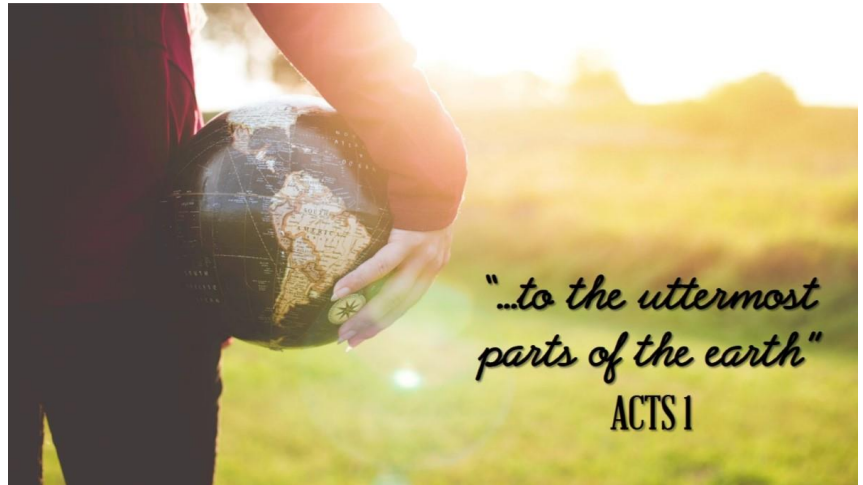


"To the uttermost parts of the earth"

- Acts 1, Part 2 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on June 14, 2020

Acts 1:9-26 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. 13 And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. 15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, 16 "Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; 17 "for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry." 18 (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. 19 And it became known to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.) 20 "For it is written in the book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.' 21 "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 "beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." 23 And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen 25 "to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." 26 And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.



If you were not there with us some 30 years ago in a little storefront down on Main Street, you missed some historic days. Just a few of us in those days with blind aspirations to birth a church that meant something...that had impact and truly furthered the kingdom of God in Dunn County. We wanted more than a church. We wanted a community. Indeed, we wanted to change the world! The Spirit of God did great things in our midst and lives were changed. People came to the Lord, and disciples were made. Of course Satan showed up right on cue, and has been hounding us ever since. In so many ways, we lived out the book of Acts in our own little corner of the world. In many ways, we still are.

As we covered previously, Jesus, upon the day of His "going home," had told the apostles to "go"...to "make disciples"...to "teach others." From His language there in His departing remarks we can gather that He was directing those who believed themselves to be His followers to actually manifest their love...to live out their love in an other-centered, *other prioritized* life. In fact, the scriptures tell us that the act of our love toward God and others IS the embodiment of and proof of our salvation. Seems simple enough. Yet surprisingly, it has proved to be far more difficult than one would have thought...especially for some of us. To "have no other Gods before Him." To love others as Christ loved us. Such priorities have made this the fellowship for some, and vilified for others.

Jesus warned us previously that in "that day"...the day of judgement for each of us, MANY will say, "haven't we cast out devils and healed the sick in your name?" His reply in the Day of Judgment? "Depart from me you

who work iniquity, I NEVER knew you!” No one will deny in this that a lot of folks were and are “active.” They are in church and attempting to keep in step with the others and even want to be a part of religious activities. That is not denied. But it is also quite clear they many do not have a real relationship with Jesus. They are busy *doing*, but the *being* has fallen to the wayside. They are not “laying their lives down for the brethren” as they claim. They are carnally minded even in a spiritual mission. Jesus warns, “*the Pharisees seek the praise of men, therefore they have their reward.*” That it...that’s all there is and they receive it promptly.

In John chapter 10 we read the following: “*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*” However, there are so many today who want to enter the kingdom of God *in some other way*. We do not want the disciples life that the shepherd presents, and we reject so much of what He has told us that describes what being a Christian really is, but we still want the benefits...we still want the blessings and we still want eternal life. But the problems is we aren’t going to get it. Because when one tries to “enter in” in some other way, we are dubbed a “thief and a robber.” Of course such naturally places us outside the sheepfold no matter what we might think.

1:9 - Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

In a moment, Jesus was gone...*or was He?* I personally wonder about the thoughts that were running through their minds at that moment. Speechless panic maybe? I wonder if they questioned their ability to carry on without Him standing by their side. But you see, He was *going* to walk beside them every day if they were willing! But they were going to have to learn what it meant to *walk by faith, not by sight*. His invisible presence was now taking over. Would they walk the walk when they couldn’t physically see Him?

1:10-11 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

While they stood there looking up in to the sky, angels, messengers from God, appeared to them and said, “*You men of Galilee, why are you standing staring up into heaven?*” The angels ask, “What are you looking at?” In other words, “What has your attention? What are you focused on?” “What are you looking at?” The use of the words “looking” or the “gazing” of the disciples into Heaven speaks of more than them just standing there in rapt amazement. It suggests that they were looking after Him like men who were worried they had lost someone, or *something*, forever. It suggests a look of hopeless bewilderment, of sadness, of brokenhearted astonishment. Perhaps that is why the angels issued a mild rebuke to the disciples in verse 10.

For the disciples, the ascension of the Lord back into Heaven changed everything. For the last three years these men and women had spent nearly every moment with Jesus. They had left family, friends, and business’s to follow Him. Now they were “alone.” Now, He was gone, and they didn’t know what to do. I am certain that the Lord’s departure left the disciples confused and concerned. They did not understand completely why He had to leave them here while He returned to the Father.

There are least three reasons why Jesus had to go to Heaven while His men stayed here.

One, if Jesus had not gone away, the Spirit of God could not have come. These men had been thus far walking by sight. They lived with Jesus. They heard His voice. They saw His miracles. They felt His touch. He was real. He was tangible. Then when Jesus died on the cross, the disciples were filled with fear. Even after the

resurrection, some of them nearly quit on the Lord. These men were so accustomed to being with Jesus they did not believe they could function without Him. They needed his physical presence. But Jesus knew what He was doing. For when he went away, the Spirit of God came, and now He dwells within every true child of God to lead them, guide them, help them, comfort them, and instruct them in the ways of God.

Secondly, Jesus went to Heaven to make intercession for them. When He ascended back into Heaven, Jesus sat on the right hand of His Father. I don't know how all this works, but Ephesians 2:6 teaches us that when Jesus ascended into Heaven, He took His people with Him. When He sat down in Heaven, His people sat down in Heaven with Him. He is there today as our representative, guaranteeing that wherever He is, we are still with Him.

And *thirdly*, Jesus went to Heaven to "prepare a place for us" so that He could return for His people some day. We must know that our world is filled with pain, sorrow, and heartache. No one knows whether tomorrow will be better or worse than today. Regardless of what the path of life hold for us, our Father not only walks with us, (Hebrews 13:5), He also walks *ahead of us* to secure our future.

Certainly tomorrow is a confusing thing to us mortals. After all, we are not even promised that we will be here! Today we are here, tomorrow we may be in eternity. Today the fair winds may be blowing around us, tomorrow may find us in the storm of our lives. While the future may be shrouded in mystery, as far as we were concerned, we have the Lord's assurance that He is already there, and that He has our future well in hand.

For those there that day on that mountain side, their mandate...*as well as all those who would follow them in a disciples life*, was to "preach the Gospel to every creature", Mark 16:15. They were to "go and teach all nations", Matthew 28:19. These men had a mission...a message to tell, and the Lord sent them out to tell it. That assignment was to be front and center in their minds as they watched Jesus depart from the world and disappear into the glory cloud. Is it "front and center" on ours today?

Are you caught up in the wonder of a risen Savior, who loves you, and who gave Himself for you on the cross of Calvary? Or are you confused and consumed about the turns life has taken? Are you worried over the future and what it holds for you? If you are worried about today or tomorrow, I challenge you to leave that in the hands of the Lord. He has your today and all your tomorrows well in hand. Living in this way IS Christianity. Are you actively serving the Lord and doing the work of sharing the Gospel He has called you too? If you are serving the Lord and sharing Him with the lost, carry on! One day He is coming and He will reward you for your faithful service to Him. Are you looking for His coming? Are you even ready for His return? If you are looking for Him, don't stop. He's coming!

Our account says they were told "***This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.***" It's interesting today we have people and whole church groups who want to say Jesus has already returned, or that He will return in some other manner than prophesied here in this passage. What are we told here? We can gather from this verse that Jesus will come again in **full view of mankind**. He will not come secretly or in the form of another "messiah." We could safely discern such positions if we would simply *read the Word He has given us!*

1:12-14 - *Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*

A “Sabbath’s day’s journey” is a short distance, roughly a half mile, the only distance the law allowed one to travel on the Sabbath day. Jesus had told His followers to “wait.” But notice they did not choose to wait at the mall or in a fishing boat! Instead, they waited for the promise of the Lord *in prayer*. They did it in “one accord,” and they did it *physically together*. Please note too, that the women played a very real part of that gathering. Oh yes, I’m sure they played all of the cultural roles of their day. But they were *more* than just mothers and housewives; ***they were players***. They were a serious part of the battle, just as sure as the women of today’s churches are to be!

“The phrase ‘one accord’ speaks of people sharing the same mind or thinking like-mindedly. It does not refer to people who all think and feel the same way about everything, but to people who set aside personal feelings and commit themselves to one task.” (Believers Bible Commentary)

Sometimes there is an individual or individuals that latch onto a local body making it nearly impossible by his words, deeds, or even his *heart*, for that body to be unified and in “one accord.” For the apostles, that individual was Judas. But, now Judas was gone...*sooner or later these folks always go*, and the body was together once again. I wonder...is our fellowship operating “in one accord?” For we cannot dismiss the fact that *unity and prayer* were the prelude to the coming of the Holy Spirit! And the future of the church was obviously imminently contingent upon the Holy Spirit’s presence. Otherwise, they would have been just “spinning their wheels.”

In verse 15-26, we read of Peter stepping up to the plate and moving to replace Judas the betrayer. Despite his weaknesses and shortcomings, Peter was always faithful to come forward when needed. Here he takes the bull by the horns and begins the process of replacing Judas’ position. Someone who would step into those shoes of leadership, and through the pre-Holy Spirit methodology, they prayed and cast lots, of which fell that day upon one Matthias.

We can’t say that Peter and the apostles were *wrong* in their actions here, but we also can’t help but notice that there wasn’t an overt and recorded call from the Lord to fill Judas’ vacant position. It is always best to create the position for the faithful individual, rather than feeling obliged to fill a vacancy, and then filling it with someone inappropriate and unqualified. The accountability and responsibility upon those who lead is great, and we are told in scripture that we will be judged by a more stringent code than others, just as we are now in real time, in the real world. When it comes to serving in positions in the church, the bible clearly instructs us to “...let these also first be tested.” (1Ti 3:10) I, ***and we***, have failed some on this matter over the years, and I am seeking to do better in the future.

Was this action concerning Matthias actually God’s will? Who knows! But we never hear about Matthias again. On the other hand, if history is correct, he did indeed take it to the end, dying for his faith and dying for his calling. After all, he was there in the upper room that day as the Spirit of God poured Himself out. And for sure it isn’t deep theological training that makes a man or woman ready for such a task. While such can be beneficial, nothing will replace the infilling and leading of the Holy Spirit.