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by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Living in The “In-Between” Times

Acts 1:12-26

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SermonAudio Blurb: The apostles watched their Lord ascend into heaven with the promise to return. They spent forty days in His presence and now He is gone. They have waiting for them the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit but that is not quite there. It is the in-between time for them. That time that is in-between key events, fun or exciting times, or life-changing situation. In reality it is just life for most people. But in this section of the book of Acts we see a glimpse into how to live during the in-between times.

I. Introduction.

- A. Open to Acts 1.
 - 1. We are back into the book of Acts for this week.
 - 2. Then we break away for two weeks while we celebrate together the birth of Christ and then Grayson brings the message out of Habakkuk.
- B. I want to read the passage before us but first a quick review to catch up our minds.
 - 1. Acts is volume two of Luke. Written by Luke and between the two of them 1/4 of the New Testament is represented.
 - 2. I encourage you to follow Matt Miller’s sermons as well since he is going through Luke. Between the two of us you can learn a lot about the life of Christ and the mission of Christ.
 - 3. In vss 3-11 we see an important account of the apostles spending forty days with Jesus. This is no small thing.
 - a. Repeatedly in the book of Acts a key part of their preaching and teaching involved the statement about His resurrection “to which we were witnesses.”
 - b. This is a major point to make because you will frequently hear people say that the account of Jesus is only in the bible, which isn’t true, but nonetheless it is said. And what is missed often is that the bible is made up of historical accounts. It is not just a compendium of religious writings.

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- c. Acts functions as a historical account that straddles the transition between the Old Covenant of the Mosaic Law and the New Covenant. It is filled with many unique events that we ought not assume are to be normal throughout the church age.
 - d. But it also is a time of unfolding great events that are then developed in the letters by the Apostles so it bears careful study by all of us. The greatest is the inexorable movement toward the Kingdom of God, something that Jesus invested forty days teaching them and was the reason for my eleven week excursus.
 - e. From there it is time for Him to go back to heaven and they witnessed His ascension with the promise that He will return in the same way.
 - f. So with that in mind let's read vs 12-26.
- C. So here we find a point in time for the apostles that is a bit awkward. I am going to call it the "in-between time."
- 1. They are coming away from an exhilarating and encouraging experience with their beloved Lord. They witnessed His ascent into heaven.
 - 2. They are also now waiting for another exciting event called the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
 - 3. But that has not come yet and so they wait. And Luke furnishes us some information about what happens during this time. This is what we will examine today.
- D. What we have before us is a simple narrative or story that has several parts to it:
- 1. The first the journey back to Jerusalem.
 - 2. The second is their devotion to prayer.
 - 3. The third is the death of Judas and the choosing of a replacement for him.
 - 4. It is this third section that takes up most of this story.
- E. But behind all of this is a picture of obedient faith and that is the lesson I would like us to walk away with today.
- 1. The in-between times are seldom exciting or memorable. But they represent most of our life if you consider it for a moment.

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2. Think about your life and I think you will agree. None here can say your life is a non-stop adventure. Nor would you say that you are deeply challenged in some special way each day.
3. The reality is that key events shape you because they set you on a path.
 - a. You choose to study hard and you graduate from High School and College. Or you don't. Both set you on different paths.
 - b. You marry or you don't. You have children or you don't. You take a promotion or you don't. And this goes on throughout your life.
 - c. Perhaps you have a major accident or illness or disease. In the midst of it for the early part it is life consuming and frightening and exciting. But eventually that event fades into the past and you are back to whatever normal looks like.
 - d. The question is what do you do in those in-between times? I want to argue that it is during those times that you can either do much good or much harm. And if you can learn to see these times as opportunity to grow and be found faithful rather than unfaithful, that you will prepare yourself for the next major event that comes your way regardless of when.
- F. Today we will see three simple expressions of faith and obedience in the lives of these brand new apostles. Three ways they show in their actions that they believe the word of Christ. And in doing so I believe it gives us a good lesson for each of us to embrace as well.
 1. We will first consider how these apostles chose to live in the in-between time.
 2. Then I want to bring it into application for us as we too live in that in-between time.

II. Three expressions of faith-filled obedience.

- A. The first is the journey back to Jerusalem (12-13).
 1. This requires little comment, though it is worth explaining the phrase "Sabbath day's journey" to you.
 2. Note that in vs 4 Jesus gave them a very clear command.

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- a. This is not hard to understand and yet I have lived long enough to know how easy it is for all of us to somehow take a simple command and work it around in our minds to mean something completely different.
 - b. These men had just had an incredible time with the Lord. They received great teaching and fellowship. They watched Him ascend to heaven. They had two angels then talk to them.
 - c. And now it is all done. Silence is now around them. The mundane settles over them again. It is just life again.
 - d. And it is here that things can go sideways very quickly if they don't pay close attention to themselves. Rationalization can kick in. Thoughts of going other places to tell close friends what they just experienced would be tempting.
 - e. But they didn't. Instead they simply obey.
 - f. And blessing is always found in obedience. Not just in the big moments but in the countless moments of normal, boring life—the in-between times.
3. A quick note on the phrase “Sabbath’s day journey.”
 - a. This comes out of the Old Testament and the encampment of the various tribes around the tabernacle in the wilderness. The various tribes were assigned specific locations when they would stop in the journey and make camp.
 - b. By combining Exodus 16:26 and Numbers 35:5 the leaders determined a 2,000 cubit distance as the acceptable distance to travel on the Sabbath. This is because 2,000 cubits would be the furthest an Israelite would have to walk to get to the Tabernacle on the Sabbath.
 - c. So, over time scribes and such determined that any more and it was considered working. 2,000 cubits would roughly be 3/4 of a mile.
 4. So they immediately obey and end up back in Jerusalem in an area where several believers have gathered.
 - a. We don't have homes like they did at that time, though in many parts of the world this would still be a normal reality.

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- b. The upper room was an all-purpose room for the household to use. Used for gatherings, relaxation, and even a place to hold the dead while awaiting burial such as in Acts 9:36.
 - c. This one was rather large, indicating someone of wealth. So 120 people are there with the apostles.
5. But the reason they end up in the upper room is because they obeyed. It is that simple.
- a. So the first expression of faith-filled obedience is to do exactly what Jesus said, even though it is a minor thing in our minds.
 - b. But it is a big deal actually. Because it is in the little things that a lot of sin abounds in our lives. Where we fudge a bit and rationalize away so much.
- B. The second expression is their devotion to prayer (14).
- 1. Note first that this was with “one mind.”
 - a. So there was unity in purpose and goals among these many people. That alone is unique.
 - b. This was not a group of people all praying for the things they personally cared about; rather it was a unified content of prayer.
 - 2. Why pray? Well it doesn’t say why, nor does it tell us what actually was the content of the prayers. But I think it was to prepare themselves for the coming of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. That was the next big thing promised. They had no idea what was exactly going to happen. But they did have the promise of Jesus and they were responding to it by prayer.
 - b. Think about the kind of questions in their minds? Would this hurt? Would it be something they felt? Would it be frightening? How would they know it happened? Would others know it? These are all things that were not understood. They just believed Jesus and obeyed.
 - c. But to prepare themselves, they prayed.
 - (1) But understand that prayer is not what brought to pass the event of being baptised with the Holy Spirit.

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- (2) That came because God had ordained it to happen. Prayer was not done to move God but to be prepared when God moved.
- d. Give that thought for a moment.
 - (1) When you pray, is it mostly for you? For what you deem good and necessary? Or is it to move God to act in some way or another?
 - (2) This is not necessarily wrong but it also is not necessarily right.
 - (3) Prayer is something that helps conform our desires and mind to God's revealed will. In other words, it is praying in accordance to what God has promised in His Word. And as you pray it prepares you for when God acts.
 - (4) This is a very different kind of praying for many. But it is a better way of praying in most cases. It is praying in accordance to His will and purposes.
- 3. So how is this an expression of faith-filled obedience?
 - a. I think of James 1:5 which commands us to seek wisdom in the midst of trials (podcast).
 - b. But it is to be done believing that God will grant that wisdom because He has promised to give it. To doubt results in no wisdom given because you are calling God a liar.
 - c. So bring that to bear on our passage: Why pray if you don't believe God will bring this work of the Holy Spirit into reality? Why devote yourself in that way? Why be of one mind?
 - d. Beloved, if they doubted God then there would be debates and questions and arguments about what is meant.
 - e. But that is not what we see. The whole of the group embraced the promise of Jesus Christ to bring the Holy Spirit to them. Even though they did not know what it would look like and how it would happen, they nonetheless devoted their time waiting in prayerful expectation.

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4. One other quick note here. It mentions in vs 14 some women and also Mary the mother of Jesus.
 - a. The women are likely a group of women who became closely connected to Jesus and His ministry. Mary Magdalene, Mary the wife of Cleopas, Mary and Martha the sisters of Lazarus and Salome who helped anoint the body of Christ after His death.
 - b. Mary the mother of Jesus is there but where is Joseph? Simply put, we don't know. However we know he was a righteous man and there is absolutely no reason to believe he abandoned Mary. They married and had other children.
 - c. However, by this time it appears that he was dead.
 - (1) He likely was older than Mary who was in her teens. Often the man was older and established so that he could care for a wife.
 - (2) But the key indicator is in John 19:25-27 where Jesus gave the apostle John the responsibility to care for Mary. It is the eldest son's responsibility to do this if the father dies. And now that Jesus is dying he gives this responsibility to John.
 - (3) It also is an indication that at the point of His death that His brothers did not believe He truly was the Messiah, much less God incarnate.
 5. So we see faith-filled obedience here in simply obeying the command to go back to Jerusalem and also in their devotion to prayer while they wait.
- C. The third expression the choosing of a replacement for apostle (15-26).
1. Here we have the account of the filling up of the twelve apostles who will be the foundation of the church that is about to be born in Acts 2.
 2. This is helpful for us because it also gives us some final, closing words about the greatest betrayal since Adam. Judas was one of the twelve apostles, but he is gone now.
 - a. Judas was intimately close to Jesus for three years. He experienced the grace, teaching and authority of Jesus.

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- b. He was given authority over demons and the ability to heal every type of sickness, according to Matthew 10. He preached and called people to repent and follow Jesus.
 - c. To anyone watching, he was a true follower of Jesus Christ. So much so that no one at the table during the last supper thought he was the one who would betray Jesus.
 - d. But he did and he showed the reality of his heart and love in the end. This is apostasy personified.
3. There were twelve disciples though Judas was always known by Christ to be a deceiver and betrayer.
 4. Peter shows himself to be the leader of the apostles here by standing and making this pronouncement in vs 15-17.
 - a. Notice the little phrase in vs 17 “received his portion in this ministry.”
 - b. Jesus had taught them that the apostles would all sit over a tribe of Israel during the millennial kingdom as their reward. So that would require twelve apostles and that is the portion mentioned.
 5. The death of Judas.
 - a. In Matthew 27:3-10 we see a part of what happened to Judas.
 - (1) Regrets his choice to betray Jesus and he throws the silver he was paid into the temple. Not that it mattered, for his choice was made and there was no repentance possible for him.
 - (2) The religious leaders used the money to buy a field
 - (3) Then he hung himself.
 - b. So what do we do with Acts 1:18? It is simply additional information given in a rather gruesome manner.
 - (1) He killed himself by hanging. And if you’ve ever seen a person hanged then you can picture this rather vividly.
 - (2) If the body is not discovered then it quickly bloats and swells and the very joints and skin begin to come apart. It is very ugly.

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- (3) And this is likely what is pictured here. Judas has hung himself. It is above that field bought from his wickedness. And either the branch of the tree gives way, he is cut down and drops or he simply comes apart and falls and everything bursts and that is the end of this man.
 - c. Judas is the perfect example of the exact opposite of what we see in the rest of this passage. A man well acquainted with the exciting but ultimately unfaithful in the end.
 - (1) He was a lover of this world and what this world would bring him.
 - (2) And as a result he lost everything in the end. He had no savior and he had no life. He was known by all as a betrayer and as a traitor he shall always be known.
 6. From here we see the selection of a new apostle and in doing so we see the basics of what is required to hold the office of the apostle.
 7. And this too is an example of faith-filled obedience. They saw a need that was in line with what Jesus Christ had taught. And so they acted on that. They believed the word of Christ and acted on it while they waited.
- D. They choose a new apostle (21-26).
1. It is important to note that this is not done in any way they wished. There were requirements for one to be numbered among the other eleven apostles.
 2. The first is in vs 21. They had to be men. This was a position of authority and leadership and therefore it belonged to the men.
 - a. This is counter to our culture but it really doesn't matter.
 - b. It is the command and design of God and the whole of the bible teaches and demands it.
 3. The second is also in vs 21 and into vs 22.
 - a. They had to have been with Jesus from the time frame of when John The Baptist baptized Jesus to when Jesus ascended. During the whole of His public ministry.

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- b. Notice in vs 22 the **key** event that they had to witness, the resurrection.
 - c. This is because over and over in the book of Acts they testified to the truthfulness of the resurrection and declared publically that they were witnesses of it.
- E. Out of the 120 present only two fit these qualification: a man named Joseph and another named Matthias.
- 1. Notice what then happened. They prayed. They knew these men fit the requirements but what they did not know was which was the choice of God. So they commit these men to the Lord for His decision.
 - 2. And then they drew lots (26).
 - a. This is not a vote.
 - b. It would normally be a type of dice.
 - c. This was a common way to decide in many nations but definitely in Israel. The Old Testament is replete with examples and there is a proverb (16:33) about it. “The lot is cast into the lap but its every decision is from the Lord.”
 - d. Sometimes you would reach into a jar of some sort to draw out some piece of pottery with a mark on it to indicate the choice.
 - 3. Regardless of the exact way it was done, the lot fell to Matthias and he was chosen.
- F. So here are three examples of faith-filled obedience in the midst of boring in-between time.

III. Application and Conclusion

- A. Judas is a good example for all of us to consider when we look at those who are raised in the church but who walk away from it all.
 - 1. We live in the presence of sound teaching.
 - 2. We claim to love Christ.
 - 3. But in time, often in the in-between times, the worries of this world and age press on us and we fall away.

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4. We tire of waiting and we look at the quick pleasures of loving this world and we lose our way.
 5. May Judas serve as a warning and reminder to press on.
- B. In each of these three expressions of faith-filled obedience there is nothing real exciting going on. But there is activity nonetheless and its motivation is faith.
1. In the in-between times of our life there is the constant temptation to let our guard down and to simply coast.
 2. But the only way a person ever continues to move forward while coasting is if they are going downhill.
 - a. Paul says that in light of the promises of God that we are “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which [we] have been called, (Ephesians 4:1)
 - b. In Romans 12 he tells us to make it our life of presenting our bodies continually as a living sacrifice unto God and in his service.
 - c. In Philippians (1:27) we are told to conduct (present tense) ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel we claim to love and believe.
 - d. Paul tells Timothy (1 Timothy 6:12) to fight the good fight of faith.
 - e. Jude (1:3) tells us to contend earnestly for the faith, that body of truth we claim to love.
 3. And so I ask you this question. Is this you? Or have you become complacent and forgetful in the in-between times?
- C. We live waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ, at least we do if we have not lost our way.
1. Jesus tells the church in Revelation 3:11, “I am coming quickly; [therefore/in light of that promise] hold fast what you have. . . .”
 2. “. . .looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13).
 - a. But therefore we are to be purifying ourselves.
 - b. We are to be zealous, literally hot, to do good deeds.

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3. In 2 Peter 3:11, “according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”
 - a. But in the very next verse he then tells you and I that because we look for these things we are to be diligent in how we live. We are to be in peace, spotless and blameless.
 - b. And that word “live” speaks of the in-between times that all of us are in. That time between Jesus ascension and His return.
- D. You see beloved, we are simply carrying on the work of these people in Acts 1. They were waiting for the coming of the Spirit but as they waited they lived out what they knew to be true.
 1. We do it as we live out the various ways we exist in this age.
 2. As workers, we work hard and faithfully.
 3. As a husband we faithfully lead our wife and household, taking full responsibility to direct them to a full, vibrant faith and hope in Christ.
 4. As a wife you fearlessly embrace the calling to follow and help and support your husband.
 5. As parents you learn what it looks like to train your children and raise them to be godly men and women. You put away a worldly definition of parenting and you embrace your calling to raise the next generation of believers.
 6. As citizens you show honor and respect for those who lead. You pay your taxes and you engage politics with the glory of God in mind.
 7. With your money you believe the command of Christ to stop storing up your treasures here and to instead store them in heaven. You become a generous person who loves others rather than the passing things of this age.
- E. Living in the in-between times is boring and unsexy. It is not the story that we want to read. It is not adventure-filled but rather it is the world of the mundane.
 1. But once you grasp by faith that God has called each of you to simply be faithful wherever you are found, then it become worship. True, glorious worship.

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2. And you rethink what makes you happy. You reconsider your goals and plans.
3. It is changing diapers and paying taxes. It is tickling your children and visiting a shut-in. It is singing songs and weeping with those who are sad.
4. It is showing kindness when kindness is not expected and standing firm on the gospel.
5. It is believing, really believing that Jesus is coming back and living in light of that. It is simply gospel living.

Small Group Questions

- Can you think of a time where a major event in your life helped motivate you to action? And how long did it take for the mundane to creep back in?
- Why is it that the boring parts of our lives seem to bring so much wandering and folly? Give this serious consideration. Probe it with one another.
- Finally, what are way God has provided for us to be found faithful in the in-between times? Try to brainstorm and write out all the ways. Then ask how often do you avail yourselves of those opportunities?