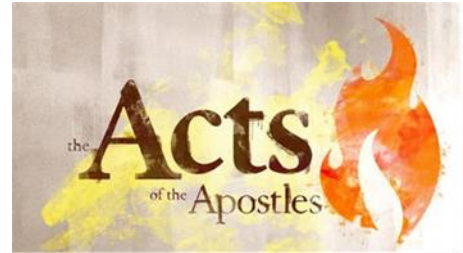


ACTS: THE STORY OF THE CHURCH – Part 2

Bon Voyage but we are just getting started

Acts 1: 7-11; 21-26

Every time they gathered together, they asked Jesus, “Lord is it the time now for you to free Israel and restore the Kingdom?” Jesus answered, “The Father is the one who sets the fixed dates and the times of their fulfillment. You are not permitted to know the timing of all that he has prepared by his own authority.”



Last time we left the disciples they had asked the soon-to-be-departed Jesus if “then”, at that moment, at that auspicious moment, he would free Israel and restore Israel’s kingdom. One cannot blame them for sensing the scarcity of time they had left with Jesus, or for going straight to the prime question they each had.

In hindsight, after two-millennia, we could have provided at least 2-3 different questions, but we were not there, we had not placed our lives on the line for him and - and this is a big and - we are not first-century Jews living under the dominion of Rome. Hindsight and future-view disqualify us from judging these 11 surviving disciples, many of whom would die martyrs deaths in the years to come.

It’s easy for us to see Jesus saying “Really you bunch of knuckleheads, three years and I’m about to ascend and this is your question?”

He did not, and his answer was very classic, not-Jesus-like: “The Father is the one who sets the fixed dates and times of their fulfillment. You are not permitted to know the timing of all that he has prepared by his own authority. But I promise you this – the Holy Spirit will come upon you and you will be filled with power and you will be my messengers to Jerusalem, throughout Judea and the distance provinces even to the remote places of the earth”.

While Jesus could have responded: “You knuckleheads, really? Three years together and you ask this? Are you still mired in the past that is holding you back?”

(Of course, he could have answered in his usual way, by way of parable, but he didn’t. He confronted the question with a firm, straight answer.)

At the point of his ascension Jesus set into motion a forward movement – one that would constantly be in motion:

Never stopping

Never slowing

Always progressing

But they, at that moment, could not understand his words. Not yet – soon – but not that day.

It's key to ask why they could not understand what Jesus was telling them.

1. Honestly, what would they do with that knowledge and information?
2. After three years they had matured but still could not think beyond Ancient Israel being freed from Rome and the classic, even romanticized Kingdom being restored. This is their only historical frame of reference of their belief in Jesus as the Messiah to do just that, free Jerusalem from Rome and fully re-establish Israel's Kingdom to its former glory. Problem is, former glory did not mesh with God's future - long term - permanent plans for his people, his total people. So, he told them to go the one mile to Jerusalem to wait patiently and to pray for a word or demonstration from God.
3. The now compliant disciples did just that and went the short distance to Jerusalem to do as Jesus said to wait and to replace Judas with another disciple. Obviously Judas was the "fly in the ointment", the one who betrayed Jesus to the religious leaders, a betrayal that led to his arrest and subsequent death on the cross.
4. Judas, who I personally believed repented and one who thought was helping Jesus, has become the perpetual scion on the Jesus story.

He, nevertheless had to be replaced so the 11 went about a process for picking the next 12th disciple (Psalm 109.8.)

How did they do it? Well, if they were Baptists, a search committee would be formed, the congregation would have been surveyed followed by listening

sessions. A list of attributes would be established, then allowing resumes to be sought. Candidates would be solicited and from those the number of candidates would be narrowed to a short list. Interviews and background checks would follow, and our primary candidate would be determined.

How did the 11 go to 12? Casting lots, which is tantamount to drawing straws. Seems like it should be more involved but it was what it was and Matthias was chosen to replace Judas.

Why was it so important to bring the number back up to 12? Biblically speaking 12 is a complete spiritual number. The 12 tribes is an earlier example. Also, incompleteness is a negative outcome for the church/Kingdom.

The Salvation cycle would have been incomplete if Jesus had not ascended. It took his arrival, life, death, resurrection and ascension to complete salvation.

In the same vein the 11 disciples were incomplete without the 12. An incomplete apostolic circle could not have completed God's tasks.

And to make this persona we are incomplete without the spirit in our lives daily.

So, they went to Jerusalem and prayed and waited and went about the business of replacing Judas. The key word is waited.

Takeaways

1. In their lives and in ours there will be lots of waiting, praying when seeking to follow God's Will. Why? Even with the Holy Spirit we can only fathom so much.

Paul wrote "We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather changes and the sun shines bright. We'll see it all then, see it all clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he sees us."

For us this will be on the other side. For the disciples, an amount of this would come with the Pentecost and the Holy Spirit. Until then for us we live in a wait,

see, pray, trust, seek and accept peace – not answers process. This has never been more true during the pandemic.

2. The reasons of Israel did not view/accept Jesus as Messiah is that a staleness and lack of sensitivity and rote practices had taken over their spiritual lives. When this happens, it eclipses a deep love for God filled with service and devotion.

If and when we see/feel a lack of excitement in our spiritual lives, a symptom of spiritual sickness is onset.

3. The 11 were an incomplete group. The salvation cycle without ascension would have been incomplete. The disciples were incomplete with the number 12 and the Holy Spirit.

We are incomplete if we do not actively engage God – purge our issues – set aside our plans and boldly with excitement embrace God’s plans.

A point to ponder:

“So Jesus, is today the day you restore “my” Kingdom? Or is

Today the day you allow me to progress Your Kingdom?”

Wow. Big question, but one we must ask daily.

Is it the most important? We will ask each day.

Amen & Amen,

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