

PM Acts 1:12-26

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 September 2024

Preacher: Rev Duncan Peters

[0 : 00] from the Holy Bible, from the book of Acts, chapter 1. It's on page 1095 of the Church Bible.

So we're going to take up the reading in verse 12 and read to the end of the chapter. If you were here last time I preached here in Dumfries, we looked at the beginning of Acts, chapter 1.

And I thought I would sort of follow that on and whenever I'm here, just preach from the book of Acts. So it will be a bit intermittent because I'm not here maybe every six or seven weeks or so. But I hope that won't be too disjointed and even if you've missed some, hopefully each passage you'll gain benefit and blessing from.

So Acts is an amazing book. It's a wonderful book. It kind of bridges a gap in the New Testament because on the one hand you've got four Gospels that give accounts of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 13] And then you've got lots of letters, most of them written by Paul but also by others like Peter and James and Jude. And they give a lot of teaching about what we should believe, how we should live.

And there's bits of information in there about Paul and Peter and others but not that much. And Acts kind of bridges that gap because it follows on from the Gospels, particularly Luke's Gospel because it was written by Luke.

And it tells us what happened after Jesus ascended into heaven. And it kind of provides a context for those letters.

Tells us about Paul and his life, who he was, and Peter, and what they did, where they went to, and those kind of things. So Acts is an invaluable book in the New Testament.

So I want us to read, so chapter 1, it begins, the first 11 verses, just deal with the time between Jesus rising from the dead on that first Easter Sunday and then being taken up into heaven 40 days later.

[2 : 32] And over that 40-day period, Jesus appeared to his disciples a number of times. And in verse 8, he says to the disciples, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

And then we read about the ascension, Jesus being taken up to heaven. And then we take up the reading in verse 12. Then they, that's the disciples, returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

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.

All these, with one accord, were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers. In those days, Peter stood up among the brothers.

The company of persons was in all about 120, and said, 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.

[4 : 03] For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. 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.

And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language, Akaldama, that is, field of blood.

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.

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

And they put forward two, Joseph called Bersabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, You Lord who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.

[5 : 28] And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles. May God bless to us that reading of his word.

Let's join together again in prayer. This evening to turn back to the passage that we read, to Acts chapter 1, verses 12 to 26.

One really basic, important question about the Christian message is the question, Is it true?

And how can we know that it is true? It may be that you've grown up in a Christian family and in the orbit of the church.

And sometimes you think, Well, do I believe this just because I was brought up to believe it? Because that's what I was taught from being a child.

[6 : 28] What if I had grown up in a different religious tradition? Would I have just believed that? Is my Christian belief just an accident of birth and the circumstances of my life?

Or maybe you are new to the church and to Christianity and it's interesting and it seems to make great claims.

But how can I know that it's true? That it's right? That it's the right way to believe and order my life? Well, God has thought of these questions and he has provided answers for them in his word, in the scriptures, in the Bible and gives reasons why we should believe the Christian message, why we should be confident in that message.

The message is centered on events in the life of Jesus, of Nazareth. Of course, there's a lot before that but this is the climax of the message and claims that he lived and that he worked miracles, that he taught about the kingdom of God and that he suffered at the hands of his enemies and was crucified.

That he was buried. That on the third day, he was raised from the dead and 40 days later, ascended to heaven. And the whole message, the whole lot stands or falls on whether this happened or not.

[8 : 05] And if it did happen, it is so momentous, so unique, so supernatural, that the message and the claims that it makes have to be true.

But how can we know that these things happened? Well, we can know they happened because Jesus Christ appointed witnesses, in particular apostles, 12 apostles, people who saw and heard these events that surround Jesus Christ, who saw them with their own eyes, who heard them with their own ears, and who gave testimony to others and to the world that these things actually happened.

And that theme of witnesses is a very strong, very important theme in the whole Bible, but especially in the book of Acts. It is the language of the law court.

You know, if something happens, so suppose in the road out there, there's a hit-and-run driver, knocks someone over, and then drives away.

If someone saw that, then that's really crucial in, you know, if they saw the car, maybe even got the number, that would be really crucial in a case, in a court case, if there were more than one, if there were a dozen witnesses, that would be even more certain that you could reach a verdict on that.

[9 : 41] And that is the function of witnesses in, well, in the book of Acts, and in those who were appointed to testify to Jesus Christ and what he did.

And in particular, his resurrection from the dead. So Jesus Christ, at the beginning of his public ministry, his career as a prophet, ensured that these events would be witnessed.

And he did that by choosing twelve companions, disciples, apostles. Mark's account of when Jesus chose them just says he chose them so that they would be with him.

And maybe part of that was because Jesus wanted and needed their company. But it was also so that they could see what happened, what he did, what happened to him.

And they spent three years or so with Jesus, seeing all that he did and climaxing with seeing him alive after his suffering and death.

[10 : 46] But not only that, one of the last things that Jesus did before leaving this world was to give these disciples a task, a mission.

We saw that in the last time I was here when we looked at the beginning of Acts chapter 1. They were to bear witness. They were to give testimony about what they had seen and heard concerning Jesus Christ.

And to do that to everyone to the ends of the earth. And the book of Acts really records their obedience to that command, to that commission.

Beginning where they were in Jerusalem and moving outwards from there to Judea and Samaria and then towards the ends of the earth. Proclaiming these events, the events surrounding Jesus Christ and their significance for the world.

In the book of Acts, many of their speeches are recorded. And God willing, we might come to look at some of those. But in almost all those speeches, you have a line, you have a theme.

[11 : 58] And it is where the apostles say, we are witnesses of these things. They talk about the death, the life, the ministry, the death, and then the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And then they say, we are witnesses of these things. That's repeated again and again in just about every message recorded in the book of Acts. And the apostles' testimony comes down to us today in the writings of the New Testament.

But just one further point. This is kind of all by way of introduction. And it's about the Greek word for witness. And in the New Testament, the Greek word for witness is the word *martus*.

And it's the word from which we get the English word martyr. And there's a connection. And really, I think it's probably in the early years of the sort of the Jesus movement, the church, that that connection sort of came together that a martyr, or in Greek, a *martus*, came to have the meaning one who witnesses, who bears witness even to the point of death, even to death.

One who is prepared to lay down their life for the testimony that they bear. And that is significant, very significant, because some people might suggest that, well, these 12 apostles or these disciples of Jesus just got together and made up a story.

[13 : 35] They fabricated a story about Jesus' resurrection, that he was crucified and they wanted to sort of continue his influence, so they made up this story. But there's at least two things we can say against that.

One is that in the New Testament, we read the ethical standards that these disciples taught. You can read it especially in the epistles, the letters.

And they taught they had a very high value on truth-telling and honesty. They told people to be truthful, to be honest.

And it would seem strange if they were kind of kept banging on about this very high ethic of telling the truth and being honest if it was all based on a lie. That's one thing.

But another thing is that all the apostles suffered for their claims, for their preaching. According to reliable early traditions, almost all of them gave their lives for it.

[14 : 45] They were martyred for their preaching, for their proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, of course it's possible that people may die for a cause that is mistaken.

But they sincerely believe that cause. Nobody who's going to die for something they know is a lie. They're going to say, okay, I confess, it was a lie. And then hopefully escape being martyred for it. But all of these apostles, almost all of them, were martyred and all of them suffered greatly for their claim that Jesus rose from the dead.

They were absolutely convinced that that happened and that they had witnessed it, that they had seen it with their own eyes. They were witnesses. And they were all prepared to back their witness by giving their lives because they were absolutely convinced that it was true that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Well, let's look at the passage. It's an account of the choosing of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot as the twelfth apostle. And it's a very significant passage.

[16 : 03] Nothing more is said about Matthias, and in fact that's true about most of the twelve apostles, in the rest of Acts. But what this passage does is it highlights the role and purpose of apostles in the church of Christ.

the New Testament elsewhere describes the church as being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And it draws attention to the message of the apostles, which was about Jesus and particularly his resurrection.

So, just working our way through the passage, in verses twelve to fourteen, we have a description of the disciples after the ascension. They're back in Jerusalem in the upper room. and it gives a list of the names in verse thirteen.

And it's the same list as the original list in Luke chapter six, where Jesus chooses the original, originally chooses the twelve apostles.

It's the same list minus Judas Iscariot. So there's eleven names here, eleven apostles. And they are still apostles. apostles. It also mentions some of the women disciples, including Jesus' own mother, his mother Mary.

[17 : 23] And also Jesus' brothers. Now, it seems that they had only recently come to believe. In John chapter seven, verse five, we're told that even his own brothers did not believe in him.

But one Corinthians fifteen, verse seven, records a resurrection appearance of Jesus to James, who, in Galatians, is identified as James, the Lord's brother.

And he later became the leader of the Jerusalem church. And possibly Jesus' appearance, resurrection appearance to James, was the source of his belief.

That may have been when he came to believe in Jesus as Messiah and Lord, and possibly his other brothers too. Well, in verses 15 to 22, Peter makes a speech.

And it's concerning getting a replacement for Judas Iscariot. So, first of all, he speaks about the loss of one of the apostles of Judas.

[18 : 25] That in verse 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.

that he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry. Now, Luke adds a comment that is in brackets in this version about what happened to Judas.

That's not part of Peter's speech, that's Luke's editorial comment. But, Peter goes on to speak about the need for choosing a new apostle.

And, he bases it on the scriptures, and that's really important. In fact, almost all the speeches in Acts, they are based on the scriptures, and for them, the scriptures were what we call the Old Testament, the Jewish scriptures.

And, Peter saw in events, the events around Judas' betrayal of Jesus, the fulfillment of scripture. scripture. In fact, he's explicit about that in verse 16.

[19 : 42] The scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Jesus. And, notice the language there, the scripture had to be fulfilled.

In other words, if scripture says something is going to happen, it has to happen, it will happen, because it must be true. And, he adds that the author of the scripture is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit spoke through David. Now, just earlier in the chapter, Jesus himself has spoken about the Holy Spirit will come upon them and give them power to be witnesses.

And, we know that just the night before his suffering, Jesus taught his disciples about another comforter who would come, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit.

And, it's the same Holy Spirit who speaks, who spoke through David and the other writers of scripture. So, we have a real insight here into how Peter and the other apostles understood the scriptures, what they, what, how, what was the nature of scripture, that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

[20 : 54] The Holy Spirit is the author of scripture. It is the Holy Spirit speaking. And, if the Holy Spirit says something is going to happen, then it will happen. It has to be fulfilled.

And, this view of scripture was the same view as, as, as Jesus had. Jesus, in John 10, says that the scripture cannot be broken. Again, it's just, if the scripture says something, then it will happen. Because, it, it can't be, it can't be broken. And, also, they see Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah, and in the events surrounding the Messiah's life and death and resurrection.

And, then, thirdly, they also order their actions according to what the scriptures teach. And, it challenges us to our view of the scriptures of the Bible.

Is it in line with that of Jesus and the apostles? Do we view the scripture as authoritative for us? It's our supreme authority for, for, for what we believe and for how we conduct our lives?

[22 : 03] Well, Peter quotes two particular scriptures from the psalm. Psalm 69, verse 25, and Psalm 109, verse 8.

May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it, and let another take his office. Now, both of these psalms, 69 and 109, are psalms of David, and they record the experiences of David.

David writes them from his own experience. And yet, many parts of such psalms came to be regarded as messianic. That means that they were predicting what would happen to the Messiah, what his experience would be.

They prophesy the experiences of the Messiah. And David, God's king, is regarded as a type of the Messiah.

One who foreshadows him. One who is like a trailer of the Messiah. Who, of course, the Messiah is the son of David. Now, it's not true of every part of these psalms, because, well, for example, in Psalm 69, verse 5, there's a confession of David's sin.

[23 : 22] And, of course, the Messiah, Jesus, did not sin. Nor is every part of David's life like that of Jesus, because there are many faults and sins in David's life, which there are not in that of Jesus.

But there are many parts that do apply to the Messiah's experience. In fact, Jesus himself used the Psalms in this way. In John 13, verse 18, he's talking about Judas' betrayal.

He's predicting Judas' betrayal. And he describes it as to fulfill the scripture. He who has shared my bread has lifted his heel against me. And that's a quotation from Psalm 41, verse 9.

So, again, this is a Psalm of David. Jesus is using that to describe his own experience. And here, in these two Psalms, Psalm 69 and Psalm 109, it speaks of an enemy of David.

And it's applied to an enemy of the Messiah. And of course, there's no more prominent enemy than Judas. And in particular, Psalm 109, verse 8, provides the warrant for choosing a replacement for Judas.

[24 : 39] Let another take his office. It's a prayer that is applied to the Messiah, that another take Judas' place of leadership.

Now, one important aspect of this is that, minus Judas, the number have gone down to 11. Jesus chose 12 apostles. And that number is very significant.

Tom Wright uses the illustration of if you go into a big field and you find lots of groups of 11 boys to school.

And they're kicking a ball around, a round ball around. And there's loads of boys there. They're kicking balls and there's goals.

And then someone comes along and chooses 11 of them. Everybody knows what's happening. 11 is a football team. And in the same way, in the time that Jesus lived in, in Jewish circles, someone choosing 12, 12 was a significant number because 12 was the number of the tribes of Israel.

[25 : 56] There were 12 sons of Jacob and from them the 12 tribes came from. So 12 symbolized Israel. It symbolized the people of God. And by choosing 12 disciples, Jesus is symbolizing that his movement, the movement of his disciples, is the true Israel.

The true people of God, of which the apostles were leaders. Just one comment about when the apostles died because in Acts chapter 12, we read of the martyrdom of James, the brother of John, who was one of the 12.

He was martyred at the hands of King Herod. And there's no mention of any replacement being found for James. Apostleship was a once for all role, a foundational role.

And after an apostle's death, there wasn't like another apostle chosen. But Judas was different because Judas had defected. He had left. And so that is why an apostle is chosen to replace him. But then in verses 21 and 22, we come to the qualifications for an apostle. And an apostle must be a witness.

[27 : 18] In verse 22, well verse 21, so one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 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 of his resurrection.

That's the function of an apostle, it's to be a witness of Jesus' resurrection. And that's the qualification that they had to have been there to witness that and also all the events from the

beginning of Jesus' ministry, when he was baptized by John, to the end when he was taken up into heaven.

And so an apostle had to be a witness of the whole of Jesus' ministry all of that time, but especially there's this emphasis on the resurrection, which, according to Peter in chapter 2, demonstrates Jesus to be both Messiah and Lord, and vindicates all the claims that he made about himself.

So that, it fulfills Jesus' words, just some examples in Luke 24, 48, Jesus said to the disciples, you are witnesses of these things, and that these things refers to Jesus' suffering and death and resurrection.

Or John 15, 26, Jesus says, he, that's the Holy Spirit, will testify about me, but you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

[28 : 48] Acts 1, 8, you will be my witnesses. And it's fulfilled in the speeches of Acts. So let me give you three examples. In Acts 2, 38, Peter says, God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are witnesses of the fact.

Acts 3, 15, Peter again, you killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.

Again, Peter in Acts 10, verse 39, we are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And there are more examples as well.

So then we come to verses 23 to 26, and the response to Peter's proposal.

And they put forward two men who are qualified, Joseph and Matthias. And it seems that perhaps there was nothing to pick and choose between these. They were both equally well qualified to be apostles.

[29 : 57] And so in verse 24, they prayed and said, You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen.

Now, who are they addressing here? They're addressing their prayer to the Lord. Now, we might just think that's God, God the Father. But in Acts so far, when it speaks about the Lord, it's always Jesus that is spoken about.

So especially just in a couple of verses earlier, in verse 21, one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us.

And earlier on too, in verse 6, they addressed Jesus as Lord. And so when they are praying to the Lord, it seems that they're praying to Jesus.

And that is really significant. It's not the first time later on in the book of Acts we find the disciples praying to Jesus, to the Lord Jesus.

[31 : 02] And Jesus is also acknowledged here as the knower of every heart with authority over God's people, over this new Israel, to choose the new apostle to replace Judas.

And what's interesting about this, what's really significant about this, and we find it all through the book of Acts, is that how the Lord God related to Israel in the Old Testament, we now find Jesus, the Lord Jesus, relates in exactly the same way to his disciples.

And it points to just the identity of Jesus Christ as the Lord God himself. So we've seen this process of choosing Matthias as a replacement for Judas.

And it highlights the role of an apostle is that of a witness. Now, if the stories about Jesus that we read of in the Gospels, in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, if these are just myths, or fairy stories, or fables, or religious epics, or whatever you want to call them, just moral stories, that kind of thing doesn't need witness testimony, doesn't need the backing of witnesses.

But the Gospel isn't fairy stories, it isn't myths and fables, it is history, it is claiming that these things actually happened, and that's why it needs witness testimony, eyewitness testimony.

[32 : 51] And that's so important in our own age, as it is indeed in every age. You cannot relativise the Gospel and say, well, if that's what you want to believe, these are nice stories for you, if they inspire you, that's fine, you can't say that.

That's not what the Gospel claims. The Gospel claims that these things happened, in particular times, in particular places. These are hard facts, backed by hard evidence.

So if the Gospels are true, and the accounts actually happened, the Jesus they present is absolutely unique.

He lived a life like no one else, and he died in fulfilment of Old Testament Scripture, and he rose again from the dead, and is alive today, alive in heaven, because he ascended there.

And his resurrection to life vindicates all the claims that he made about himself and everything else. And so, if you haven't read it, then read the Gospels, read these eyewitness accounts, this eyewitness testimony, recorded in the New Testament, look at the evidence for him.

[34 : 16] It's evidence that demands a verdict, a response, and that response is to believe, to place your commitment, your trust, in the Gospel, in Jesus Christ, as the Saviour, and as the Lord.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word to us this evening, we thank you for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that it is written down in these books of the New Testament, and there we have what is really eyewitness testimony of the events of Jesus Christ, of his life and death, and rising from the dead.

And, Lord, we pray that you would help us to believe this and to follow the Lord Jesus, to proclaim him to our lost and needy world, that the truth of these things would impact us and impact those around us.

So help us in this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.