

**Acts 1:6-17 & 21-26** <sup>6</sup> Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. <sup>10</sup> They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup> "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." <sup>12</sup> Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. <sup>13</sup> When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. <sup>14</sup> They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. <sup>15</sup> In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) <sup>16</sup> and said, "Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. <sup>17</sup> He was one of our number and shared in our ministry."

<sup>21</sup> Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." <sup>23</sup> So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. <sup>24</sup> Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen <sup>25</sup> to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." <sup>26</sup> Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

A PERSON DOES NOT NEED TO LIVE VERY LONG BEFORE HE OR SHE BEGINS TO BE AWARE THAT LIFE IS FILLED WITH UPS AND DOWNS.

THERE IS: EXCITEMENT AND BOREDOM, SADNESS AND HAPPINESS, CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION, AND THE LIST GOES ON AND ON.

THE DISCIPLES AND OTHER FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WERE MORE THAN AWARE OF WHAT WE MIGHT CALL THE "ROLLER COASTER RIDE" OF THEIR TIME WITH JESUS.

THEY EXPERIENCED BOTH HOPED FOR AND UNEXPECTED HIGHS AND LOWS FROM THE TIME THEY BEGAN TO FOLLOW HIM.

THINK ABOUT IT-JESUS OF NAZARETH APPEARED IN GALILEE SEEMINGLY OUT OF NO WHERE; TEACHING ABOUT GOD AND SCRIPTURE- THINGS THAT BOTH EXCITED AND CHALLENGED.

HE CHOSE HIS INNER CORE OF DISCIPLES, AND THE CROWDS GREW, DRAWN AT FIRST TO HIS MESSAGE, AND THEN TO THE MANY MIRACLES HE PERFORMED.

SO POPULAR WAS HE THAT SOME CROWDS FOLLOWED HIM FROM PLACE TO PLACE TO HEAR HIS WORDS, AND WITNESS, AND PERHAPS RECEIVE THE BENEFIT OF HIS MIRACLES.

THE WORD ON THE VILLAGE STREETS WAS THAT HE MIGHT BE THE PROMISED MESSIAH.

THIS WORD WAS CONFIRMED BY JESUS TO THE DISCIPLES, WHO THEN HAD INCREASED EXPECTATIONS THAT FINALLY GOD WAS ACTING TO FULFILL THE PROMISE- TO RESTORE THE KINGDOM OF DAVID-WITH JESUS AS KING.

THIS WOULD MEAN THE END OF ROMAN OPPRESSION, A RETURN TO THE GLORY DAYS OF ISRAEL, AND THE TWELVE WOULD BE AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL.

BUT, THERE WAS ALSO SOME CONFLICT WITH MANY JEWISH RELIGIOUS LEADERS WHO CRITICIZED AND EVEN TRIED ENTRAP JESUS.

AFTER ALL HE DID NOT CONFORM TO ALL THE RELIGIOUS NORMS.

JESUS, AS A RIGHTEOUS MAN AND A RABBI, HUNG AROUND AND WELCOMED MANY KINDS OF UNRIGHTEOUS PEOPLE, THOSE WHO WERE OBVIOUS SINNERS.

THIS WAS UNACCEPTABLE TO MANY. EVEN SO, LIFE WAS NOT JUST GOOD FOR THE TWELVE IT WAS GREAT.

JESUS HAD EVEN BESTOWED SOME OF HIS POWER ON THEM TO PREACH AND HEAL, WHEN HE SENT THEM OUT IN PAIRS ON A MISSION TRIP.

THEY WERE RIDING HIGH-UNTIL JESUS WAS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED. THEY ABANDONED HIM, AND HE WAS TRIED AND CONDEMNED BY PILATE TO BE CRUCIFIED.

JESUS DIED AND HIS LIFELESS BODY SEALED IN A TOMB. THINGS WERE AS LOW AS THEY COULD GO. ALL HOPE LOST.

AND THEN-JESUS WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD, APPEARED AMONG THEM AND HOPE AND JOY ABOUNDED TO AN EVEN GREATER HEIGHT.

THERE INDEED WAS NOTHING JESUS WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO DO, HIS JEWISH OPPONENTS AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE WERE IN TROUBLE-OR SO IT MUST HAVE SEEMED TO JESUS' FOLLOWERS.

THEY WERE BACK ON ANOTHER UPWARD CLIMB ON THE ROLLER COASTER-AND EXPECTED THINGS WOULD ONLY GET BETTER. THEY WERE RIDING HIGH TOGETHER.

BUT THEN, THEY SUDDENLY PLUNGED AGAIN TO THE BOTTOM WHEN JESUS TOLD THEM HE WAS LEAVING THEM.

HE PROMISED TO BE WITH THEM IN A WAY, BUT NOT PHYSICALLY.

IN SHOCK AND DISMAY THEY WATCHED HIM PHYSICALLY ASCEND FROM THE EARTH AND BE COVERED BY CLOUDS.

YES, JESUS ASCENDED TO HIS FATHER IN HEAVEN AS HE SAID HE WOULD, AFTER PROMISING ONE DAY TO RETURN.

THE BOOK OF ACTS SAYS THOSE WHO WITNESSED IT STOOD LOOKING UPWARD LONG AFTER JESUS PASSED OUT OF SIGHT, UNTIL GOD SENT MESSENGERS GET THEM MOVING.

IT WAS ONLY THEN THE SAVIOR'S OTHER WORDS CAME BACK TO THEM.

HE HAD TOLD THEM TO STAY IN JERUSALEM AND WAIT FOR WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT.

AND JESUS PROMISED SOMETHING IMPORTANT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN SOON, SOMETHING ONLY GOD COULD AND WOULD DO.

THIS IS WHAT MOTIVATED NOT ONLY THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES, BUT ALSO ABOUT 120 FOLLOWERS OF JESUS TO CONTINUE TO MEET TOGETHER.

THEY NOT ONLY CONSISTENTLY GATHERED TOGETHER, THEY PRAYED TOGETHER AS THEY WAITED.

THEN ONE DAY, PERHAPS AS AN ANSWER TO THEIR PRAYERS, PETER GOT UP TO SPEAK.

HE REMINDED THEM ABOUT THE PROMISES OF GOD FOUND IN SCRIPTURE, AND THEN CALLED WHAT WE MIGHT THINK OF AS A CONGREGATIONAL MEETING.

HE SUGGESTED IT WAS TIME TO PREPARE FOR WHAT GOD WOULD DO, AND THIS MEANT REPLACING JUDAS WHO HAD DIED.

TWO MEN OF GOOD STANDING WERE SUGGESTED. THEY WERE FROM AMONG THOSE WHO HAD FOLLOWED JESUS FROM THE BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY.

JUSTUS AND MATTHIAS WERE PUT FORWARD. ONE OF THEM WOULD BE CHOSEN BY THE TRADITIONAL METHOD OF CASTING LOTS. AND THE LOT FELL TO MATTHIAS.

THUS THE ELEVEN DISCIPLES BECAME THE TWELVE APOSTLES, READY TO LEAD THE REST OF JESUS' FOLLOWERS- WHENEVER GOD SENT WHAT JESUS CALLED THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

NONE OF THEM REALLY UNDERSTOOD WHAT THAT MEANT, UNTIL TEN DAYS AFTER JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, ON PENTECOST.

BUT IN THE MEANTIME, THESE FIRST CHRISTIANS CONTINUED TO WAIT AND MEET TOGETHER AND PRAY.

THIS BRINGS US TO WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE 120 FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WHO WERE WAITING FOR GOD TO ACT.

WAITING, FOR MANY OF US IS NOT EASY. IT CAN BE AN ANXIOUS AND FRUSTRATING TIME.

THIS ESPECIALLY TRUE WHEN WE REALIZE WE ARE NOT IN CONTROL AND HAVE NO POWER TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN.

AND WHEN IT COMES TO WAITING FOR GOD, THE DEGREE OF OUR TRUST IN THE LORD IS IMPORTANT.

PROVERBS 3:5-6 TELLS US WHAT THOSE FIRST CHRISTIANS DID, AND WHAT WE CAN DO WHILE WE WAIT FOR GOD.

“TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND DO NOT RELY ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING. IN ALL YOUR WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM, AND HE WILL MAKE YOUR PATHS STRAIGHT.”

YES, TRUSTING IN THE LORD, IN GOD'S LOVE AND GRACE, POWER AND PROMISES IS A GOOD WAY TO WAIT.

THERE ARE ALSO SEVERAL MORE THINGS WE CAN LEARN FROM THE EXAMPLE OF THOSE FIRST 120 BELIEVERS.

ACTS CHAPTER ONE REMINDS US THAT THEY LISTENED TO WHAT JESUS SAID, AND THEN THEY OBEYED HIM, EVEN WHEN HE DID NOT GIVE THEM ALL THE INFORMATION THEY ASKED FOR FROM HIM.

THEY WERE NOT DISCOURAGED BY CHRIST'S ABSENCE, BUT GATHERED TOGETHER, PRAYED TOGETHER, AND THEY LOOKED TO SCRIPTURE FOR COMFORT AND INSPIRATION.

THEY ALSO TOOK WHAT ACTION SEEMED RIGHT, AS THEY WAITED FOR GOD TO MAKE THE NEXT BIG MOVE.

NOTICE THE IMPORTANCE THEY PLACED ON BOTH GROUP FELLOWSHIP AND PRAYER, NOT JUST AMONG THE APOSTLES AND MARY HIS MOTHER, BUT WITH THE OTHERS AS WELL.

THESE FIRST CHRISTIANS DEMONSTRATED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THOSE WHO BELIEVED IN JESUS MEETING TOGETHER AS MUCH AS THEY WERE ABLE.

THE WAY IN WHICH THEY WAITED FOR GOD TO FULFILL THE PROMISE JESUS MADE IS A MODEL FOR ALL CHRISTIANS.

FOLLOWING THEIR EXAMPLE WILL NOT NECESSARILY MAKE OUR WAITING EASIER, BUT IT WILL MAKE IT MORE PRODUCTIVE.

THINK ABOUT THE COMMUNITY BUILDING THAT HAPPENED BECAUSE THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CONTINUED TO GATHER TOGETHER AND PRAY TOGETHER.

THOSE 120 OR SO INDIVIDUALS WERE DRAWN TOGETHER IN THE NAME OF JESUS AT A TIME WHEN IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN EASIER AND SAFER TO GO THEIR SEPARATE WAYS.

THIS IS ONE OF THE BLESSINGS THEIR TIME OF WAITING FOR GOD GAVE THEM. ANOTHER BLESSING WAS THE POWER OF BEING UNITED IN PRAYER.

ALSO THE CHOICE TO REPLACE JUDAS SHOWS THEY BELIEVED GOD WOULD ACT AND THEY WANTED TO BE PREPARED BY FILLING THE VACANCY THE DEATH OF JUDAS LEFT.

SO HERE WE CAN LEARN THE VALUE OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, OF BEING UNITED IN PRAYER, AND OF TAKING WHAT ACTION SEEMS RIGHT, WHILE WE WAIT.

HERE IS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW CHURCHES DO THIS ALL THE TIME.

WHAT HAPPENS TO A CHURCH WHEN THE PASTOR LEAVES? DOES THE CHURCH BOARD AND CONGREGATION SHUT THE DOORS AND CLOSE UP SHOP UNTIL A NEW PASTOR ARRIVES?

NO-THEY CONTINUE TO GATHER FOR WORSHIP AND PRAYER. THEY CONTINUE TO DO THE NECESSARY BUSINESS OF MAINTAINING AND RUNNING THE CHURCH, AS WELL AS MISSION AND OTHER MINISTRY.

THIS IS A NECESSARY PART OF ACTIVELY WAITING FOR GOD TO SEND THE NEW PASTOR; CHOSEN IN SOME CHURCHES BY THE BISHOP OR OTHER AUTHORITY, AND IN OTHER CHURCHES BY THE CONGREGATION.

EITHER WAY, THE TIME OF WAITING, BE IT SHORT OR LONG IS A TIME TO LIVE OUT TRUST IN THE LORD, AND FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS.

SOMETHING SIMILAR CAN BE DONE IN OTHER TIMES OF WAITING AS INDIVIDUALS OR A CONGREGATION.

THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE A LOT OF THE TIME WE SPEND IN LIFE INVOLVES WAITING.

LET US ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT WHILE WE WAIT, ESPECIALLY WHILE WAITING FOR GOD, THERE IS USUALLY MORE GOING ON THAN WE REALIZE.

THOSE OF US WHO HAVE LIVED LONG ENOUGH AND BEEN ON OUR FAITH JOURNEY A WHILE CAN TESTIFY TO THE FACT THAT THERE ARE TIMES THAT IT SEEMS LIKE NOTHING IS HAPPENING.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN IT APPEARS AS IF GOD IS NOT EVEN TRYING TO ANSWER OUR PRAYERS, AND IS PERHAPS BUSY ELSEWHERE.

HOWEVER, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT-THINGS ARE OCCURRING THAT WE ARE UNAWARE OF, EITHER WITHIN US, OR OTHERS, OR THE WORLD-AND GOD IS PRESENT IN THIS.

A USEFUL EXAMPLE OF THIS IS FOUND IN NATURE BY LEARNING ABOUT HOW THE CHINESE BAMBOO TREE GROWS.

WHEN THE BAMBOO SEED IS PLANTED-IT TAKES A VERY LONG TIME TO GROW. OF COURSE MANY TREES DO.

HOWEVER THIS PARTICULAR PLANT IS EXTRAORDINARILY SLOW TO RISE FROM THE SOIL.

IT IS SAID THE SINGLE SHOOT THAT SPROUTS WILL GROW SO SLOWLY IT MAY SEEM TO AN INEXPERIENCED GARDENER TO BE DEFECTIVE.

BUT, THE TINY SHOOT THAT BARELY GROWS AN INCH A YEAR MUST BE CAREFULLY WATERED, FED, AND WEEDS KEPT FROM IT, SO THAT IT CAN GROW.

AFTER FIVE YEARS THE BAMBOO TREE WILL SUDDENLY GROW UP TO NINETY FEET IN AS SHORT A TIME AS THREE MONTHS.

YOU SEE ALL THE ACTION TAKES PLACE BENEATH THE SOIL, WITH THE ROOTS OF THE TREE SPREADING OUT AND GROWING, WHILE THE GARDENER WAITS AND TENDS TO THE TINY TREE.

WITHOUT THE UNSEEN GROWTH OF THE ROOTS THE TREE WOULD NOT LIVE LONG IF IT GREW LIKE OTHER TREES.

SO ALSO IT CAN BE THE CASE WHEN WE WAIT FOR GOD. THINGS ARE HAPPENING, SEEN BY GOD AND NOT BY US.

THEN WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT GOD'S PLAN WILL BECOME VISIBLE TO US AND OUR WAITING ENDS.

IN THE MEANTIME, GATHERING WITH OTHER BELIEVERS, PRAYER, AND TAKING WHAT ACTION SEEMS RIGHT ARE WAYS WE CAN PREPARE FOR WHAT WILL COME.

THANKS BE TO GOD FOR HIS FAITHFULNESS BOTH SEEN AND UNSEEN. PRAISE GOD FOR THE PROMISED PRESENCE OF JESUS WITH US ALWAYS, AND THE POWER AND GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

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