

Acts 1:15-26 Taking the lead

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We are back in our study of Acts this morning and we are picking up the story from chapter 1 verse 15.

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Acts 1:15-26

15 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said

Before we go on to what it is that Peter said there are two points that I would like to make about this scene.

Jesus was seen alive over period of 40 days by all the apostles and at least 500 people at one particular time (1Corin15:6). So there were at least over 500 believers possibly more at the time of Jesus' ascension into heaven and yet at this particular point there are only 120 present.

It is an interesting number as Adam Clarke in his commentary notes that this was the exact number required by the Jews to form a council in a city and as we read on we are going to see an election take place, but before we do that the second point I want to make is about Peter.

Peter stood up.

Ok, big deal what is so significant about this?

Peter stood up and took the lead in what was about to unfold in regard to the election of another apostle to take the place of Judas. Not only was the number 120 a significant number to the Jews but so was the number 12 as this was the number of Jewish men that was required to form a legal assembly or a synagogue.

Now I want to diverge a little and explore what it meant for Peter to stand up before moving on as I feel that Jesus wants to speak to some of us this morning about leading.

I believe God wants to narrow in on us men. Now it may not be all of you but I believe that it will be some of us. In regard to the women in this church, I cannot think of one of you who do not already exercise good leadership alongside their husbands in their families, this church and their workplaces.

This is not to say that I believe the men are incompetent in this area, but I do believe that God wants all of us men and in particular some of us to stand up and take the lead as Peter did.

This leading will no doubt be in your families, the church and your workplaces. As individuals we are all called to at least lead our own lives and to go about our work diligently, quietly and with dignity, not interfering in the lives of others for we will be accountable for our own lives.

Did you know that leadership is a spiritual gift given by the grace of God?

In the kingdom of God you don't have to be born a leader as we are often taught in the world but rather you need to be gifted as a leader and graced by God to lead within the church.

Romans 12:3-8

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,

5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;

7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;

8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; **the one who leads, with zeal**; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

The Greek word for lead is in essence to stand before or to preside and this is exactly what we see Peter doing.

Have you ever been in a group of people deciding to do something, let's say go out to a restaurant or go and to a movie and everyone says what would you like to eat or what would you like to see and all you get is I'm easy, whatever you want and then you say I don't really care I'm happy if your happy etc etc.

How frustrating is that. No one wants to stand up and say I really feel like Mexican or I would love to see such and such a movie.

Leaders make decisions and are prepared to get it wrong. What if you chose an awful Mexican restaurant? It's your head on the chopping block, you're the one they are going to blame.

And that I believe is why we just don't want to lead. We want to keep our dignity and pride intact. It is much easier to pick the mistakes in others who are prepared to lead than it is for us to actually lead.

Guys, if God has gifted you to lead - do it with zeal and allow him to make the adjustments in your life when you get it wrong, because let me tell you - you will get it wrong, that's part of the process of being developed.

In my managerial role at work I recently said to my boss that 90% of my learning this year has come as a result of being beaten up by people when I've made bad decisions. It would be too easy to give up, but if God has gifted and called you to lead, be brave and be bold, he will increase your capacity and your giftedness.

I am absolutely convinced that nothing gets done in life without someone taking the lead and in this verse we see Peter doing just that.

If I stand up in a group, I get people's attention. Most of us love sitting down, because that way we can hide and avoid the spotlight. I wonder if the others thought who is this show pony, pretending to be someone he isn't? But Jesus had called him to lead and lead he was going to do.

That is one of Peter's most enduring characteristics is that he just never gave up. From first to last we see him putting his neck on the line time and time again and God honoured him in such a way that virtually the first 15 chapters of Acts shows what God accomplished through his leadership.

Let's never forget that leadership is a spiritual gift and if you believe God has given this gift to you then please do yourself and the body of Christ a favour and prayerfully develop it for his glory. The church needs loads more Godly leaders.

Now let's turn to the very first post ascension leadership decision that Peter is about to make from verse 16.

16 “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

17 For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.”

18 (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.

19 And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

20 “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’; and “‘Let another take his office.’

21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”

23 And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.

24 And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen

25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”

26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Peter is in essence calling for an election, one in which they will rely upon God to choose between two candidates that they put forward, namely Barsabbas and Matthias with Matthias getting the Guernsey.

From this passage there are a number of things that we need to take note of.

- 1) They needed to complete the original 12 for legal reasons so that they could lawfully assemble as Jews who were still in the early throws of what and how they were to carry on Jesus’ mission.
- 2) This remaining apostle had to meet certain criteria for his inclusion in the original 12 to be valid, namely - he must have accompanied them from them from the beginning of John’s baptism, right through to seeing Jesus raised from the dead and rising into heaven.

This is important to note as some churches today believe that the gift of apostleship closed with the 12, along with all the miracles and spiritual gifts including the baptism or infilling of the holy spirit. A careful reading of scripture will show that this is simply not the case. Paul was called an apostle and wasn’t one of the 12 and so was Barnabas (Acts14:14) as well as Silas and

Timothy (1 Thessalonians 2:6).

An apostle simply means one who is sent as a messenger or an envoy. Obviously there is much more to the gift than this, but if they are not being sent and going they are not functioning as apostles.

- 3) Third it might seem wrong to our 21st century mindset that they should cast a lot or a ballot. It seems to us a little like going to the pokies and taking a gamble, but this was not an uncommon thing to do for the Jews.

We see it with Zechariah in Luke's Gospel when he was on duty to enter the temple the custom was to be chosen by lot. That is to have your name put on a piece of stone and placed into a garment and whereby they were shaken together and the first one to fall out was said to be chosen by lot.

After this event in Acts we don't see lots being cast again and it would have been quite a reasonable thing for them to rely on this practice and expect God to choose who would complete the 12 as it was Jesus who chose the original twelve and they were going to rely on God again to choose as it says in Proverbs 16:33

Proverbs 16:33

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.

So, please don't go out and play the lottery and expect God to choose you as the winner.

- 4) And finally there is a lesson on one of God's wonderful attributes that is buried in this passage that we could easily miss if not careful.

That attribute is God's Omniscience or his innate ability to know exactly everything that ever was and ever will be.

This is very important to note as once again as in some Christian circles today there is a growing trend to believe that God does not know everything, in particular the future choices that you and I will make in life.

This is known as Open Theism and it implies that because God does not know everything that he is then open to learning. When you learn something it would be logical to assume that you are being taught by someone and then to believe that God is taught by someone or something, then that someone or something is logically greater than God.

To me that seems absurd.

Peter prayed Lord you know the hearts of all and in 1 John 3:20 it says

1 John 3:20

for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

We must be guided and hold fast to the scriptures.

There are no doubt texts that suggest that God changes his mind or does not know certain things, but as a number of theologians have commented that this is God in effect speaking to us on our terms or as one theologian put it is God speaking to us in “baby talk”.

God is all knowing and because he is all knowing we can have the assurance (as the apostles did) that he will also ensure the outcome.

We no doubt make choices and decisions in life but at the same time in a mysterious kind of way God is also at work behind the scenes making things happen.

Philippians 2:12-13

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,

13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

I fully believe that as followers of Jesus the sooner we give up our own agendas and our own choices and pursue God’s agenda and his choices for our lives, we are poised to live the most fulfilling and the most satisfying lives ever.

As it says in psalms 37:4-5

Psalms 37:4-5

4 Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.

Let’s pray