

Preparing for Something Astonishing
Acts 1:12-26

Main Point:

The early believers were prepared for mission by depending on God through prayer, having a biblically-rooted identity as children of the King, and proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus.

Introduction:

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to Acts 1. For those of you just joining us, we have just started a new sermon series in the book of Acts. This study comes right on the heels of the vision/mission/values teaching series we completed last fall, and the sharing of the goals and aspirations we have for the next couple of years. Now we believe that the book of Acts will be a helpful guide for us over the course of the next year as we navigate our future because we want to learn from the apostles, and become more aware of how the HS works in and through the church. Acts is not just giving us history, but also provides a template, a pattern, for how Christ is building His church in the present day.

Setting the context: Imagine what it would have been like to be a disciple in those days...

Imagine with me what it might have been like to be in their shoes...

You lose your Messiah to a mock trial and then crucifixion; however, 3 days later He shows up again, resurrected, just as He promised. Then, for the next 40 days, the Messiah teaches about the kingdom of God, and that you will be endowed with the promised Holy Spirit. You ask the question that would likely be on the mind of any god-fearing, biblically-informed, first century Jew: is this the time you will be restoring the kingdom of Israel? As usual, the Messiah gives one of His cryptic answers about the times and seasons of the Father's own authority. However, the Messiah goes on to say that not many days from now, you will be endowed with the promised Holy Spirit and will be a witness from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, all the way to the ends of the earth! Then, to top it all off, He ascends back into the heavens, where an angel informs you that in the same way He left, He will return again. In the meantime, you are told to wait for the Holy Spirit. No idea on how its going to happen or even when, just to wait.

If you are anything like me, all of this would have been very disorienting and probably confusing. And yet, we know from the story this band of merry disciples would go on to evangelize the Roman empire and become what is today the global church which, after 2,000 years, is still going strong and continuing to grow at an unprecedented pace (particularly in places like Africa, Latin America, and Asia). In fact, some missiologists are now making the case that one of the fastest growing Christian populations today are Persians – both in and outside Iran!

So, how were they prepared for this endeavor? How did this small, merry band of twelve disciples, minus one (Judas), along with other followers of Jesus (numbering only about 120), prepare themselves for the coming of the Spirit and this monumental task which the Lord Jesus gave them? As I hope to show you from our text today, I will suggest that the disciples and these early followers of Jesus were uniquely prepared for all that God would have them do and be by embracing and being anchored by three key attributes – attributes and characteristics which, I believe, God would have us also embrace as we enter into this new year and new season as a church. They are as follows:

Dependent on God in prayer

Rooted in their biblical-identity as children of the one true King**Committed to the good news of Jesus's resurrection**

So my plan is to work my way through the text, and then make some application along the way, leading up to the end where we will all be encouraged to take a next step in doing exactly what the Apostles themselves did. So, let's go begin in verse 12...

Main Text:

Dependent on prayer: the Disciples gather for prayer in Jerusalem (Acts 1:12-14)

Scholars debate whether this is the same upper room as the one Jesus took them to when He had His final conversations and instituted communion. It's not an important detail – what is important is who is there (the disciples minus one, along with the women, Mary, and His brothers/siblings, presumably James and Jude). But notice what Luke says about them: they devoting themselves to prayer, and doing so in a spirit of unity and like-mindedness. The ESV translates it as “one accord” (literally: of one mind).

So here is the question: is there anything we can assume they were praying about and for specifically? While the text doesn't specifically tell us, my guess is that these disciples were praying exactly the way Jesus had taught them to pray in what we commonly call “the Lord's prayer”. In Luke 11, here is how Jesus taught them to pray: *“Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.”*

There are two reasons I believe that this is how they were praying:

First, Jesus spent 40 days sharing with them about the Kingdom of God, and had just commissioned them to advance it from Jerusalem all the way to the ends of the earth.

Second, the book of Acts describes the mission of the church as unfolding in exactly this way: the kingdom expands from person to person, family to family, city to city, by offering forgiveness of sins, assuring people that God's presence now abides with them, and that the pathway of the kingdom is loving and forgiving even your enemies!

Third, and more practically speaking, keep in mind, that many of these disciples still had lots of friends and families who did not yet know about Jesus. So undoubtedly, prayer was being lifted up for them on their behalf as well. In the midst of praying the things that Jesus instructed them to pray for, many friends and families were being lifted up as well.

Application:

So, first and foremost, these disciples realized they were completely dependent on the Lord – and they expressed their dependency with prayer. And this kind of prayer-dependency was not only pleasing to God, but it made them all the more effective. Their weakness – humanly speaking – would become their greatest strength. And so it is with us. At the end of the service, we are going to get a chance to do exactly this. But before we get there, I want to move to the next section and see how they were rooted in their biblical-identity.

Rooted in their biblical-identity as children of the (true) King

Acts 1:15-19 - Despite his massive failure after Jesus was arrested (you will recall he denied knowing

Jesus 3 times), Peter repents and becomes reinstated as the leader of the disciples. Be careful not to overlook the significance of this. God can restore anyone, no matter how great the failure, if they are repentant. Now, note the contrast of Peter's restoration with the fate of Judas. Whether Judas was truly repentant or not is up for debate, but Luke describes his death in very graphic ways that highlights Judas's treachery. However a problem remains: the Twelve have now become the 11. Peter says they need 12. Why? Why is it so important that they have 12, and not 11? To answer this question, I want to look carefully at how Peter frames their situation with Judas the wider biblical story with two Psalms: Psalm 69:25 & 109:8.

Acts 1:20-21 - At first glance, these prayers seem very random and haphazard. But lets take a deeper look at how these Psalms function as prophecy, not only about Judas, but about the identity of this new group of disciples.

In Psalm 69, we have a lament from the pen of King David about the persecutions of the ungodly against him. The first 12 verses are the conflict he is experiencing. The pain. The injustice! And how does David respond?

Psalm 69:13 - Prayer. Focused prayer on God's power, goodness, and commitment to deliver and rescue His people. At this point, the Psalm changes course from lament to a pronouncement on the enemies of God leading up to verse 25, which reads:

Psalm 69:25 - Now, the Psalm ends on a very hopeful note:

Psalm 69:34-36 - Despite persecution, God will vindicate His people, He rebuilds the cities of Judah in such a way that the people will be persevered and the praises of God will reach the ends of the earth. In other words, the kingdom will be restored for Israel.

Hold on to that thought for a moment... Lets look at the next Psalm: in Psalm 109, we have a similar pattern as Psalm 69. David begins by lamenting his situation wherein he suffers attacks from the ungodly rabble. How does David respond?

Psalm 109:1-4 - Now, just like we saw in Psalm 69, after prayer the tone of the Psalm changes to a pronouncement of judgement and victory over their enemies. And one of those judgements is this one:

Psalm 109:8 - The term "office" can mean refer to one who has oversight and responsibility. Due to their unfaithfulness and wickedness, this privilege is taken away and (presumably) given to someone who will be faithful. In other words, God is going to judge the wicked and provide a way for the righteous, His people, to flourish as they hold on to Him.

Here is the point Peter is making: Jewish worshippers understood David to be not only the divinely-appointed king but also a prophet, David's psalms were commonly used in synagogue and temple-worship. In other words, Psalms 69 and 109 not only reflect David's own circumstances, but the circumstances of all God's people and the promise of a future kingdom under a future Davidic king who would eventually sit on David's throne.

However, now, that this future king has been revealed to be Jesus of Nazareth, the one who was crucified and risen and ascended, Peter (and these early Christians) re-read these prophetic texts - not from the perspective of a faithful Israelite looking for a future Davidic-Messiah - but from the perspective of those who have met the Messiah and are now living in the age of fulfillment. Peter claims

that these texts speak directly to the present situation: Judas, the imposter, sought to persecute God's people by betraying Jesus the Messiah. However, God's cause triumphs and He saves His people by raising the Messiah from the dead and restoring His kingdom to a new Israel – a Spirit-filled Israel represented by the 12.

In the Old Testament, Israel had originally been constituted as twelve tribes, each of which descended from Jacob's twelve sons. However, these tribes were dispersed and removed from the land as a sign of judgement during the exile. Only two main tribes remained of the southern kingdom remained and were sent back into the land: Judah and Benjamin. But one of the purposes of Jesus's ministry – as the true Messianic king – was to regather and restore Israel by establishing a new community under the leadership of twelve hand-picked apostles. Listen to how Luke describes Jesus' call to the Twelve in His gospel: Luke 22:29-30 - Just as Israel was called to be a light to the world, and a blessing to the surrounding nations, so now these disciples – and the church that emerges – becomes the fulfillment of what Israel was supposed to be by bringing God's salvation to the world through Jesus. Therefore, the disciples look to fill their ranks back to 12 so that they may be prepared to embrace and live out their biblical-identity as the new Israel, true children of Abraham, the inheritors of the promises and covenants, as children of the one true King.

Application:

We are going to see this throughout the book of Acts, that the promises of the Old Testament are being fulfilled in Jesus, and in these disciples who are called the church! As Pastor Stan has said, with Jesus's ascension, the promised kingdom has been inaugurated – not yet consummated – but inaugurated under the leadership and reign of the Lord Jesus Himself.

This is true also for us. We too can read these covenant promises and say, "This is for Israel of old, but also now, under Jesus Christ and in this age of fulfillment, its also for me!" We too are to root our lives in our identity as children of the King.

Example from Isa. 43:

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. ³For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. ⁴Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. ⁵Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. ⁶I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Committed to the good news of Jesus's resurrection

Acts 1:21-26 - Now Jesus Himself had chosen His own apostles. But Jesus is not there to do it personally. So to discern the Lord's will they engage in a common practice in Greco-Roman society of casting lots. Some scholars think they had rocks with the name of the two apostles on them and they simply drew them out, and concluded the one they drew was God's own choosing. Now we want to be careful here. Some of you, if you're like me, look at this as kind of like flipping a coin and assuming its God's will. Seems very superstitious. I agree. In the Old Testament, the casting of lots is sometimes a helpful way of

discerning the Lord's will, and other times it's the path of folly. Jesus never commands us to do this, and we don't see the Apostles do this again in Acts. While there have been Christian groups who have followed this practice, I think what we see here is simply their way of trying to discern God's mind without the direct help of the Holy Spirit, who hasn't been poured out yet. After the Spirit comes upon them, the Spirit guides and directs them personally and corporately – prior to that, they trust God to show them through their own human efforts. So, its not a bad thing they do here but it will be replaced by Christ dwelling with them in the Spirit.

However, the key thing I want to point out is what were the requirements they had for a replacing Judas. Look again with at vv. 21-22. He must be a reliable witness of the resurrection! Why? Because they needed someone who would share their *Christ-centered Agenda* of proclaiming the kingdom of God, in the name of Jesus, to all the world!

Conclusion:

These early followers of Jesus were prepared by being dependent, rooted, and committed. Now, the same Jesus who taught them, prepared them, and commissioned them, is the same Jesus who teaches, prepares, and commissions us today as His followers. Just as the disciples were going to step out in faith and in the power of the Spirit to turn the first-century world upside down, so now we are being called to do the same for our 21st century world. And we are called to do it the same way: dependent prayer, rooted in our biblical-identity as children of the one true king; and committed to proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus!

What we want to do now is put all of this into action, by expressing our dependence on the Lord, as ambassadors of the king, in prayer for those who don't yet know the Savior. Who haven't submitted and given their lives over to the king!

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Main Point:

The early believers were prepared for mission by depending on God through prayer, having a biblically-rooted identity as children of the King, and proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 1:12-15

The Disciples were *Dependent* on God in prayer

Acts 1:16-20

The Disciples were *Rooted* in their biblical-identity as children of the one true King

Acts 1:21-26

The Disciples were *Committed* to the good news of Jesus's resurrection

Application:

Questions for Reflection:

- 1) What do you think it means to be devoted to prayer in "one accord" with others? Have you ever experienced something like this? Share with your group.
- 2) What is the theological significance of there being 12 apostles? Why is it important for believers today to understand their own identity as "children of the King"?
- 3) What OT scriptures do you find encouraging/comforting in relation to your identity as a child of the King?
- 4) Why did Peter emphasize that Judas's replacement must be a witness of the resurrection? How does the fact that Jesus has been raised from the dead bring you hope?