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Preparing for the Promised Kingdom

Acts 1:12-26

Intro: Last week, our text (1-11) dealt with the 40 day time period between the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ. During this time, Jesus presented Himself alive to His disciples on multiple occasions, providing many infallible proofs of the claims He had made of Himself and His purpose for coming to this earth. Everything Jesus had taught and declared during His earthly ministry was proven to be absolutely true and precisely accurate because of the resurrection. And, as we saw in the last few chapters of John's Gospel, during this time, Jesus also continued to instruct the disciples on the nature and purpose of the church and His divine, loving and gracious rule over it. But, as we saw last time, the disciples still misunderstood the nature and purpose of the coming kingdom of God.

It is clear from the question they asked in v6 that they were looking for a kingdom of God that was different than the one Jesus had taught them about. They were looking for a political kingdom – the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. They were looking for an ethnically limited kingdom – one that belonged exclusively to Israel, to the Jews. They were looking for a kingdom that geographically limited – centered in Jerusalem, where Messiah was supposed to reign! Now, Jesus never said that what they expected to happen was never going to happen; in fact, we know a kingdom will be established on earth in the future just as the disciples described. Jesus didn't disagree with them; He just said it wasn't their business to know God's business concerning His kingdom at that time. Then He tells them what their business actually is (8), the Great Commission - a plan for witnessing that's taken the truth of the Gospel worldwide.

In His response, Jesus dispelled the disciples' misunderstanding by teaching them of the true nature of His kingdom. First, He taught them that His was a spiritual kingdom. We see this in His emphasis of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Now, I don't know how that information makes you feel but most people's response to a "spiritual" kingdom is the equivalent of, "Oh, that's nice," which is just a polite way of saying, "So what?" Most people think a spiritual kingdom isn't important because you can't see it. They don't have anything

against it but they don't have anything for it either because our modern culture thinks that if something is invisible – it's not really that important.

But notice that when Jesus describes the spiritual nature of His kingdom, He doesn't actually use the word "spiritual" even though he could have. What He says is, in effect, "The kingdom I have in mind is one that will be established by the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead. Jesus was actually saying it was going to be God's kingdom. What does "spiritual" mean? We often use it to refer to somebody who's not in touch with real life, to someone who's living in the clouds. Actually, "spiritual" has to do with God the Holy Spirit. What is spiritual is what the Holy Spirit does. The Bible teaches that the visible things of this world will pass away but the invisible things are eternal.

Christians believe in things that are invisible. We believe in God; God is not visible. We believe in eternal life; that's not visible either. We talk about redemption, regeneration, justification. None of those are visible, yet we believe in all of these things. We are committed to them. In the same way, we must be committed to the invisible spiritual kingdom that our Lord has brought to this world. Although it's an invisible kingdom, it's also eternal and will never pass away.

The next thing Jesus teaches is that His is a powerful kingdom. Every kingdom ever established has been based on some sort of power that eventually boils down to political power. This is not the power Jesus is referring to here. The Greek word in [vs8](#) is dynamis (dynamite) an explosive power. God's kingdom will be established on the explosive, life-changing power of the Holy Spirit operating through the proclamation of the Gospel. This is not political power, which is what the disciples wanted. They expected Jesus to set up a political machine. They understood that kind of power, but that was not the power Jesus was talking about. He was talking about power that flows from God.

How does this differ from political power? Political power is an illusion. Just because a person holds a political office doesn't mean they can control world events, change things or bring reformation to the world. The power to change comes from a completely different source. What brings about change? The power of an idea! Armies don't change the world; they just put different people in charge of the problems. Money doesn't change the world.

Not even laws change the world. When Congress passed Prohibition, did it eliminate drinking? No! In fact, it did the opposite, it encouraged people to drink. There was actually more traffic in liquor in those days than there had ever been before. Laws don't change things. Only ideas change things. Change occurs when ideas possess people's minds.

In the spiritual realm, real change comes when the Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to regenerate fallen sinners, causing them to repent of their sin, seek righteousness, and live for Jesus. Changes follow in a big way when that happens. That's when you have real reformation.

Jesus also taught that His would be a kingdom of truth. We see this in His telling the disciples that they will be His witnesses. Witness comes from the Old English word wit. "To wit" means "to know." A "wit" is "a knowledgeable person" (half wit; nit-wit). So, a "witness" is one who knows something and testifies to it. Thus, the disciples were to be witnesses to who Jesus was and what He had done. They were to be witnesses to the truth of the resurrection. They were to advance Christ's kingdom not by force or coercion, but by their testimony to the truth.

Money can't advance the kingdom; Laws can't advance the kingdom. If the laws of the land are bad, there's nothing wrong with trying to change them but changing laws doesn't advance God's kingdom. Actually, the opposite is true: where God's kingdom is advancing, good laws follow. Spiritual changes only come about spiritually, not by force or coercion. Signs and wonders don't advance the kingdom. Many today believe that miracles will bring more people into the kingdom but that's not what Jesus taught. He taught that when the power of the Holy Spirit is received, the result will not be miracles, signs, or healings, but witnessing. The one sure evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit in people's lives is that they will testify of Jesus. If you're a Christian, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will work through your testimony to bring about his kingdom.

Finally, Jesus taught that His kingdom would be worldwide. God's kingdom would embrace all nationalities and people groups of this world and it is doing that even today. Did the disciples understand what Jesus was teaching here? Well, we never read them making this mistake again. In fact, when they understood what Jesus was saying, they actually carried out the Great Commission. They were empowered by the Holy Spirit to go into the

entire world with the Gospel. This Commission was fully carried out by the first generation of the church because every Christian considered it their obligation to bear witness of Jesus Christ. We must tell others who Jesus is and what the Gospel of salvation by His death means to them. It was the most important thing in the world.

12-26 – The 2nd half of Acts 1 focuses on the 10 day waiting period the disciples endured prior to the Holy Spirit's arrival. Jesus told them that they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit "not many days from now" so all they knew was that Jesus had been taken away from them and they were to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were just like us – people of action. Jesus had given us a job; let's get to it! The Holy Spirit should come immediately; we should start preaching the Gospel right now! But that's not what happened; instead, there's an apparent delay.

We occasionally experience times like this in our lives, and they can make for tough going. They're often the hardest times to live through. We want to do something or rather; we want God to do something. When He doesn't, we tend to think something's wrong. If I'm on track with God, things should be happening. But that's not necessarily the case.

This time of waiting wasn't a period of complete inactivity. It was a time of preparation, which is what times of waiting are for. Sometimes we see the preparation; other times we can't. God's doing things in our lives that we're unaware of. Maybe He's developing our character. We rarely see that. This passage shows the early Christians practicing obedience, fellowship, praying, studying Scripture, and choosing leaders in preparation for their ministry.

How were they practicing obedience? What the disciples did in **12-13** was a direct response to what Jesus had told them to do (**v4**). This must've been difficult because there were plenty of things they could've done. They could have gone back to their various homes, back to their original jobs. They could have seen that there were souls to be won, work to be done for Jesus. It must have seemed utterly pointless for them to wait inactively in Jerusalem. The truth is: we learn about obedience most during the times when we can't see why we're called to do what we are doing. We learn obedience when the course we're called to does not seem to be the best option.

If you're going through a similar time in your life, when you know what you should do but don't know why you need to do it; if you're experiencing a delay in God moving in your life and it seems you're stuck in a spot and can't get past it, know that there's valuable preparation in just remaining where God has put you. The action will come later.

Another way the disciples prepared for future ministry was they gathered together in fellowship (14a). The phrase in one accord is seen 6 times in Acts, describing the unity of the early church. This was an eclectic group of people with all kinds of baggage and it would have been easy for any of them to bring division into this beautiful assembly but they didn't. There was a wonderful, loving unity that bound them together in Christ. Jesus had given them the solemn responsibility of bearing witness to a lost world and none of them could do the job alone.

People need people. This need is part of what it means to be human. One of the worst things that can happen to a person is to be completely isolated from others, so, if we are to grow intellectually, socially, and spiritually, we need others. Christians need other Christians. When you become a Christian, you don't do that in isolation, you actually enter into the body (assembly) of those who are also Christ's disciples, and you find fellowship with them. It is this fellowship that assists in our spiritual growth because as we learn to love Jesus, we will also learn to love His people.

Of course, the disciples didn't just sit around shooting the breeze. The point of their constant fellowship was to be in constant prayer (14b). What did they pray about? I'm sure they praised God for the salvation He had accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus. They were preparing to do a daunting work for the Lord so they would have been conscious of their own inadequacies and sin. This must have been a time of confession for them also. I'm sure they were abundantly thankful for all that God was doing in their lives at the time as well as praying for the necessary strength and faithfulness to do the task before them. They probably prayed for the Holy Spirit's coming.

Some people feel that since God is sovereign, if it's His will to accomplish something, it's going to happen so why pray for it? This is a gross misunderstanding of how God works. It's true that God *is* sovereign. God accomplishes His purposes. The disobedience of man doesn't frustrate Him.

But when God accomplishes His purposes, He does it through certain means. If He's going to save someone, He usually does it by leading someone else to go to that person with the gospel and speak about Jesus Christ. Similarly, when God sends revival, He almost always does it by leading His people to pray. Prayer is not without purpose. The disciples knew it because Jesus had taught them. So they must have prayed for the coming of the Holy Spirit and for blessing when the Holy Spirit came.

15-22- We also see that the disciples had been studying the Scriptures. When Peter brought up the necessity of replacing Judas, he referenced to OT passages (**Ps 69:25; Ps 109:8**). Two things go together in the Christian life: prayer, where we talk to God, and Bible study, where God talks to us. Prayer is of great importance. But it's been said that when we talk to God and God talks to us, we should let God do most of the talking. Meaning, we should spend most of our time in Bible study – not just reading, which is good – but deliberate, informed study.

This is clearly what the disciples were doing during this time as evidenced by Peter's effective use of OT themes and passages in his Pentecost sermon. Sure, Jesus had told them previously that when they stood up to testify of Him, the Holy Spirit would bring to mind what they were to say. But Jesus never said the Holy Spirit would plant truth into their minds; He wasn't just going to insert it on the fly. No! In order for the Spirit to be able to bring Scripture to mind, it had to first be in their hearts. When Peter preached on Pentecost, he instinctively spoke about OT Scriptures. How else could he get them in his mind if not by this kind of in-depth, meaningful study?

As Christians, we often say, "We want God to bless our church" (or our family, Bible study, nation, etc). But if we're serious, we must learn that the way God blesses is usually through studying the Bible: as people come to know what God has written, as they respond to it, believe it and proclaim it to others in the world. If you find yourself in a time of waiting or inactivity, redeem the time, as the disciples did. Become a more knowledgeable student of God's Word.

23-26 – Finally, we see they recognized the need for leadership and took steps to supply it by electing Matthias to replace Judas. Some have been critical of the disciple's action here for several reasons, all of which can be answered by Scripture. Sure, Paul was an Apostle but so was Barnabas, but

they were Apostles in a different sense than these 12. Jesus had called 12 men to be Apostles and it was necessary that 12 men witness at Pentecost to the 12 tribes of Israel. Later, in ch12, when the apostle James is martyred, he is not replaced. Why? Because the official witness to Israel had been completed and the message of the Gospel was going out to both Jews and Gentiles. There was no more need for 12 Apostles to give witness to the 12 tribes of Israel.

Others fault them for casting lots, claiming they resorted to a pagan way of doing things. Casting lots was actually a strong OT tradition. They were simply following an OT precedent, not resorting to pagan superstitions. You couldn't fault any of the other things they had done: practicing obedience, in constant fellowship, prayer and Bible study so we must assume they were led by the Spirit to seek a qualified person to fill this necessary place of leadership. They found 2 qualified candidates and then let the Lord decide between the 2. Of course, this is the last instance in the Bible of casting lots and since we have access to the complete filling of the Holy Spirit and the completed Word of God, there's no good reason why believers should continue to use this approach to determine God's will.

The modern church believes that substantial growth only comes through mass mailings that canvass the city, or special events that draw a crowd or programs and activities to engage families and/or individuals. There's nothing inherently wrong with these things, they just don't produce real growth. My Dad says the only problem with having an elephant on the stage to get the people in is that the next Sunday you'll have to have 2. True growth doesn't come from these things; it comes from practicing obedience, from experiencing and enjoying the fellowship of loving unity, from realizing the benefit of consistent prayer and effective, in-depth Bible study. Church growth comes from taking what we learn through these activities and exemplifying and declaring it to a world that hungers and thirsts for truth.

If we are serious about church growth, we must get ready for it. We must prepare. All the things that are seen in the early church must be encouraged in our church. we must use these days of waiting wisely, knowing and trusting that if we do, Jesus will send the blessing we so desperately need and desire to see. 😊