



120

Acts 1:9-26

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Some of you know that my mom has been sick. Two weeks ago, she had a stroke, suffered from congestive heart failure, and kidney problems. Early Friday morning, my mom passed away. And we are so relieved to know that she is at rest and with the Lord. Mom was 85 and, until this last week, had a sharp mind, a sharp wit, and a sharp tongue to match. My reminiscing will lead to a point in a moment.

Mom lived in a nursing facility in North Little Rock. She struggled with mobility and had to use a walker and could barely get around. A couple of years ago, one of the ladies at the facility fell. And when they all looked around, my mom was voted as the runner to go get help! Of the hundreds of memories I have of Mom, one that stands out is the night she sat in an electrical storm to watch me play football. There was no one else in the stands on either side. No kidding, my mom was going to be there to support me and watch me play football.

My mom and dad met in 1942, had three dates, got engaged, and were married in four months. My mom and dad loved each other. Dad passed away in 1975, so Mom lived with him for 33 years and lived without him for 33 years. But she never really lived without him. She never stopped loving him or talking about him. My dad had a crippled leg, shortened by a childhood infection. But Mom said she never noticed. All she noticed was his brown eyes, wavy hair, and mischievous grin. Dad felt accepted by her. Although he might have wondered the day they she cracked an egg on his head to prove her point.

We got to visit Mom last week while she was still responsive. And she talked about Dad. She couldn't wait to see him. She had a vision of Dad greeting her in heaven and saying, "Come on Evelyn, let's party." So, they are together in heaven today enjoying a party with Jesus.

I reminisce because they were hopelessly devoted to one another. Theirs was a commitment of love. And that's what devotion is, a commitment of love. And as I studied Acts 1 this week, that's what kept coming out in the story for me.

The book of Acts records the birth of the church, the launching of a movement of God, of which we are privileged to be a part.¹ Christianity is a movement based upon devotion to Jesus Christ. Devotion is not a commitment of duty, devotion is a commitment of love. That's what launched the Christian movement. Those privileged few, who walked with Jesus and witnessed Jesus were captivated by Him. They were captivated by love.

And that's how Paul summarized Christian devotion. "For Christ's love compels us," because Jesus died for us! "For Christ's love compels us ... that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, NIV). Jesus' love defined them. And their love for Him determined the trajectory of the rest of their lives. And so it should be with us. Captivated by His love. Adoring with Him with all our being.

What is Acts 1 really about? What is Christianity really about? What is the movement really about? ***Jesus loved us enough to give His life for us. Do you love Him enough to give your life to Him?*** The 120 did, because they were captivated by His love.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have the privilege of becoming citizens of the Kingdom of God. It all began with a 120 in an upper room, and today 2 billion people, one-third of the world's population, profess Jesus Christ as Lord. I want us to take a look at the birth of the church and a look at the devotion of the 120.

WITNESS

Think of the events they witnessed. *To be a part of the 120 is to be a witness of the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.* They witnessed this amazing, supernatural trilogy of events surrounding the Son of God.

Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NLT).

What captivated the 120? They were witnesses. And being "witnesses" forever changed the foundation and the trajectory of their lives: their identity, their values, their mission, their eternity.

They heard His teaching and they witnessed His miracles. They witnessed His compassion for the sinful and His rebuke for the religious. And they witnessed the cross. They saw Him bleed and suffer and die. But they also looked inside the empty tomb, and to their surprise and exhilaration, He was not there. And on the Mount of Olives, they heard His last words, the Acts 1:8 mission. And then they watched His feet hover from the ground as He ascended into heaven. They were witnesses, and so are we.

- Under threat of being beaten Peter declared, "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). He was flogged for saying it.
- Paul expressed the purpose of his life when he said, "I am obligated . . . I am so eager to preach the gospel . . . (and) I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:14-16, NIV). Paul was captivated by the gospel and martyred for it.
- John was 90 years old when he reminisced, "The one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is Jesus Christ . . . he is the one who is eternal life. . . . We are telling you about what we ourselves have actually seen and heard" (1 John 1:1-3, NLT).

Those who witness great events are obligated to tell others what they witnessed.

Elie Wiesel was a victim and a witness of the Holocaust, spending his teenage years inside a Nazi concentration camp. Surviving those horrifying years of unimaginable brutality, Elie Wiesel has been an international voice for racial, religious, and ethnic justice. He has spoken boldly against the indifference of affluent countries while ethnic injustice still exists in our world.

Nelson Mandela was a victim and a witness of Apartheid, and was jailed for 27 years for challenging the system. Mandela became the international face of the anti-apartheid movement and was eventually elected the President of post-apartheid South Africa.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was a victim and witness of Communism. Solzhenitsyn was sent to a Siberian labor camp for 11 years for criticizing Stalin. Later exiled from the Soviet Union, he exposed the evils of the Communist regime. Before his death, Solzhenitsyn celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of Communism in Eastern Europe.

The Holocaust, Apartheid, and Communism are the great atrocities of the 20th century. Each one is a thing of the past because the witnesses spoke up. We are children of God today because the 120 spoke up. They witnessed the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. They were devoted because of what they had seen. They could not deny what they had seen or what they had experienced, and neither can we. We too are witnesses. To the degree that we have been captivated by what we have seen and experienced will be the degree to which we will speak up.

POWER

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.” (Acts 1:8, NLT). ***To be a part of the 120 is to be empowered with the Holy Spirit.***

Before His ascension, Jesus said, “I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49, ESV).²

Jesus knew that the Christian life would be difficult. That’s why the Holy Spirit is called “the Helper.”³ And that’s why Jesus left a part of Himself to be with us and to be in us. “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16, NAS). “The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you” (Romans 8:11, NLT). Jesus calls us to live Spirit-filled lives. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”

Power to do what? Again, Jesus promised, “Anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father” (John 14:12, NLT). “Even greater works.” As I recently heard someone say, He puts His “super” in your “natural.” The Spirit-filled life means no longer living in our flesh, no longer relying on our ability or willpower. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, as Paul explained, means “not that we are competent in ourselves ... but our competence comes from God” (2 Corinthians 3:5, NIV).

To be a part of the 120 is to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

LORDSHIP

To be a part of the 120 is adore Jesus as Savior and revere Him as Lord. Imagine the emotion of witnessing the ascension.

⁹After saying this, ***he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching***, and they could no longer see him. ¹⁰As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them.

¹¹“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!” (Acts 1:9-11, NLT).

The cross proved that Jesus was the Lamb of God. The resurrection proved that Jesus was the Son of God. The ascension proved that Jesus was the Lord of the Kingdom. Jesus “is the radiance of His (Father’s) glory and the exact representation of His (Father’s) nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When (Jesus) He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3, NAS).⁴

He sat down on His throne. “Heaven is My throne” (Acts 7:49). “The Lord is in his holy Temple; the Lord still rules from heaven. He watches everyone closely, examining every person on earth” (Psalm 11:4, NLT).

John was allowed a peek into heaven and this is what he saw.

¹Then as I looked, I saw a door standing open in heaven, and (a) voice said, “Come up here ...” ²And instantly I was in the Spirit, and ***I saw a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it.*** ³The one sitting on the throne was as brilliant as gemstones—like jasper and carnelian. And the glow of an emerald circled his throne like a rainbow. ⁴Twenty-four thrones surrounded him, and twenty-four elders sat on them. They were all clothed in white and had gold crowns on their heads. ⁵From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder.” (And four angelic beings⁵ flew around the throne and) day after day and night after night they keep on saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty— the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come.” ⁹Whenever the living beings give glory ... ¹⁰the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne ... And they lay their crowns before the throne and say, ¹¹“You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased.” ... ¹²And they sang in a mighty chorus: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered— to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.” ¹³And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They sang: “Blessing and honor and glory and power belong ***to the one sitting on the throne*** and to the Lamb forever and ever.” (Revelation 4:1-11, 5:12-13, NLT).

The title “Lord” is used 8,000 times in the Bible. Jesus is the central character of the Bible and the central character of the universe. He is the Lord of the Kingdom. “The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice” (Psalm 97:1, NAS). “The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble” (Psalm 99:1, NAS). “Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2:11, NAS).

To be captivated by Jesus, to be devoted to Jesus, is to say, “Jesus, You are my Savior and my Lord. I adore You, I worship You, and I will follow You wherever You lead.”

MOVEMENT

After the ascension,

¹²The apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile. ¹³When they arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying.... ¹⁴***They all met together and were constantly united in prayer,*** along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus. ¹⁵... ***about 120 believers were together in one place*** ... (Acts 1:12, 14-15, NLT).

The 120 were bound together because they shared an intense experience. But the 120 became more than just a community, they became a movement. ***To be a part of the 120 is to be a part of a movement that changes people’s eternity.***

The Great Commission is to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that” Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20, NAS). The message is “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV).

The movement is the gospel. The movement is about changing people’s eternity. Jesus left the message of the gospel and the future of the church in the hands of 120 faithful few.

John Wesley once said, “Give me 100 men who fear nothing but sin and love nothing but God and I will shake England.” That’s the type of person God is looking for too. The faithful few, the abandoned few.

The Acts 1 movement was to move beyond Jerusalem, into Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. It was bigger than the 120 and it was beyond their generation. Jesus entrusted the gospel message and the future of the church into the hands of 120 people, and Jesus entrusts the gospel message and the future of the church in our hands today. We are responsible for what happens in the name of Christ in 2009. And God is doing something beyond Fellowship Bible Church, something beyond Roswell, Georgia, something beyond our generation. But we are a part of the movement and each of us has our part.

SHIPWRECK

Acts 1 gives us a warning. **[PPT] *To be a part of the 120 is to dread the possibility of spiritual shipwreck.***

Judas. The name stirs up contempt. No one names their son Judas. But why talk about Judas? His story is in the past. The 120 were anticipating the future, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the launching of a new movement. So why talk about Judas? Because 1:17 states, “Judas was one of us and shared in the ministry with us” (Acts 1:17, NLT).

¹⁵During this time, when about 120 believers were together in one place, Peter stood up and addressed them. ¹⁶“Brothers,” he said, “the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. ¹⁷***Judas was one of us and shared in the ministry with us.***” ¹⁸(Judas had bought a field with the money he received for his treachery. Falling headfirst there, his body split open, spilling out all his intestines. ¹⁹The news of his death spread to all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means “Field of Blood.”) ²⁰Peter continued, “This was written in the book of Psalms, where it says, ‘Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.’ It also says, ‘Let someone else take his position.’ (Acts 1:15-20, NLT).

They pondered the failure of Judas because he was one of them. His life was a sober warning against spiritual shipwreck. And it is sobering to thinking about one of your friends falling away.

The tragedy of Judas’ life is that he had every opportunity.⁶ He walked with Jesus every step of the way for three years. He too was a witness. He heard every word and witnessed every miracle. He enjoyed camaraderie with the other disciples. He professed Jesus. He participated in ministry. When Jesus predicted that one of the disciples would betray Him, none of them suspected Judas.⁷

He was so close to Jesus, yet his heart was so far away. Judas reveals that it is possible to profess Jesus, to serve Jesus, and yet be completely hardened by sin and driven by selfish pursuits.

Judas is an extreme case, yet spiritual shipwreck is a possibility for all of us. No, we wouldn't think of betraying Jesus or denying our faith or handing Him over to be crucified. But the thing that makes spiritual traitors out of many Christians today is pursuit of lifestyle. The root of our temptation is not much different from Judas. It's greed, self-interest, self-preservation, the pursuit of lifestyle. It's money, sex, and power.

It's so easy to drift. And I believe it happens for two reasons: apathy and arrogance. Those who drift and shipwreck are apathetic, complacent, and don't pay attention. Those who drift and shipwreck are usually filled with arrogance, pride, and dare to say "I would never do that." The Bible says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18, NIV). "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12, NAS). "Don't be so naive and self-confident. You're not exempt. You could fall flat on your face as easily as anyone else" (1 Corinthians 10:12, MSG).

That's why Paul wrote to Timothy about Phygelus and Hermogenes who "turned away" (2 Timothy 1:15). He wrote to him about Hymenaeus and Alexander, who "rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith" (1 Timothy 1:19). He wrote to Timothy about Demas, whom Paul said "has deserted me" (2 Timothy 4:10). These men got their names in the Bible for defecting, for drifting, for shipwreck. Timothy knew these people. He knew of their great faith and he knew of their great fall. Paul described them as "holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" and told Timothy to "avoid such men as these" (2 Timothy 3:5, NAS). Paul did not want Timothy's name to be added to that list, and God does not want your name added to that list either.

We are so close to Jesus. We have heard more sermons than we can count. Christian media in the form of books, music, television, radio is more readily available than at any other time in history. We are drenched in Christian truth, Christian lingo, Christian community, and yet, could Paul's description be a description of us? "Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2 Timothy 3:5, NAS).

The 120 pondered the failure of Judas and realized that spiritual shipwreck was a possibility for anyone. "For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it" (Hebrews 2:1).

ASSIGNMENT

To be a part of the 120 is to accept God's assignment for your life.

The person to replace Judas had to be someone who traveled with Jesus and who witnessed the resurrection. Casting lots was the way they decided who it should be. Two stones were placed inside a jar with a small opening so that only one stone could come out at a time. Each stone was etched with each man's name. The first stone that came out was considered to be God's choice. Matthias was chosen by lots to replace Judas.⁸

But there's more happening in the upper room than the choice of Matthias. Each of the 120 was chosen. Each of the 120 was a witness. Each of the 120 had an assignment placed on their lives by God, and so do each of us. And what is that assignment? To be His witnesses. To tell what we have seen and heard. To be so captivated by His love that others want to know Him too.

CONCLUSION

What is Acts 1 really about? What is Christianity really about? Yes, it's about the birth of the church. Yes, it's the launching of a movement. But mostly, it is a story of devotion to Jesus Christ. It's about a commitment of love. It's about being captivated by Jesus Christ.

“For Christ's love compels us,” because Jesus died for us! “For Christ's love compels us . . . that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, NIV). ***Jesus loved us enough to give His life for us. Do you love Him enough to give your life to Him?***

NOTES

1. We are entering a study of the book of Acts called *Your Kingdom Come*. It's about a movement of God, a movement which we are invited to join. "During the forty days after his crucifixion, (Jesus) appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about **the Kingdom of God**" (Acts 1:3, NLT). The followers of Jesus had a hard time thinking about the kingdom in any other way than a political kingdom. They longed for deliverance from Roman oppression. They longed for a Messiah to set them and to establish peace. And the Messiah would set people free and establish peace, but not in a political way. When Jesus talked about the kingdom, He was not talking about political or geographical government. He was not talking about a kingdom outlined on a map, but a kingdom governing a person's heart. Jesus said, "I must preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43, NAS). And He also said, "Unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John 3:3, NLT).
2. Jesus repeated this instruction in Acts 1:4-5.
3. See John 14:16, 26, 15:26, 16:7, 13.
4. Think of all the opposition Jesus faced, of all the efforts to stop Him and thwart God's plan. But the Pharisees could not stop Him. The Romans could not stop Him. Judas could not stop Him. Satan could not stop Him. Jesus won an absolute victory over sin, over death, and over Satan. "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57, ESV). With certainty Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18, ESV). He is invincible, unstoppable.
5. See Revelation 4:6-7 for a description of these angelic beings.
6. If it was prophesied that Judas betray Jesus, then Judas never had a chance. Calvin himself, for all his emphasis on the sovereignty of God, wrote: "Judas may not be excused" because his betrayal was prophesied, "since he fell away not through the compulsion of the prophecy but through the wickedness of his own heart." John Calvin, *Institutes of Religion*, Volume I, page 40. Quoted by Stott in *The Message of Acts*, page 55.
7. See John 13:21-30.
8. Judas had to be replaced so that there would be 12 apostles seated with Jesus in heaven. This is also evidence that Judas would not be in heaven. Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28, NAS). Even as the church was birthed, there was this preparation for the heavenly kingdom.