

## Acts 1:9-14 They devoted themselves to prayer

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Last week in Acts we saw that the disciples were to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the father which was the baptizing or the immersion in the Holy Spirit.

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We saw that the promise of the father was for them because this was going to take place in them, they were the ones going to be baptized, but as we saw last week the main purpose was for the world.

In being immersed in the Holy Spirit they were to receive supernatural dunamis or dynamite power so that they could be Jesus' witnesses. And they were to be his witnesses at home and abroad. The world was to become their parish as someone has once said.

So, let's pick up the story again beginning from chapter 1 verse 9

### Verse 9-11

**And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.**

**And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,**

**And said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."**

How often do we read these verses and just gloss over them?

One of the main things, if not THE main thing we need to keep in mind when we study or read the bible is to always try and put ourselves into the story alongside the main characters, as though we were one of them hearing these words, seeing him alive and now gazing into the sky as he is taken away from them.

Can you imagine this?

Not only did they see him alive for a period of 40 days after he had well and truly been killed, but now this was to be the very last time he was to speak to them face to face.

From now on he would talk to them and guide them by the presence of the Holy Spirit within them.

But what about the cloud and the dudes in white robes?

Check the cloud out, it takes Jesus into heaven. This was no ordinary cloud.

And the guys in white robes, they were angels appearing as men. God can do these things and does do these things.

He made a cloud appear during the day to lead the Israelites while they were travelling in the wilderness by day toward the Promised Land and at night he gave them a pillar of fire to do the same thing.

And the scriptures also teach us that in our hospitality to strangers some of us have in fact entertained angels.

The comforting thing about this passage is that Jesus is coming back for us and every eye will see him.

### **Revelation 1:7**

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.

### **Verse 12**

**Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.**

The Mount of Olives was east of the city of Jerusalem and when it says that it was a Sabbath day's journey this meant that it was the amount that any law abiding Jew was allowed to travel without it being considered as work and thereby breaking the Sabbath.

The distance was the equivalent of about one kilometre. So they were pretty close to the city where Jesus had commanded them to stay. Why a kilometre?

John MacArthur says that traditionally it comes from the Exodus period where the Israelites were camped around the tabernacle and it would have been the distance from the furthest campsite to the tabernacle.

*(The MacArthur Bible Commentary. P1433)*

**Verse 13**

**And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.**

The famous upper room; that all Christians hold fondly as the place where Jesus ate the final Passover with his disciples and transformed it into what we now know as Christian communion. It may have been that very same room (Mark 14:15), we don't know for sure.

A quick count of the apostles will show only 11 as Judas Iscariot had already betrayed Jesus and had taken his own life. The Judas mentioned in this verse is the son of James and was also known as Thaddaeus (Mark 3:18)

These guys were such a diverse group called together by Jesus after his night of prayer. In the natural they were not a team that many of us would choose but they were the ones that God had chosen.

You had Matthew who was a tax collector - a Jew who worked for the Romans - a traitor to Israel and Simon a political revolutionary known as a Zealot who wanted to overthrow the Romans. These guys would have hated each other and here they were together on the same team. Not only this, but through the transforming work of Jesus they actually were able to work together as we see in the next verse.

**Verse 14**

**All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.**

It wasn't only the 11 apostles that were present in the upper room but also the women who became believers during his ministry, including his mother and more than likely some of the apostle's wives. It also included his brothers also.

Jesus had not only brothers but sisters as well.

**Mark 6:3**

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Even his family members became his followers.

They weren't just going along for the ride - they actually believed that their brother and Mary's son was indeed the promised Christ, God in the flesh.

Even though they did not believe in the beginning, later James was to become the leader of the Jerusalem church and wrote the New Testament letter James, while Judas or Jude wrote the New Testament letter after his name.

OK, let's finish up this morning by focussing our attention not so much on the people present in the upper room but rather what we find them doing.

And what is it that they were doing?

They were devoting themselves to prayer, just like Jesus who spent whole nights in prayer.

Last week a few of us went to Planet Shakers in the City to hear Bill Johnson speak and one of the things he said that caught my attention was about the time when the disciples tried to cast out a particular evil spirit from a person only to find that they couldn't do it. They had been doing it quite easily up until this point, but now they couldn't and they asked Jesus and he said to them that this type could only come out by prayer and fasting.

Jesus then goes onto to cast the demon out himself. So what was the difference? Jesus was living a lifestyle of prayer and fasting and wasn't only doing it in emergency situations or in times of difficulty - it was his life.

Vines Expository Dictionary says that the word devote or continue is literally to be strong towards or to endure in or persevere in to be continually steadfast with a person or thing.

We see it with prayer and we also see it with the apostles teaching. The disciples devoted themselves to these things. They were important and not optional extras.

Paul also encourages us to be the same.

**Romans 12:12**

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

**Colossians 4:2**

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

Can I say, this is something that God is continually teaching me about, how to have a lifestyle of prayer.

Often I find myself only praying in times of need and when things are going along smoothly I take my foot off the accelerator.

Many of you know that with my new job this year it has been very demanding and one of the things that has helped me get through to this point without going crazy has been your prayers and my own prayers during the week.

Each Monday as we drive to work in the car during this period I have said to the girls let's pray, but what I noticed is that when things have started to go well and I thought I was getting on top of things that we would not pray during those times and I felt God challenge me why I would stop praying.

He showed me that it takes as much faith to pray during the good times and to be thankful as it does to pray when your life seems out of control. We need to pray at all times until prayer becomes a lifestyle and not just an optional extra.

Let's pray