

In the first eight verses of chapter one, we learned that Luke wrote Acts, the recipient of the historical report was a man named Theophilus, and the fact that Jesus appeared to the Apostles and gave them many convincing proofs that He was alive. Over a period of forty days, Jesus instructed the disciples on the kingdom of God and told them to wait in Jerusalem until they were baptized with the Holy Spirit who would come on Pentecost.

The disciples wanted to know if Jesus, at that time, was going to restore the kingdom to Israel, but Jesus said that it wasn't for them to know the time or date, but rather they would receive power from the Holy Spirit so that they could be His witnesses throughout the earth. Chapter one is a record of the events that occurred in the interim between Jesus' appearances after the resurrection, until the Holy Spirit came.

In tonight's passage we begin with the account of Christ's ascension into heaven and end with the disciples choosing a replacement for Judas. Let's see what we can learn by reading together, Acts 1:9-26.

The phrase in verse 9, after He said this, refers back to verses 7-8 where Jesus told them to wait for the Holy Spirit, and that when He came, they would use the power of the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. In terms of application, from the time of Jesus ascension, until the time of His return, all of the Disciples of Christ are to continue to be His witnesses to the lost world, and be obedient, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The account of the ascension is pretty straightforward. Jesus was taken up before their very eyes, until the clouds obstructed their view. Notice that the disciples were eyewitnesses of this ascension into heaven. This is typical of Luke in both his gospel, and the book of Acts. He reports the eyewitness accounts as he researched and interviewed the people who saw these things happen. Beginning in chapter 16, Luke becomes the eyewitness and records the events that he saw himself.

The ascension marks the conclusion of the bodily ministry of Christ on earth, until His return. When we read of Jesus' teaching on the Holy Spirit in John 14-16, we understand that Jesus had to leave before He could send His Holy Spirit. With the presence of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life, Christians carry on the work of Christ in the world, as we contribute to the building of the kingdom of God, through sharing our faith in Christ.

Imagine the impact the ascension had on the disciples. Jesus arose from the grave, and they fellowshiped with Him for a period of forty days. He taught them about the kingdom of God, instructed them in what is about to happen, and apparently His body lifted into the air and disappeared into the clouds. When we think about the evidence of scripture, that Jesus is Lord, we should not neglect the miracle of His ascension.

Verse 10 tells us that the disciples looked intently into the sky as He was going. Of course they did, wouldn't you want to witness every moment of the ascension? Wouldn't you want Jesus to stay? Wouldn't you be amazed to see Jesus' glorified body levitating and disappearing in the clouds?

As they were watching, the bible says that two men, dressed in white, stood beside them. It is interesting to note that Luke 24 records that two men with clothes that gleamed like lightning appeared to the women at the tomb on the day Jesus arose from the grave. They gave the women a message that Jesus had arisen from the grave, and that He was alive. Here we see

two men dressed in white appear and tell the disciples to get their heads out of the clouds, and that Jesus was going to return in the same way that He had left.

The idea, for Christ's disciples today, is that we need to be careful to keep our heads out of the clouds and be about the business of spreading the gospel to the lost world. There is an old saying that some people are so heavenly minded, that they are no earthly good. As we compare scripture to today's headlines, it is natural for us to be excited about the prospect that Jesus could return in our lifetime. Sometimes people get so engrossed in end times prophecy, that they neglect the more important matters of reaching the lost, and ministering in Jesus' name. If we truly believe that Jesus may be coming back soon, it should serve to encourage us to be more diligent in our witness, while there is still time.

The knowledge that Jesus is coming again gives believers hope in an otherwise hopeless world. I grieve for our country because of its moral decay and the way our current administration seems to have abandoned Israel, in support of the Islamic cause. The economy is a house of cards, ready to be blown down by the next gust of economic wind. The enemies of Israel are developing, and may already have nuclear weapons. Radical Islam daily threatens to destroy Israel. We see on the news that our Christian brothers and sisters are being martyred, every day, for their faith. In the United States, as well as the rest of the world, Islam is the fastest growing religion. Their philosophy is to destroy the infidel, and Christians and Jews are at the top of their list.

But when we observe end times prophesy, we might conclude that these things have to be in order for the scripture to be fulfilled. The events that are happening today may be an indication of the soon return of Christ. I feel hopeless in being able to turn this world around, but I know Jesus is coming, and He will do what I cannot. The scriptures tell us that there will be tribulation in the world, and I believe they tell us that followers of Christ will have to endure some of that tribulation. But just at the right time, the Lord will rapture His church, and God will begin to pour out His wrath on the earth. When Jesus reigns in His millennial kingdom, He will make all things right, and you and I will be with Him, if we have settled in our hearts that Jesus is Lord.

In verse 12 we learn that Jesus' ascension occurred at the Mount of Olives, just east of Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. That is just over a half a mile, and was the maximum distance a Jew could travel on the Sabbath, according to Jewish Sabbath laws. When the eleven Apostles arrived, they went to an upstairs room. In the architecture of the day, the lower floor of a home had smaller rooms, with the interior walls helping to support the upper stories. These upper rooms would be much larger and open. Along with the disciples, Luke tells us that the women, probably the same women mentioned in Luke's gospel who were at the tomb, and Jesus mother, Mary, along with Jesus' brothers, were present.

Luke 8 mentions that Jesus' mother and brothers had come to see Him during His ministry. Matthew 13, and Mark 6, give us their names and indicate that Jesus had some sisters as well. Perhaps they were among the women in the upper room. There are some who argue for the perpetual virginity of Mary and therefore Christ could not have had any earthly brothers and sisters, but to me the scriptures are clear. Jesus had siblings, and by this time, His mother, brothers, and sisters, had all received Him as their Messiah, the Christ who was the Savior of the world.

In verse fifteen, we see Peter taking the leadership role among a group of around 120 who had trusted Jesus. In verse 16 we see Peter's high regard for Scripture, and He understood the concept of the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit. He understands that something

David had written in the Psalms spoke of Judas' betrayal of Christ, and thus a prophecy that had to be fulfilled.

The church today needs leadership with an understanding that the bible is the inspired word of God, without any mixture of error. But this is not the case everywhere. People flock to hear what their itching ears want to hear, and many pulpits preach a watered down gospel, or no gospel at all. Please, Lord, let it never be that way here. Everything we preach and teach is based upon our best contextual interpretation of God's word. It is possible that our interpretations may be a little off from time to time, but God's Word is never off. It is the absolute truth and the standard by which we measure all proclaimed truth. Just as we can see the prophecies in Scripture that have already been fulfilled, we have great confidence that God is going to do in the future, all that He said He would do, as it is recorded in His word.

The heart of Peter's speech is that they needed to find someone to replace Judas Iscariot, who betrayed the Lord. We know elsewhere that Judas hanged himself, and here Luke tells us after that suicide, he fell headlong, his body burst open, and his intestines spilled out. This apparently had a big impact upon the people in Jerusalem, because they noted Judas' betrayal of Christ, and Luke here makes a reference to the field that was purchased with the 30 pieces of silver, meant to pay Judas for his betrayal. In verse 20 Peter points out that this happened according to prophecy, and using another of the Psalms, gives the scriptural authority for choosing Judas' replacement.

There has been much written about whether the choosing of Matthias was God's will or not. Some claim that Paul was God's chosen replacement, and Peter, and the other disciples, got ahead of God in their selection. Some say that instead of casting lots, they should have waited upon the Holy Spirit.

This is the last occurrence of casting lots in scripture. After the Holy Spirit came, Christians relied upon the Holy Spirit for personal discernment in their decisions, same as we do today. We never hear of Matthias in the scriptures after his selection, but that does not settle the differences in people's interpretation of this event. Certainly Matthias became a leader in the early church, along with the other disciples. Under Peter's leadership, they mainly focused on sharing the gospel with other Jews, whereas Paul became an Apostle to the Gentiles.

Verse 21 indicates that there were other disciples other than the 12, who had followed Jesus the whole time of His ministry. Luke 10:1 tells us that Jesus choose 72 other disciples to go out and minister the gospel to the people. From among the believers gathered in that place, they chose two men who had been with them the whole time, who were eyewitnesses to the events surrounding Jesus life, who could testify that they had seen the risen Lord, and who had entrusted their lives to Him.

We cannot settle from scripture whether or not Peter got ahead of God in choosing Matthias, but we can see the principle that there is a need for godly leadership in the church, and where there is a vacancy in leadership, God will raise up someone to do His will.

Ultimately the major decisions in our church are left in the hands of its members. But the church depends on godly leaders to set the tone and the direction for the church. One day Bro. Carl, Bro. Jimmy, and I will go to be with the Lord. If our leaving is not in the rapture, the church must decide whom to call to fill our positions. God will raise up new pastors, but the church will need the discernment of the Holy Spirit to know who to call.

The good news is that the church does have the aid of the Holy Spirit in all our decisions. The subject of the next sermon in this series is an examination of the big event, when the Holy Spirit came, in a general way, to all believers, at Pentecost. It happened just the way Jesus said it

would. The church was born as a living spiritual entity, and God began to do miracles through the disciples to reach the world for Christ.

God's work through the church continues today, and it will continue, right up to the time of the return of Christ. Jesus' return is the hope that we have to sustain us in times of trouble, but it is a reminder that time is short. We have to be about the work of sharing our faith. This also means that time is short for those who have not yet bowed their knee in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. Even tonight, there may be someone who is still lost in his or her sins, and needs to accept Jesus and the gospel message in faith. If that is you, why not in the privacy of your seat, confess your sins to God, and trust Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior. Then tell someone so that we may help you in your first steps of your new life in Christ.