

"What to Do When Waiting on the Lord"

Acts 1:12-26

If we're tempted to ignore the 'boring' parts of Scripture so we can 'get to the good stuff' we would probably bypass 1:12-26 from our Bibles. I mean, if I read 2:1-3 right after 1:11-12, here's what it would sound like:

¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. ...When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.

Doesn't that sound better? Who needs all that in-between stuff anyway? We do. Remember,

^{2 Tim. 3:16} All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work

So then, vv.12-26 are there because it's God's breathed out words intended for our instruction to make us better equipped servants of God. How? It's just a passage about these guys waiting on God to reveal His plan? Oh. Right. Don't we spend more of our life waiting on God to reveal His plan in our lives than anything else? I mean really, how often do we experience Ascension and Pentecost moments? Not often.

Here then is one of the most practical sections of Acts: what do we do when we're waiting on the Lord?

- When we're waiting on an answer to prayer
- When we sense His direction but unsure about details
- When we need to make major (and minor) decisions in our life, etc., etc.

So, Jesus said 'wait in Jerusalem for in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit to be My witnesses.' They knew what being baptized with water meant but what did being baptized by the Spirit mean? And how exactly were they going to be His witnesses? Debate the Pharisees in the temple? Won't we get arrested and maybe find ourselves on a cross too?

Questions, questions and more questions. Lord, we're not sure what we're to do. Wait. We're not good at waiting. But waiting on the Lord doesn't mean just sit there and do nothing. Waiting on God is a very active thing we need to do. How do we do that? While the disciples did not always follow Jesus as they might have, there was one thing they learned from Jesus, and that was to pray. So what do they do when they are told to wait?

Pray About What You're Waiting on God For **(1:12-14)**

The disciples return to Jerusalem to an upper room (possibly the same one as the Last Supper but maybe not since it's a different Greek word) which is less than a kilometer away. If it was 40 days

exactly then it was a Thursday, which means Pentecost is 10 days away. But they don't know that the Spirit is coming on that day yet. So they pray about what Jesus told them: for the Holy Spirit to come. That may sound like the obvious thing to do when we're waiting on God for something, but in praying for the very thing we are waiting on God for, it helps us not to wander and let our mind go crazy with worry – as it sometimes does. A number of you are praying for work. So you pray for God to sort out the details of who will I work for, where will I work, how will it work with our family schedule and financial needs, etc. Maybe you're waiting on God for a big life decision. Again it probably involves a who or a where or a how. But it always revolves around

Trusting God about His timing (vv.12-13)

The verbs for “staying” in the upper room and “joined together constantly in prayer” are meant to tell us this was their repeated practice and purpose day by day. Not 24-7 but it was a continual habit every day to pray. Praying obviously for what Jesus told them was going to happen. Did they know what day? No, just a few days. Did they know how it was going to happen? No because they never experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Would it hurt? Who knows? Would it happen to all 120 gathered there? Not sure. But this is why you pray and you trust God for the details.

‘Lord, I know I need this or you promised that. Help me to receive it the way You desire. Help me to recognize its from You. Help me to wait for You to answer it in Your way. I'm praying for Your Word to be accomplished in my life.’ This is why we pray Scripture for one another. It keeps us focused on God's purposes and keeps our minds from wandering too far away, which it can sometimes because we are anxious. Often these kinds of prayers need the safety net of Prov. 3:5-6

⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.*

⁶ *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

Heart and mind are synonyms for our thoughts. Our understanding is incomplete, self-focused and often impatient. That's why we trust God, acknowledging its about His purpose for me so He can bring clarity or show us direction because we are at a roadblock or confused. So they prayed. But they prayed together. And that's a good reminder too, to

Connect with like-minded believers (v.14)

... when we need God's direction or an answer to prayer in our life. Now, let's not take this scene for granted. How often were the disciples actually united? Not all the time. What's brought them together here? It says they were all of one mind. One mind about what? About the fact that they all believed in the resurrection of Jesus and were committed to waiting on Jesus' promise to come true. And they were all willing, I believe, to be His witnesses.

It would be wonderful if we could count on all God's people to be of one mind in prayer. But let's be honest, we're not all at the same maturity level. Some people have not matured enough in their walk with God and haven't learned how to wait on God in prayer for spiritual promises. They will pray for a physical need and for things very tangible and can be answered very clearly. But to pray for spiritual maturity or direction or wisdom are not always easy things to pray for because they are not as tangible. And we like tangible things

because we want a God who speaks into the practical aspects of our life. And He does. And we all start there in our prayer life. But like everything, we need to spiritually grow in our prayer life.

The 11 apostles and the rest of the 120 people there, were of mind to wait on God's timing for the Spirit to come but also were willing to be Jesus' witnesses. Earlier in Luke's gospel Jesus taught His disciples to count the cost of following Him, to pick up their own cross daily. Now they knew exactly what Jesus meant by that. Following Jesus comes with a cost. If we're praying for a job then we're obviously willing to work. If you're praying about selling your house, you're willing to move. If you're praying about finding a spouse, that means you're willing to be a spouse.

So then is the reason we don't pray to be a witness for Jesus because we're not willing to be His witnesses? We haven't really counted the cost? We don't want the suffering that might entail? Is the reason we don't pray for our own spiritual maturity is because we're not willing to spend time with God or with God's people? So it was very important for the disciples to be praying about the coming of the Spirit together with other believers who understand what that entailed.

But, like most Christians I know (including myself), sometimes when I'm waiting on God I'm like 'Yeah Lord, but what can I DO?' Yes prayer is doing, but, is there nothing else I can do as I wait? Waiting on God is not a passive thing but an active thing. There are some other things we can do while we're praying and that is ...

Prepare for What You're Waiting on God For **(1:15-26)**

If you're praying about what university to attend after high school, you're going to investigate some specific universities about the programs they offer. If I'm praying about a job I'm going to look at who's advertising for employees or inquire. If I'm praying about selling my house, I will probably put a sign on my lawn. There are always things we can do to prepare us for what we're waiting God for. Especially when it's a spiritual matter where we need wisdom and direction. What can we do so we're prepared spiritually to hear God's answer?

Stay close to God through His Word (vv.15-19)

The 120 disciples are staying together, united in prayer and as they pray Peter starts to mention Scripture. Like when has Peter ever quoted Scripture before? Never! But he's growing. He's reading Scripture and most likely remembering things Jesus taught them. After all Jesus just spent 40 days teaching them about the kingdom of God and back in Luke 24:44-45 after His resurrection. He told the 11

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

Now v.16 really makes sense.

“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus— ¹⁷ he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.”

Luke gives a little explanation here about passages of Scripture from two psalms that we would classify as Messianic psalms. Jesus must have shown the disciples in Ps. 69 how God’s anointed will get mistreated and how His anointed prays to God for deliverance. He even says in 69:19

¹⁹ You know how I am scorned, disgraced and shamed; all my enemies are before you. ²⁰ Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none. ²¹ They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst. ²² May the table set before them become a snare; may it become retribution and a trap. ²³ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever. ²⁴ Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them. ²⁵ May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents. ²⁶ For they persecute those you wound and talk about the pain of those you hurt. ²⁷ Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation. ²⁸ May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.

Then he quoted Ps. 109, another Messianic psalm, also called an imprecatory psalm because the King of Israel prays that God would judge those who seek his harm. Starting at v.4,

⁴ In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer. ⁵ They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship. ⁶ Appoint someone evil to oppose my enemy; let an accuser stand at his right hand. ⁷ When he is tried, let him be found guilty, and may his prayers condemn him. ⁸ May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership.

They prayed for God’s direction, they also were in the Word, going over the things Jesus had taught them about how even Judas’ treachery was prophesied. So Peter reads ‘may another take his place of leadership’ and says we need to act on God’s Word. Because they were studying God’s Word as they waited on God it helps them ...

Make wise decisions as you wait (vv.20-23)

Why did they feel Judas needed to be replaced? Reading this verse no doubt they also thought about Jesus other words from the Last Passover. At the table He said,

Luke 15:28 You are those who have stood by me in my trials. ²⁹ And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus chose 12 disciples to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. Peter thought we need a 12th! If they are thinking about being Jesus’ witnesses, Jesus sent them out once before to do this very thing in twos. They have to have an even number. All these things enabled Peter and the disciples to agree together to choose a replacement for Judas based on prayer and Scripture. Then they said whoever it

is must be someone who can testify about Jesus' whole ministry; from John's baptism to His resurrection. And they came up with two possibilities.

This was a wise decision based on prayer and Scripture as they waited on God to fulfil His Word. But then they drew lots! Be careful; they prayed first reminding us to ...

Pray about every decision (vv.24-26)

²⁴ Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen

Then they practiced what many did in the Bible, they drew lots. They prayed before that because Prov. 16:33 says,

³³ The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD

They did their homework. They had two equally good choices. They drew lots because that had been the practice but they prayed that God would show them His choice. This is the last time lots will be used in the Bible because after this they will have the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth.

While the disciples were slow at times to learn from Jesus, it is clear they followed His example of prayer. They prayed about waiting for God to send the Spirit. They listened to the Word. They shared ideas. They prayed more and made decisions. Perhaps the biggest thing we need to take away from this passage is what they didn't do. They didn't ...

Don't Run Ahead of God in Your Own Power
(Is. 40:28-31)

They needed to wait for the Spirit who would empower them to be Jesus' witnesses. They didn't decide to go and do it on their own. Very wise. When we do go out in our own power not willing to wait on God, here's what we miss. Turn to Is. 40:28-31,

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Through the Holy Spirit God was going to strengthen His disciples to be Jesus' witnesses. After all the events of the last week of Jesus' life, the emotional valley of His death, the mountaintop experience of His resurrection and then anticipation of His kingdom rule only to be disappointed that it wasn't now and Jesus just left, indefinitely, the disciples had to be exhausted. They needed to wait on the Lord to renew their strength; physically, spiritually. Sometimes God has to force us to wait on Him so we can renew our strength so we're ready to receive His.

Most of the time we live in Acts 1:12-26, where we're waiting on God for direction or an answer to prayer. Keep talking to God in prayer, keeps you balanced. Keep reading His Word, there may be something we need to hear. Ask others who understand to pray with you and for you. Do what you

can. Be ready for when God is going to direct you. They may sound like 'casting out a fleece' at times but usually they are practical steps that we can take that God may use to direct us. Remember not to run ahead of God. We're so tempted at times but we'll miss receiving His power and strength to accomplish His purpose.

Ps. 27:14 Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD

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If you have any comments or questions about the message please contact us at
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