

Title: Restored
Text: Acts 1.12-26
Theme: The new people of God
Series: Acts #4
Prop Stmtnt: The church will be the new people of God.

Read Text:

In a few weeks we will celebrate the incarnation of Christ, yet, the ascension of Christ is a very important event that tends to get overlooked and is therefore vastly under appreciated. Stop for a minute and consider what was going on in heaven when Christ returned. The incarnation and ascension of Christ are the bookends that mark the beginning and the completion of his life on earth. In between those two bookends was the perfect life that Christ lived in our place. He did it. His perfect life accomplished two major objectives. 1) He showed us how to live. He modeled for us what it means to love God and love one another. 2) He secured the salvation of every single person who would ever believe on him. He redeemed us. He bought us back for himself. He broke the tyrannical reign of sin and death. His death on the cross paid the debt of our sins in full, leaving us with nothing to pay and his resurrection was the undeniable evidence that he was victorious over death because he had paid the wages of sin. Having paid the sin's wages and satisfying its demands, he gives eternal life to everyone who turns from their sin and trusts in him. Christ accomplished that! He completed his mission. This means that...

- The ascension of Christ marked the conclusion of his earthly ministry.

The incarnation marked the beginning of the humiliation of Christ while his ascension marked his exaltation. At his birth he began his life on this earth, while at his ascension his earthly ministry was now complete. We learn from the epistles that when Christ returned to heaven that he received a hero's welcome – as he should have. The Scriptures speak of him being enthroned at the right of the Father, ascending into glory, being higher than the heavens, crowned with glory and honor, having all authorities being placed in submission to him, being seated FAR ABOVE all rule, authority, power, dominion, and every title that can be given to anyone in this present age or in the one to come. Jesus was made head over the church, who fills the universe with his power and lordship. He holds the highest office that heaven can create and therefore, every knee will bow before him in heaven and in earth and under the earth and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. His mission of dying for, purchasing and securing a people from every tribe, language and nation was so successful that he was bestowed with a power that authorized him to give gifts to anyone he wanted.

- The ascension of Christ marked the beginning of his New Covenant ministry.

So, what this means is that Christ completed his earthly ministry but he did not go to heaven to retire, binge on Netflix or YouTube videos and watch us from afar while we are left to muddle along. No. Christ has been installed as the Chief Executive Agent who after initiating the Messianic Kingdom, is now making his life and power known through his church. (Ephesians 4 - read) This is what was going on. The disciples were walking back probably feeling like LeBron James had just left the team. And yet Jesus told them that it would be better for them if he left

and went back to the Father. Jesus not here is better? How so? Well, the book of Acts demonstrates that. The return of Christ to heaven set in motion the next stage in God's plan for the ages. It was now time for the Spirit to come in larger scale ministry and will take what Christ accomplished and will apply it on a scale never before imagined. In fact, in just a few days from this scene, the Day of Pentecost will occur, and the church will be birthed and on that day 3,000 people will profess faith in Christ. After three years of public ministry, there were (only) 120 people who were followers. In one day, that number would increase by 3,000. 2,000 years later in spite of centuries of persecution, heretics and heresies from within, hypocrites and wolves, the church has survived and thrives. I concluded last Sunday by pointing out that we are the "ends of the earth" that the disciples were charged with reaching. The gospel made it this far and this long. Jesus accomplished this and the Spirit will accomplish his mission as well.

But, something had to happen in order for the church to begin. One of the disciples was gone and he had to be replaced. They need one more. So, something has to happen. At the same time, something has happened. These men are not what they used to be.

I. Something has happened. (12-14)

The trip back from where Christ ascended (Mt. of Olives – east of Jerusalem) was down the mountain, over the Kidron Valley, back into the city and into the Upper Room, was a Sabbath's day journey, which is another way of saying about one half to seven tenths of a mile. The Upper Room, is probably the same place where Jesus and the disciples observed the Passover before he went to the cross. The term simply means, "upstairs room" so it may have been in a different place. But, this was the place where they were staying. The upstairs room was likely a large meeting room in a large home in the city that was owned by a person with some wealth who allowed Jesus and the disciples to use it for the Passover and now was allowing the disciples to use it. This would have put the owner at some risk to the authorities, since the disciples were not just using the room, but appeared to be living there. They would need a place to stay since they were for the most part from Galilee and yet Jesus said to start in Jerusalem.

There is a historical rumor (tradition) that this home was owned by the mother of John Mark, the young man who ended up traveling with Paul for a time and who wrote the 2nd gospel. Luke then names the 11 disciples. And right away we can see that these men are different. Verse 14 sets the stage for what happens later on the day of Pentecost. The disciples were together and were with one accord and were devoting themselves to prayer. Next week our text is the formation of the church by the baptism of the Spirit. The church was a new stage in redemption history and this new stage, this new era was inaugurated by the miracle of speaking in tongues. And of course, speaking in tongues gets a lot of attention, even to this day. But, I think that the biggest miracle in the upper room was not speaking in tongues but that these guys were all together and were in one accord! Seriously! Think about it.

Much of what we read about the disciples in the gospels is not that encouraging. These guys were concerned with who was in charge, they bickered amongst themselves, they seemed clueless at times as to what Jesus was saying and doing. But now, when the teacher has left the room and you would expect the spitballs to start flying, fighting, and some divisions to start, these guys are in one accord and are devoting themselves to prayer. What has happened to them?

This is new. This is different. This is beautiful. So, what has already happened is beautiful. These men, along with the other followers of Christ, which numbered about 120 are meeting together. They are together. They are of one accord and they are praying. It is a preview of what the church is supposed to look like. They had been with Christ and their lives would never be the same. They were all in now. This mission was their mission. Following Christ was not a side job for them, it was their lives and now reason for existence. Is that what following Christ means to you? Christ's mission on this earth was not in order to be a spoke on your wheel that competes with other things for your heart. Christ is to be the hub who holds all of the pieces together and drives everything that you do.

Let's stop here for a minute. Can you imagine putting your life on hold and meeting in someone's house for several days in order to pray? What good is that doing? They had a mission to take the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea Samaria and the ends of the earth, right? Why aren't they engaged in strategy and planning sessions. Where are their 3 month, 6 month, 9 month and 1 year goals? They prayed. They were together and they prayed. And "in those days" they realized that something has to happen.

II. Something has to happen. (15-26)

Luke has just listed the eleven by name because he is making it clear that there is a hole in the ranks. There is an unresolved problem. The 12 are no longer the 12, and since the 12 disciples launch the church as representatives of the 12 tribes of Israel, there needs to be a 12th man added to the bunch. This is so good for us to understand. While the church (the new covenant people of God) begins in Acts 2, she stands on the shoulders of Israel (the old covenant people of God). Jesus picked 12 disciples in order represent the 12 tribes of Israel. The 12 disciples looked back to the 12 tribes and the 12 disciples looked forward to the new heaven and the new earth, where the holy city, the New Jerusalem (according to Revelation 21) would have 12 gates with 12 angels at the 12 gates and the names of the 12 tribes would be on the gates. The city would have 12 foundations, with the name of the 12 apostles on the 12 foundations. It is by design that the city is 12,000 x 12,000 stadia and the walls are 144 cubits (12 x 12) tall. At this point, they have no idea of all of that. So, here's the problem. There are only 11 apostles at the moment. They lost one and they can't begin the church with 11. Luke does not tell us how they came to this conviction. My guess is that Jesus talked to them about it before he left. The OT passages that Peter cited that were related to this, may have been some of the things that Jesus talked about when he showed them how the OT scriptures spoke about him. They had a hole in their ranks that needed to be filled. Peter steps up and we witness a new leader. It's not that Peter hasn't led before, it's that he is leading in a different way. Now, we can't help but notice that the guy who denied Christ is now the leader of the band. This is a powerful example of restoration, but restoration is not the main point of the text. We also can't help but notice that the reason why they had a hole in their ranks, is because Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ and the disciples and ended up committing suicide. This text is a gruesome account of what happens to a soul that turns its back on Christ, but warning and suicide are not the main points of this text. We also can't help but notice that the disciples utilized what seems to us to be an unusual method for making a decision, but decision making is not the main point of this text. All of these relate to the main point that the church, the new covenant people of God stand on the shoulders of the old covenant people of God. If you are a Gentile, you are a debtor to Israel. The world goes to very

dark places when she forgets that. So, while that is the big idea, the immediate issue is that a 12th man needs to be picked. So, up steps Peter, but this time, Peter is different too.

In the past, Peter's leadership was more about him instead of about Christ. That is different now. And this is the first of many events that show that Peter is the recognized leader.

- He leads the selection of the 12th disciple
- He preaches on the day of Pentecost
- He healed the lame beggar by the Temple and then preached the gospel
- He confronted Ananias and Sapphira
- He performed some miracles of healing
- He confirmed that the gospel had come to the Samaritans and to the Gentiles
- Herod Agrippa arrested Peter and attempted to execute him

The former, impulsive and thick-headed man is different now. He leads in a way that is attractive. This brother is restored. This brother calls the others, "Brothers" and he leads the brothers in fulfilling what the Bible calls them to do. We need to replace Judas. This story is so fascinating on several levels. The authority (influence) of Christ is being powerfully demonstrated in the life of Peter, who a few weeks ago denied Christ three times and then ran away. His failure was colossal. His leadership now is the evidence of the power of the gospel. But, look at what the issue is that he is addressing and look at how he takes the lead.

The issue is the need to replace Judas because of Judas' betrayal and his failure to repent. This is somber. If this is happening in the same upper room, which it seems to be, Peter is addressing the elephant in the room. Judas betrayed Christ and in betraying Christ, he betrayed them (read v.17) and now there are only 11.

These guys all knew what had happened. Luke adds a parenthetical comment so that we (the readers) are brought up to speed. Judas Iscariot, after being remorseful, but not truly repentant, returned the money (30 pieces of silver that he was paid to betray Jesus) to the Pharisees. Since the money was tainted (oh the irony of this) the Pharisees could not accept it for themselves, but instead used the money to purchase a field where foreigners could be buried. The money was ceremonially unclean, so they used it to buy a field to bury people who were ceremonially unclean. This was the location of where Judas hung a rope from a tree and committed suicide. The details are gruesome. Either he hanged on the rope for days because no one buried him and his body bloated by the sun ended up bursting as he eventually fell, or, the rope broke and his body fell headlong on to the rocks and his body split open from that. Either way, he was not only dead, but he died in a terrible way. But, Judas had been the trusted treasurer. He had been the guy who had been in this same room, eating with them. They had trusted him and in betraying Christ, he betrayed them. The fact that he had been one of them, in that very room and now, they were there, but he wasn't, was sobering.

Don't you feel it? Following Jesus is a serious call. Who wants to take the place of Judas Iscariot? What if you were in that room? To be named as one of the 12 would be inviting the world to hate you, scorn you, persecute you and kill you. Peter, having articulated the need does not make the decision. The brothers "they" put forward two guys. Justus and Matthias and then

they prayed. (v.25) They knew this was the replacement of an apostle. Peter had established the fact that the apostle needed to have been with them and needed to have been an eyewitness of Jesus following his resurrection. Which, by the way, there are no apostles in that sense today. There haven't been ever since the last one, John died. They were for the foundation of the church.

After praying, they cast lots for them. Casting lots was a recognized form of decision making in the OT. It was not taking a gamble. It was an act of faith. And while it is not prescribed for the church, the Lord used this process to select Matthias. Matthias replaced Judas. The circle of 12 was now complete. The ring of disciples was reset. The church could begin. Distinct from, yet related to Israel. What was about to happen would change the world forever.

Takeaways:

- 1) God is Sovereign and Man is responsible. (Romans 3)
 - a. The Sovereignty of God does not remove man's accountability.
 - b. Man's accountability does not overrule God's Sovereignty.
- 2) The church is distinct from, but related to Israel.

This is important so that you know how to read your Bible well. Here is what I mean. Some of the most unhelpful and destructive conversations take place on the comment sections on social media or after articles. People say things like: How can you believe in a God who commands people who commit adultery to be executed? And of course, what they do is go to the OT law and its lists of prohibitions for OT Israel and misapply them. Do not be intimidated by those accusations. The OT law does reveal the righteousness of God. That is true. But, it also points to Jesus. Yes, the wages of sin is death. Yes, our sin is offensive to God and calls for punishment, but this righteous God sent his righteous Son to become our righteous, sin-bearing offering by dying on the cross for us. We, the New Covenant people of God are related to, but not the same as the Old Covenant people of God. You cannot understand the church as you need to without understanding Israel. But neither can you understand Israel as you are supposed to without understanding the church that she prepared the way for.

- 3) Matthias was chosen over Justus, but the unity was not disrupted.

I want to say, let's hear it for Justus. Here was a man whose character was so well known that he was put forward by the other brothers for consideration as an apostle. The Lord said Matthias and not Justus. We don't know why. Nothing further is said about Justus, but the unity is not harmed.

- 4) Peter and Judas present two different roads that you can take.

Judas was sorry for his sin. He was full of remorse. He regretted that things turned out the way they did. He was not happy. But, his sorrow and remorse was not a godly sorrow. He was disappointed in himself and could not face his failure, so he ended his life. There is a better way.

Peter was also sorry for his sin and full of remorse. He regretted what he said and did and like Judas was not happy. However, instead of staying away, he turned back to Christ. He was forgiven. He was restored. Peter was forgiven by the very one he had denied. That is all that he needed. He did not need to forgive himself. He needed Christ to forgive him and Christ did. That's all he needed. It didn't matter what his world said or did. Jesus, the King, forgave him. That's all you need too.