah 14:3-4 we are told, "**Then the LORD will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, Making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north And half of it toward the south.**"

His promise to His men and to us is this, "*I'll be back!*"

VERSES 12-14

A Sabbath's day's journey was about 2/3rd's of a mile or about 3,520 feet. If you went farther on the Sabbath you would break the Sabbath Law, or should I say their tradition!

Now, notice the disciples were obedient and they gathered together in the upper room, but for what?

They gathered together in unity to pray, both general and specific prayers; and they were waiting for the Promise of the Father that Jesus spoke of.

It is as Psalm 133 tells us of brethren dwelling together in unity and how good, how pleasant it is. And it is interesting that prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus, they were trying to outdo the other disciples but now they are working together, in unity!

Charles Swindoll put it like this,

Union has an affiliation with others but no common bond that makes them one in heart. *Uniformity* has everyone looking and thinking alike. *Unanimity* is complete agreement across the board. *Unity*, however, refers to a oneness of heart, a similarity of purpose, and an agreement on major points of doctrine.

- Charles R. Swindoll, Hope Again

You may not agree with everything someone says or does, but you don't agree with everything your spouse does and you love your spouse. And if you can't agree on anything but one thing, Jesus Christ and the building up of His Kingdom, what more do you need? Think about that for a minute. That is what it is all about, the worship of God and the sharing of the truths of God so that God's Word would take root in people's lives and they would come to know Him as Lord and Savior.

Before Jesus went to the cross to pay in full the penalty for our sins He prayed that there would be unity among the brethren in John chapter 17 and that unity is based in truth, it is based in Christ!

And, as I have said, they were also in prayer. Again, not self-seeking but seeking the Lord's direction. And it is interesting that the prelude to Pentecost was unity and prayer!

One other thing to note here is that this is the last mention of Mary and please note that they are not praying to her in the upper room, but she is praying with them, with the 120 that had gathered. She was waiting with them to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Also, we see Jesus' half-brothers here, at least Jude and James. Prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus we see them against Jesus, as John 7:5 says, "**For even His brothers did not believe in Him.**" But now they do and who steps forward to lead this group? Let's read on and see!

VERSES 15-20

Look at how far we have come today in regard to moving away from the Word of God. And yet, look at what the early church was doing and the confidence they had in the Word of God.

I think that is important for us today as there is so many so-called Christians that are coming against the Word of God. We must have *CONFIDENCE* in the Word of God, that what God has spoken will come to pass, not might! The early church believed this and so must we if we are going to impact the world in which we live in!

Not only did they have confidence in the Word of God, but they also believed in the *INSPIRATION* of the Scriptures and the *INERRANCY* of the Scriptures!

Again, something that the church today has moved away from and it is a dangerous road to travel!

So, the early church was *CONFIDENT* in the Word of God and the reason that they were *CONFIDENT* was because the Word of God was *INSPIRED* by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God was *INERRANT!* You can trust God's Word from Genesis through the book of Revelation!

Look at what we see here. David spoke by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit. That means if it is in the Word of God it is inerrant, it will happen! And this is very clear as Peter tells us that David penned these words from Psalm 69 and Psalm 109 by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit!

And this is what they held onto, that the Scripture must be fulfilled which was spoken by the Holy Spirit through David.

It is as Paul said in II Timothy 3:16-17, "**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**"

What an important lesson for us regarding the Word of God. God spoke it forth so that as we read it, take it into our lives, as the Holy Spirit opens it up to us, that it will be profitable in our lives and help us to grow by telling us what is right, what is wrong, how to get right when we have gone astray and how to stay right. God is equipping us for the work He has called us to do!

So, Peter steps forward but please understand that Peter stepped forward only for a short period of time and led them.

We will see later on in Acts that James, the half-brother of Jesus oversees the church in Jerusalem and Peter reports to him.

There is one other point I would like to bring out here and that is these verses that Peter brings out. Peter is using verses that are very obscure, which tells me that Peter knew the Word of God and so should we. From Genesis through Revelation!

And it was the Holy Spirit that opened these passages up to Peter and told Peter what they meant, and they will go forward in obeying what God has said here in His Word.

Now, what Peter is saying is that the spot vacated by Judas, who has already hung himself must be filled.

It is interesting that Peter uses the Greek word HETEROS for “**another**” which speaks of another of a different kind. He did not use the Greek word ALLOS which speaks of another of the same kind, why? Because they did not want another person like Judas! That just makes sense.

Now as some read this they think there is a contradiction between what we read in Matthew 27:3-10 regarding the death of Judas, as it tells us that he went out and hung himself.

And then here we read that he fell headlong and “**burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out.**” Acts 1:18.

Please understand that there is no contradiction between the two accounts. Judas did go and hang himself and it is most likely that the rope broke and as he fell to the ground, his entrails gushed out! It makes sense to me.

Now look at what happens as they take the Word of God and apply it to the situation that they are in.

VERSES 21-22

Notice the qualifications of this position. They must have been with Jesus since the beginning with the baptism of John and continued with Him through His earthly ministry, seen Him in His resurrection until the day Jesus ascended back to the Father.

That means, today, obviously, that office can't be fulfilled, being one of the 12, but back then it could!

And let's look at who they pick, because there is some controversy on what is being done here.

VERSES 23-26

They had whittled the men down to two prospects, Justice and Matthias and as they prayed and cast lots it fell upon Matthias and he was made one of the group of 12 Apostles.

Now please understand that the casting of lots was not just like getting the shortest straw. The casting of lots was used to determine the will of God, as Proverbs 16:33 says, "**The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.**"

So, this was not wrong for them to do. But what about us today. Is the casting of lots something that we should be doing today?

Well, it is better than the way some people do it, on pure emotion, feelings, circumstances, selfishness, but I don't believe the casting of lots or laying out a fleece is for today.

Why do I say that? Because this is the last mention of it in the Scriptures and it occurs prior to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Now we wait upon the Lord, let Him speak to our heart by His Spirit regarding a situation. God will speak to you, He is not going to hide these things from you, or let you guess till you get it right!

Now please, don't get me wrong, God does answer us at times when we cast lots or lay out a fleece, but I don't believe that should be our pattern.

When I first got saved the Lord put it upon my heart to teach a Bible study, but being so young I wasn't sure, so I asked my pastor and he told me to go for it, but I needed more assurance.

So, I asked the Lord to give me a sign, and as I was driving home from work one night, in the middle of winter at around midnight, I saw a light show that God put on for me, the Northern Lights.

I had never seen them before nor have I seen them again, and I knew that God had done this for me.

I have never done that again, now I wait upon God, let Him speak to me, guide me. But, back then I was a young Christian but now I have learned to trust in Him and to take those steps of faith without a fleece or the casting of lots!

Now what about this Matthias, is he really part of the 12? Many don't believe so. They will argue that they rushed into this and they limited God to two men, when God didn't want either of them, He wanted Paul!

One of the arguments is that we don't read anything more of Matthias in the Scriptures and thus, they come to the conclusion that Paul was the one who was to be the 12th Apostle!

In fact, in Galatians 1:1 we read, “**Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead).**”

First of all, there were other apostles, Barnabas – Acts 14:14; Silvanus and Timothy – I Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6; James the Lord's half-brother – Galatians 1:19. So these were not part of the 12 but they too were sent with a commission.

For Matthias, don't think of him as a loser, for we don't hear much about any of the Apostles except a select few.

You see, I believe that Matthias was the one and Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles!

I do understand that some may not agree with me, but I don't see in the text that they made an error in what they did. They read the Scriptures, they prayed that God would fill that vacancy with a man who would be a witness to His resurrection, and they then cast lots and Matthias was the man!

Now, as we close here this evening, keep in mind that they had all the tools, they are just waiting for the power to run them, to drive that engine down the tracks from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and then to the uttermost parts of the earth!

And next time we will see the train begin to move with power as the Holy Spirit is poured out upon their lives and the Gospel message goes forward! ***PENTECOST*** is coming!