

**Stick To The Plan**  
**Acts 1:12-26 (ESV)**

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We're going to be reading from Acts chapter 1. We have started a new series, *God on the Move*. He is on the move in our days. He's working in a successful, effective way. He does so through His church. Oftentimes, it seems very subtly, but nonetheless, surely and effectively. And that's the story of the book of Acts. It is God working through His people who are weak and fallen, but who are redeemed and granted the Spirit to affect all of human history, to move this world toward one great conclusion, a climactic event in which Jesus Christ receives glory that is due Him. Every knee bows and every tongue confesses. That's what we're about. The story has continued to be written and we're reading about the beginning of Jesus' work through His church here in Acts.

*12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. 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. 14 All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.*

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

May God encourage us through His Word, today!

What is happening in our country? I know that's on the minds of many, if not all of you. We scratch our head and we wonder. Over the last several months we have seen lawless riots in major cities all through our country. This past week we witnessed a lawless riot at our nation's Capitol building. In addition to these incredible disruptions, we witness boiling hostilities, people hostile toward people. We see racial animosity, cold-hearted abortions, sexual immorality of every variety celebrated, the advance of suicidal despair, more brokenness in families, deep and abiding hatred of God, the exaltation of self, and hearts filled with covetousness and severe condemnation, fingers pointing outward with an angry face. All these and more abound in our community, in our country, and I believe, also inside Jesus' precious church. What is happening? I believe we are witnessing the effects of a long but steady march away from God. That march away from God is not new. It's been happening, I believe, for decades. But the effects of that long, steady march away from God are coming home.

Now, I want to encourage you today. I want to lift up your spirits. Brothers and sisters, do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in Jesus. God is sitting on the throne and He is working His perfect plan in a perfect way. Every detail of human history is being used by God, formed and fashioned to fulfill His will. And that will ends in a splash, an amazing display of glory where His Son returns and His Son receives the glory that is due Him. On that day, every knee bows, every tongue confesses. All that is upside down and messed up and chaotic and conflicting in this world is set right. God is ruling over the affairs of men. He is successfully pursuing His program. He is not failing.

True, God often acts in human history in ways that are mysterious to our thinking. Think of these eleven guys in this room when they saw their Lord, who promised to bring in the kingdom, die upon a cross. What is happening? What is God doing? They had to have been asking this exact same question. We don't know why God chooses to do and act in ways that are different from the ways we would act if we were God. Except we know that as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are God's ways higher than our ways. God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts. When God fashions out His plan for human history for these present times, God did not consult me. It's shocking! And He doesn't consult you and He doesn't consult anyone. He just acts on His own, independently of all because He is the one who is ultimately wise. Man in rebellion against God never prevails, never thwarts God's design. Not once! Not an atom is moved apart from God's perfect design, using even the evil and sinfulness of man's heart to bring about His perfect conclusion. God alone is ultimate.

It's important, I believe in all times, but especially times of turmoil and trial, to reflect upon God's sovereignty. It is this truth about God that becomes our great comfort when it seems as though all is in chaos, because all is not in chaos. Let's reflect on just a few of the many verses that God gives us to describe His character.

**Isaiah 45:7** I form light and create darkness;

Stop there for a moment. God is not the author of evil, but He creates darkness.

**Isaiah 45:7** I make well-being and create calamity;

Have you ever thought about that? The Lord says, “I create calamity. Do you think that one calamitous event happens apart from me?”

**Isaiah 45:7** I am the LORD, who does all these things.

**Isaiah 46:9b-10** I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning

How is it that God can declare the end from the beginning? Because He superintends the end from the beginning.

**Isaiah 46:10** and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’

Think of that! Every purpose of God is accomplished. Not one fails.

**Psalms 115:3** Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

I love 1 Chronicles chapter 29. It’s one of my favorite set of verses.

**1 Chronicles 29:11-12** Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

God is never surprised by the downward spiritual spiral of a blessed people. We are often surprised by that, but God is not. In fact, we read of this very thing happening all through the Old Testament among God’s chosen nation. They are a people blessed by God, graced by God, and then this downward spiral into this darkness that is so deep as to be almost unbelievable. What should we do in these times when God seems to be giving our country over to her sins? How should God’s people respond when it seems as though God is releasing us into His judgment?

When the Israelites were turning from the LORD to worship other gods and to participate in all kinds of wickedness, God sent prophets. These prophets gave sermons. There was sermon after sermon. Many of them were prior to the judgment actually falling. People like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, and others. He sent prophets to give sermons, to preach and say “judgment is coming! Judgment is coming!” And in those messages, I think there are two primary responses as you read the Old Testament prophets.

The first response that God gives for His people that are to become their duty during a time leading up to judgment, when the whole community around them was spiraling downward into rebellion and disobedience and idolatry, He says first, repent. Over and

over again, we read, “Repent, repent, turn, turn from your sin. Turn from your willfulness and submit to God.” It’s in times like this that we need to take some time to evaluate areas in our life that we are not aligned with God. As God preaches us sermons through His Word, through His servants, we’re right to take a moment and ask God, “Where is my life off kilter from what You would desire?”

If you were to ask me to create a list of people who you think are to blame for the condition our country is in, I could give you a list. If you said to just give you ten groups or people specifically, who is to blame for the problems that our country is experiencing, can you think of a list? Let me ask you, is your name on the list? If it’s not on the list, we’re not reading God’s Word. God says to put your name at the very beginning and repent. Turn away from anything that’s not in alignment with God. It’s so easy to point a long bony finger of condemnation. “That person, this group!” But God says humble yourself before me. Seek my face. Turn from your wicked ways. God’s blessing is always withdrawn from a willful people. But the good news is God’s blessing is always secured by a humble people. Let us humble ourselves before Him. His blessing is not dependent upon other people humbling themselves. That’s the truth. Now, in this world, we’re going to have tribulation. So I’m not saying our life is going to be a bed of roses if we humble ourselves before the Lord right now. I am just saying God’s permanent eternal blessing will be ours. That’s the good news as we seek Him.

The second duty, and it’s the duty that we’re going to spend the rest of the morning talking about is the duty for us to wait on the Lord. All through the prophets, God tells His people that they have a joyful future. Yes, judgment is coming, but that doesn’t mean He is releasing the promises that He gave to them to bless them. There is going to be a future day when the fulfillment of His promises will come true. And now is the time to simply wait upon him to bring that future joy into the present. That future joy is not present, so wait on me. It seems like we are in one of these times. Yes, there is activity. As we talk through the book of Acts, we’re going to see the call of God to be energized toward Gospel witness. But it seems like it’s also a time when God would have us to wait upon Him; repent and wait. Over and over through the Scriptures, God calls us to wait upon Him. I think of

**Psalm 27:13** I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Why is the Psalmist confident? Is it because he sees other people around finally responding to God and God’s blessing finally flowing into this nation? No. He says, “I am confident that I am going to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living on the basis of God’s promises. God promised that’s going to happen. I believe that’s what is going to happen. I believe I’ll get to be part of that. So what’s our response? Here’s what the Psalmist says.

**Psalm 27:14** Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

Don’t get discouraged. Don’t despair.

**Psalm 37:7** Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;

Take a breath! Instead of allowing our focus to be on everything we see horizontally, take a breath and be still before the LORD. Consider Him and wait patiently for Him. The Psalmist says

**Psalm 37:7** fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

Have you found yourself fretting over evil people who are actually successful in carrying out their plans? God says, “Don’t do that. Instead, be still before the LORD. Know He is the LORD and wait patiently for Him.”

Isaiah prophesied in the first 39 chapters about a coming judgment, but now in chapter 40 begins to say there is hope. I don’t want to leave you with just this dark, dismal expectation of the future. He says there is hope. God is going to bring comfort to the people after the judgment. He says this in Isaiah 40.

**Isaiah 40:31** but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Any season in which we’re tempted to begin to fret, worry, be frustrated, I believe, is a season where God would say to take some time to wait upon Him. So we open up our Bibles to Acts 1:12-26 and we learn from these eleven guys in an upper room, along with one hundred or so more disciples of Jesus, what waiting means. What does it mean to wait upon the Lord?

You remember that Jesus spent 40 days appearing to His disciples after His resurrection. He appears to them in bodily form. And what is He doing? Well, here in Acts 1, we learn that Jesus spends those forty days teaching them about the kingdom of God. That’s the subject that Acts 1:5 tells us is Jesus’ focus. So what we find then in Acts 1 is this great call that God gives to us to simply wait, wait, wait upon Him. As we look at verses 4 and following, what we see is this group of people beginning to discern what it means to take action of waiting on the Lord.

It’s easy for us to begin to consider, during a time of such turmoil or during a time of such need, surely there is something more than just simply passively waiting. Are you telling me, pastor, that what we’re supposed to do is do nothing? What I want you to understand is that waiting on the Lord is not like waiting in a long line at the grocery store, where you’re just sort of passively looking at your time and you’re hoping the people in front of you don’t have coupons or the red light goes on. That’s going to be really terrible! Waiting on the Lord is not that kind of waiting. Waiting on the Lord is this eager expectation of something really joyful about to happen. You’re super confident and you’re doing things in preparation for that.

My son Daniel was just deployed again this week. His wife and little son are waiting for his return. There is a specific day a couple months away when he is supposed to return. But what do they do? They don't just sit at home. They're busy about daily activities, but they're also waiting by talking with Daniel over Facetime. They're praying for them. They're planning for that future day. So it's a very active kind of waiting. It's a very energetic kind of waiting. The main idea that we're going to learn here is that this chapter teaches us to wait, don't worry. Whenever we're tempted to worry, God says to take some time to wait. Look at the end of verse 4. So He tells them not to depart from Jerusalem. Stay in the city. Don't get busy with other things.

**Acts 1:4** but to wait for the promise of the Father

They're not told how long they are to wait. He says it's not going to be many days. So we know it's a short amount of time, but they don't know how many days. It ends up being a period of ten days. We're going to find that out next week. So what do we do while we wait on the Lord? There are four actions that this passage unveils for us that waiting involves.

**Action #1: We long for Jesus to return.**

I'm going to spend a good deal of time just on this one because it seems to be so prominent here in this first chapter. So Jesus is with them for those forty days after His bodily resurrection and He is teaching them about this theme that Luke describes as the kingdom of God at the end of verse 3. He wants them to know the meaning behind His death upon the cross, how that relates to the kingdom of God and Him being the king who comes to suffer for the sins of mankind. But He also wants them to know that His death on the cross doesn't change the other parts of this kingdom. This Messiah is going to receive great glory. He is going to establish an earthly throne where He will then establish His earthly reign and all this messed up world will be set right. Even in its fallen state, it's going to be set right by the king who comes to rule and establish His glory on earth. So yes, the kingdom of God is present spiritually. Undoubtedly, Jesus unfolded that. There are parts of this kingdom that were promised all through the Old Testament that are present right now. And this kingdom is also yet future. There are parts of this kingdom that they are to wait upon, that will come and that will be received by them. So for forty days, He is speaking to them about the kingdom.

I don't know what passages of Scripture He used. I believe Jesus was teaching them through Scripture because that's what He always has done and continues to do. Let me just unfold a couple of passages that speak of the kingdom of God prior to the coming of Jesus that I believe are part of this teaching that Jesus gave to these disciples. First is Isaiah chapter 11. It's one of my favorite descriptions because it's so concrete, the imagery of what this kingdom is going to be like. So Isaiah, underneath the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes this about this kingdom.

**Isaiah 11:6** The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,

Think of that. That doesn't happen right now because the lamb will be eaten in short order. When the king comes, He establishes a kingdom in which even peace among the animal kingdom takes place because the king's rule is so vast, so powerful that it even impacts animals as well as weather patterns. He goes on to say,

**Isaiah 11:6** and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.

Even the fatted calf can lie down with the lion. A little child shall lead all of these dangerous animals.

**Isaiah 11:7-8** The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

Such will be the glory of the Lord on that day. The impact will be everywhere.

**Isaiah 11:9** They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain;

What's the reference point? The holy mountain is Jerusalem. It says this king centers His rule and reign from His holy mountain.

**Isaiah 11:9** for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Can you imagine that? How do the waters cover the sea? Completely! There is not a place when the king is sitting on the throne that you won't find the knowledge of the LORD filling that place. Can you imagine? Anywhere you go on earth, people are going to know the Lord and talk about the Lord and understand who He is and worship Him.

**Isaiah 11:10** In that day the root of Jesse,

That's an indication that this king comes from David's line because Jesse is David's dad.

**Isaiah 11:10** who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire,

This is not just a kingdom that relates to Israel, but all the nations come to this king who established his throne on the holy mountain in Jerusalem to inquire. In other words, to have him be their king as well.

**Isaiah 11:10** and his resting place shall be glorious.

Then consider Zechariah 14. On the day when God fulfills His plan and brings about the state of His kingdom in the world,

**Zechariah 14:8** On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem,

Jerusalem is a real place. It's a city in Israel. There is going to be living waters flowing from Jerusalem,

**Zechariah 14:8** half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea.

He's talking about the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. And what he is saying is where there is desert now, there's not going to be desert because this king will establish permanent climate change. Such will His control and authority be that He's going to speak to the clouds and where there had never been rain in a desert that is just dry as a bone, there is going to be lush valleys, fruitful harvests. And he says

**Zechariah 14:8-9** It shall continue in summer as in winter. And the LORD will be king over all the earth.

Isn't that amazing?! Is Jesus worthy of that kind of glory? To come and establish a kingdom not just with the eternal state where everyone is already in their fully redeemed place, but in a world that's fallen. Jesus says if this fallen world had accepted me at the beginning, this is what the whole of human history would be like. But it's because you rejected me. But look at my glory even in a fallen world. Look at the authority and the power and the glory that would come if my people would humble themselves and bow before me.

**Zechariah 14:9** On that day the LORD will be one and his name one.

Jesus spends these forty days speaking of this kingdom. So He gives these instructions and He says, now, you're supposed to stay in Jerusalem. Don't depart until the promise of the Father, which is the promise of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. And the first question that pops into their minds when they hear Him tell them to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit is this. Look at verse 6.

**Acts 1:6** "So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Why did they ask this question? Some really good scholars, some really good evangelical commentaries say it's because these apostles are bozos. They say that the disciples just don't understand. They just totally got it wrong. Jesus has talked about the kingdom for forty days and now they ask this stupid question. "When will you restore the kingdom to Israel?" Don't they know that God is never going to restore the kingdom to Israel? That's the theology behind that interpretation. I believe the opposite.

It's a very harsh condemnation on these guys who have seen the resurrected Lord for the past forty days, have sat at His feet and are now on the basis of Acts 1, completely obedient to Him, to say that they just misunderstood everything, still. Why then did they ask this question? There are a number of answers. First, I would say because Jesus has been talking about the kingdom for the past forty days. In other words, He has given them a hunger for the kingdom. He has talked about these prophecies we just read and they

said, “Is this the time now? We’re longing for the time. We understand that the death of the suffering servant was necessary in order to bring atonement for sin. But when is this day going to be, when the Son is going to set upon His throne and establish His glory on earth? When is that going to be? We’re excited about that. Secondly, they asked this question because Jesus often taught about the coming of an earthly, literal kingdom throughout His ministry. So, in Matthew 19, for instance, Jesus says to these same guys,

**Matthew 19:28** Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

There are twelve guys, remember? He’s speaking to these twelve guys who will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. That’s what the restoration of Israel is about. When Jesus is king, they’re stewarded with judging over the twelve tribes of Israel in this new kingdom. When is this going to be?

If Jesus told you that you had this special privilege that is a privilege of grace, you didn’t earn it. You didn’t deserve it. You’re not worthy of it. But if He told you that you have this privilege of actually in this new kingdom when Jesus is on the throne and all these changes take place in the world to actually be one of the guys to sit on the twelve thrones, wouldn’t you ask, “When is this going to happen? We’re excited about it. You promised it. When is it going to take place? Is this the time?”

And finally, I believe they asked this question because they understood something really important that God taught about this kingdom in the Old Testament. I think this is really the crux of the reason why they asked. Remember, Jesus has just told them you have to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit comes and you’re baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Look at Ezekiel 39 for a moment and see how God had already told His people that the coming of the Spirit is going to coincide with the coming of this new kingdom. That’s the issue, and they had read their Bibles. So if the Holy Spirit is going to come in not many days, that must mean then that the kingdom must be coming as well in just a few days. So when is it going to happen? Look at Ezekiel 39.

**Ezekiel 39:25** “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob

Did you catch that? They asked when will the kingdom be restored to Israel? It’s the same word.

**Ezekiel 39:25, 28** “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name...Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God,

This is the whole house of Israel. Remember, these guys are living at a time when they know that the Jewish leaders and the Jewish population has just crucified Jesus. They have rejected Him. But they know when the kingdom comes, there is going to be this

great conversion. The whole nation is going to bow at the feet of Jesus. When is it going to happen? They're passionate for Jesus' name sake. Ezekiel goes on to say, describing this future day when there is a restoration of the fortunes of the house of Israel.

**Ezekiel 39:29** And I will not hide my face anymore from them,

In other words, God releases judgment from them.

**Ezekiel 39:29** when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD.”

So when the fortunes are restored to Israel, the Spirit is poured out on Israel. Jesus has just said that the Spirit is going to be poured out not many days from now. So they ask the question, “when will the fortunes of Israel be restored?” It's a biblical question. How does Jesus respond to this question?

**Acts 1:7** He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

As you know from reading the Gospel, Jesus is not shy about correcting His disciples when they need to be corrected. So you remember that He often says, “O, you of little faith. O, you slow to believe. Haven't you read the prophet? Haven't you read your Bibles?” Oftentimes He did that to correct them. So if these guys are so far off the mark with their question, we would expect Jesus to say, “O, you of little faith. You haven't been listening to me for forty days, talking about the kingdom? Have you missed it by that much?” He doesn't say that, does He? He listens to the question and He answers it with revelation. He doesn't answer it with rebuke. He answers it with revelation. He says, “Good question. It's not for you to know the times. I know you're asking me when. That's the question; when? On that part, when the nation is restored, Israel to glory through Jesus being on the throne, it's not for you to know the times. The Father has set that time.” He doesn't say, “The Father has never set a time.” He says, “The Father has already fixed a time. It's going to happen, but it's not for you to know.” Well, what are we to do right now? Here's what you're to be concerned about, because we don't know the time when this future restoration of the kingdom to Israel will take place. Here's what is the focus.

**Acts 1:8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,

And here is what the Father would have us do in this time.

**Acts 1:8** and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Then Jesus ascends into heaven and the disciples are told in verse 11,

**Acts 1:11** This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

These two men actually communicate to them that Jesus will return. Why is that? Because these men are telling these disciples that it’s right for them to look not just passively up in the sky like they’re doing, but to still have in their hearts this expectation of the coming of Jesus to the earth to receive glory and to rule with authority. God wants us to wait on Him by expecting, anticipating, loving, longing for His appearing. He feeds these disciples with that notion. We could track it through the rest of the New Testament as well. It’s this notion that it’s really important for God’s people to be ready, to stay alert, and to have this joyful anticipation of Jesus’ future return. Let me just read a few of the many verses in which we as believers are urged to wait on the Lord by longing for the appearing of Jesus. They’re all over the place. In 2 Timothy, Paul is at the end of his life. He says

**2 Timothy 4:8** Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

In other words, “it’s a reward of grace that I’ve remained faithful to the Lord. The Lord promised that anyone who remains faithful to Him will receive this reward. And He’s going to reward this crown of righteousness to me on that day, but as I write this, I want you all to know it’s not just a special award to me. It’s an award that is available to all those who have loved Jesus’ appearing.”

Let me ask you, do you think that reward of grace would be yours? Have you lived a life in which you have loved, loved, loved the appearing of Jesus? If we do, then this award is ours. It’s what Paul did. We can read in every letter about how much he loved and thought about the coming of Jesus.

**1 John 3:2** Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Do you sense the heart of John, longing and loving for this appearing? We’ll see Him in glory and it will be such a vision of glory that we’ll be transformed by it. John just loves this appearing of the Lord.

**1 Thessalonians 1:10** and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

We’re waiting for Him.

**Titus 2:13** waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

We're waiting for this blessed hope.

**Hebrews 9:28** so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

I love that!

**Philippians 3:20** But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

We're waiting. We're looking forward. We're longing for His appearing. And then Jesus says in Revelation,

**Revelation 16:15** Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake,

Blessed is the one who loves His appearing; who longs for it and is ready to receive Him. Waiting on the Lord means longing for Jesus' second coming. I do belabor this truth in this one point for a moment here this morning, because the New Testament is full of references to us to long for, expect, anticipate, be ready for the coming of Jesus. And yet, how many modern believers live with the glorious appearing of Jesus in view? How many believers go day after day, week after week, month after month without thinking of that day at all? Is it any wonder then why believers, when they watch the news and they watch the downward spiral, have the same kind of angst, the same kind of worry, the same kind of frustration, the same kind of anger that the world has? It's because we're not loving the appearing of Jesus. Wait on the Lord. Let's wait on the Lord and let's encourage each other. I need encouragement and to hear other believers say, "Jesus is coming back. Won't that be a great day?" Let's talk about it. We long for Jesus to return. That's what waiting entails.

**Action #2: We obey the Lord's clear commands.**

In verse 3, Jesus tells the disciples to go to Jerusalem and don't depart from there. Wait! What do they do?

*12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet,*

The idea is that Luke wants us to know the disciples obeyed the Lord as they waited on the Lord. They waited for these ten days. They weren't told how many, so by a week, you can imagine them saying, "It's been a week. He said not many days. We expected the Holy Spirit to have come by now. What are we going to do? We're just sitting here in Jerusalem." You can imagine Peter, James and John thinking of all the fish in the Sea of Galilee that could have been caught in that time. You can also imagine they're excited about doing ministry because Jesus talked to them about their ministry. And He talked about that when the Holy Spirit comes they're going to be witnesses. They remembered and reflected back that when Jesus was on earth, He sent them out two by two and how they did miracles in the name of Jesus and how they preached sermons and how lives

were changed. It would have been easy for them to say, "Let's get busy here. Let's get out of Jerusalem. We're tired of just sitting in this one dusty room." There were about 120 of them. It had to have been a big room in Jerusalem. They're sitting and waiting. Again, I think they're active. I think they're talking about the coming of the Lord. They're opening the Scriptures. We're going to see that they're praying, certainly. So it's not like they're doing nothing. This is a command that I think it would be tempting to stray from it.

It is simple obedience to God's clear commands that is a necessary part of waiting. Simple obedience is obeying God even when we don't understand the wisdom of His commands. The commands which we affirm and agree with and say, "Yes, that's right. That's good. That's what I want to do, anyway," is really not obedience. It's obedience, but it's not a tested obedience. Let me put it that way. There are a lot of commands that God gives us that we would say, "Yes, that's the way I want to live. That's the way I would live even if God didn't say that." Because we just see the goodness of the command. But what about those commands that God gives us that we find troublesome? Perhaps we even find them to be irksome?

We find these commands and it seems as though they're going to get in the way of our happiness, of our own glory, of our own success. What do we do when God commands something that frankly, in our hearts, we just don't want to do? What about the command to forgive when someone has hurt us so deeply and they're not repentant? They're not acknowledging the hurt. In fact, they're trying to even continue to do more hurt. And we see the command "love your enemies. Bless those who persecute you." What do we do with that command? What do we do with the command to live sexually pure lives when we're in a relationship that's not sexually pure and we love that relationship? There's a closeness. There's a joy in it. What do we do with that command? What do we do with these commands that would move us away from financial success or career attainment? What do we do with commands that have to do with seek first His kingdom and His righteousness? What do we do then? Well, our flesh naturally just rationalizes and justifies and pushes them out of sight.

Let me ask you a question. Are there any commands from the Lord that you have a hard time affirming their goodness for you in your life? This is the test of simple obedience. Waiting on the Lord requires us and calls us to actively obey Jesus by faith. Waiting is listening to the Lord's instructions and placing ourselves under His rule. That's what waiting is. As you think about waiting, I want you to stop there for a moment, too, and just not flow past into the next action point until you settle this in your heart. Is there anything right now, as you consider your life, that you're not submitting yourself over to the Lordship of Jesus? That's where the Lord would have you pray and converse and ultimately yield.

### **Actions #3: We pray together with others.**

Waiting always involves prayer.

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

Evidently His brothers were converted. So for ten days, 120 people gathered physically together in a room in Jerusalem. They were spiritually united. They were with one accord. And you might underline that they're devoting themselves to prayer. It's not the only time that phrase is going to be used, here. It's going to be used of the church after the Holy Spirit comes, as well. But the emphasis here is not on personal private prayer, but on corporate prayer. They were together devoting themselves to prayer corporately. Now again, private prayer is an important matter of discipleship, of following Jesus, of living for His glory. It's right to have regular habits of private prayer. But here, waiting on the Lord includes corporate prayer. God's church is personal. Waiting on the Lord involves personal relationships that are devoted to prayer.

Christian friend, I want to ask you: do you have any commitments in your life where you are praying together in a devoted committed way with other believers? Again, this is an area where I believe that many believers, many Christians go week after week without meaningful committed connection to other believers in prayer. Here at Bethany we urge commitment to formal times of corporate prayer, like through our Wednesday night prayer time and Small Groups and ABC classes and Bible Studies of all kinds. In a pandemic, these are often hard. We acknowledge that. I encourage you to commit to formal times of corporate prayer. It strengthens the church. It glorifies Jesus. It helps us to wait together. It encourages others to wait on the Lord. But also, I would urge you and encourage you on the basis of God's Word to devote yourself to creating informal times of corporate prayer. What do I mean by that?

Kimberly and I were having devotions one morning this week when I received a phone call. It was a brother from our church. He said, "Hey, Pastor Ritch." He said, "I was thinking of you and I was praying for you. I wanted to ask you, how is Daniel doing?" I told him like three weeks ago that Daniel was to be deployed to the Middle East about this week. I told him that Daniel made it over to the Middle East. He said, "Well, I want to just pray with you." And he said also, "How is your wife, Kimberly?" Three weeks ago, I told him Kimberly had had some health issues. "How is your wife, Kimberly? I want to pray for her, too." So I put him on speakerphone and we just listened as he poured out his heart to God for us. I prayed for him, too, and his family. At the end, Kimberly looked me and she said, "That was an amazing gift." I know as a pastor I have more people that do that for me than most people have. But I want you to know as you look around at your brothers and sisters, it is an amazing gift. It's what waiting on the Lord means. It means I'm going to ask God to prompt me, to help me think about people I wouldn't ordinarily call. This guy doesn't call me every week or every month. He just called me on this day and said, "I want to pray with you and for you." It had a powerful impact! What a powerful impact if we as a church would just simply be that kind of people as we waited on the Lord. Waiting on the Lord means praying with other believers over the things that are important to God. That's what this group did.

**Action #4: We search the scriptures.**

I wish we had time to break this apart.

*15 In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, 16 “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled,*

The implication is that they had been reading the Scriptures together. And he says the Scripture had to be fulfilled

*which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas,*

He talked about Judas and Judas’ end, even though he had been included in the ministry of Christ and had such an opportunity to be on one of the twelve thrones of the twelve tribes of Israel and this future kingdom. And he squandered the opportunity. There are going to be twelve tribes. There are twelve thrones. We need a twelfth person. So that’s the reason why there had to be twelve. Why couldn’t there just be eleven apostles? What harm is there in that? We don’t hardly know what at least eight of the apostles even did. We know very little about them. Why would there have to be another apostle? And also, there are two good guys. Why not put both of them on there? Why not thirteen? Here’s the answer. It’s because of what Jesus taught about the kingdom. There are twelve tribes. There are twelve thrones. Here’s what the kingdom is going to be like. We need another person to occupy that throne in that kingdom. That’s the issue.

Then Peter says that what you saw with Judas was not God sort of losing grasp on human history. What you saw with Judas is not God saying, “Oh boy! How did this happen? What’s my plan B?” Judas did this in fulfillment of Scripture. God anticipated this for hundreds of years before Judas betrayed Jesus. Don’t think of Judas, who was with us from the very beginning, who we trusted, don’t think of that as some aberration that God sort of lost control over anything. God promised that this kind of thing was going to happen, in the Scripture. It’s an affirmation of God’s absolute control.

The large point that I would just make here at the end of this time is that God’s people are searching the Scriptures to discover God’s plans and purposes, and they’re doing that together. And they’re talking about it. That’s one of the reasons why we open up God’s Word every Sunday morning. Waiting on the Lord means that we search the Scriptures and we do so together. It means we’re a people of the Book and we talk to one another about what we’re discovering from God through His Word.

So I would ask you, are you actively searching the Scriptures to shape your heart as you respond to national troubles and to personal trials? This is the season that I would commend for you to turn off the television on that editorial news channel, to shut down your social media. Or if you post on social media, how about this? For just one month, every post is going to be a post of Scripture. How about that? Wouldn’t that be a great idea? Just say, “I’m done commenting. I’m just going to present Scripture and I’m not trying to select Scripture to put a jab at people. I’m trying to select Scripture to be an encouragement and to exalt Christ.” How about that? Because waiting on the Lord means we’ve become devoted to searching God’s Word. God blesses us as we wait on Him.

The last issue I want to talk with you about, because there are some here who can't wait on the Lord because you don't know the Lord. Until you come into this kingdom of heaven through faith in Christ, this future is not yours. And I want you to know that God loves you and He invites you into His kingdom. He gave His Son, Jesus, to die upon the cross so that you could be part of this kingdom, so that you could have a future. God loves you so, so very much.

I was talking to my three-year old grandson this week. He came over to our house and I said, "Malakai, who loves you?" I want to ask you that question. Who loves you? There are a lot of people in this world who say, "I don't know if anybody loves me." Malakai smiled and he said, "Gigi loves me." That's what we call Kimberly. And then he thought a little while and said, "OG loves me." That's my name. And then he said, "Mommy loves me." And each time, he had this huge smile on his face. Isn't it awesome and joyful to be loved? And then he said, "And Daddy loves me. Daddy loves me so, so, so much." I just rejoice because I love that Malakai knows that he is loved and I love that my son is communicating love and that Malakai is loved so, so, so much.

I want you to know that God loves you so, so, so, so much. He loves you more than any other human could. God loves you and He calls you to Himself and He calls you into His kingdom, the kingdom of His Son. Believe on Him and you will be saved.