

A Faithful Fellowship

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Date: 08 September 2024

[0 : 00] We're going to begin our worship by singing to God's praise in Psalm 1, in the Scottish Psalter version, Psalm 1, page 200 of the psalm book, and the tune is Argyle. We're going to sing the whole of this psalm.

That man of perfect blessedness who walketh not astray, and counsel of ungodly men, nor stands in sinners' way, nor sitteth in a scorn's chair, but placeth his delight upon God's law, and meditates on his law day and night.

And then we have the promise that there is growth, and that he shall be like the tree that grows near planted by a river, which in a season yields his fruit, and his leaf fadeth never.

We'll sing the whole of this psalm to God's praise, and we stand to sing. Amen. Lord, sing the whole of this psalm.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[1 : 13] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. O day and night, each of me like a tree that grows near the day I are there.

When chingles sing some years is good and is refrained never.

And what he does shall prosper well, thou make it I'm not so, but like they are unto the child which wind rise to and roll.

[3 : 04] In judgment therefore shall and not stand such as the glory are, nor in the strength we hope the just shall bring in the name appear.

For why the ring of God he may unto the Lord is known, when high it's Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer. Let us pray.

Lord, our gracious God, we come before you anew this evening thankful for the very fact that we can call upon your name with that great assurance that as we do, you hear and listen to all our cries.

We thank you, Lord, that no matter what our prayer is, whether it's spoken out loud, whether it's the groaning of our hearts, whether it's even just the sighs that come from us, they are all known to you and they all remind you of all our different needs.

Nothing is hidden from you and for that we give you thanks, O Lord. Lord, we do come acknowledging, Lord, our need of you. We thank you that we do not depend on ourselves for anything in this world.

[5 : 10] And we thank you that you provide for us in so many ways. We thank you for your word. Even as we have sang in that psalm, we are reminded it's the foundation of our lives.

It is what gives us strength. It will give us wisdom and help. It helps us to flourish and to grow. And we thank you that there are so many promises in your word that are our meat day by day.

They are what sustains us, even as we enjoy the many blessings of physical food and water for our bodies. We thank you for your word that is truth to our souls and to our very being and to this world as a whole.

For we live in a world where truth has seen us whatever we want to believe ourselves. Truth has seen us just individualistic in so many ways.

But your truth is so different. It's our foundation. It's our security. And we realize that many will try and reject it and put it away.

[6 : 15] Many will try and even ban it from so many different places. But yet we thank you that it is powerful. It is active. We thank you for every way. We are so often reminded of the power of your truth.

We think of Gideon's, as it were, or the Good News Bibles, and how they have been placed in so many different places around the world and spoken to so many different people in very desperate situations.

Whether it was in hospital or hotels or just by being handed out and distributed in many different places. We thank you that many have opened up your truth, maybe not thinking anything of it, maybe skeptical about it, and yet it is spoken powerfully.

And we thank you that that is true for so many of us here. That a word that was just black and white before our eyes for so long. That you made it alive to us.

By your grace, O Lord, you opened our eyes to see and to hear the wonder of your truth, the wonder of the scriptures, the wonder of the beginning of all things and right through to what is yet to come.

[7 : 24] That we have these great assurances that you made all things, that you are the creator of the heavens and the earth. That by your word things were spoken into being.

Things that people might laugh at and mock today. And yet it is our great assurance and our great hope that your word is powerful. That your word speaks to us even to this day through all that you have made.

But we thank you that your word, the truth of the gospel, has been given by your spirit. As it has been breathed out and as people have written it down, your word, as we have it compiled in the word of God before us.

We thank you how it has been kept, the Old and the New Testament bound together. All your truth there before us, all that we need for life and for eternity.

And so as we open up your truth, we pray to know your power behind it. Your power speaking to us anew this evening. Your power reminding us that these words are so precious now as they have ever been.

[8 : 31] And we ask, O Lord, that you will help us to give attention to it and to hear it and to do according as it says. And we do pray, Lord, that as we sing your praise, as we read from your word and as we come to consider it together, that you will be in our midst.

That you will bless us not just here, but all who tune in online or who listen at different points in these coming days ahead. And we pray that you will be pleased to bless all that we seek to do in your name.

And we thank you for all your encouragement that you give us, that you are a God who is working, that you are one who is calling a people to himself, that you are one who is building his church.

And we know that we have but a small part to play. And yet your command to us is to be ever faithful, to be ever vigilant, to be a people of prayer and patience with you, a people looking to you for all things.

And so we commit all that we do in your name to you at this time. Hear our prayers, O Lord, as we think even of the vacancy as we've spoken about it in the intimation.

[9 : 41] And looking for that meeting coming up on the 18th, seeking your help and your guidance, seeking your spirit to lead us. May you give us your will, O Lord.

May you show us your paths and teach us, Lord, the way that you would have us to go. We thank you too for the encouragement that we see with our young people and with all the activities going on with the church.

Lord, we thank you that during the week we see so many people coming and going from this place and hearing of the wonder of your truth. And we do pray that you will bless every endeavor of reaching out with the gospel.

We pray for the toddler group as it meets tomorrow. We pray for our prayer meetings during the week. We pray for the explorers groups as they have assumed and the big question Bible study.

We pray for the 55 plus and the Fridays at the Free. All these are activities, Lord, not just for the sake of it, but for reaching out to those around us, for showing the love of Christ and the concern that we have for all around us to come and hear of the wonder of a saviour who is Jesus Christ.

[10 : 59] And we thank you that it's a message that is worth telling, telling to all and telling to any who come into our paths. And so we pray for courage and boldness to speak of the good news of Jesus.

And we thank you that to all the ends of the earth that this message goes out, that we see and hear of your people far and wide. We hear of the persecuted church.

We hear of those who are experiencing great trials and troubles. And yet, even in the midst of that, we can give thanks and rejoice that you are the God who is faithful, the God who is with your people in every circumstance, that you will build your church through the joyous times, but also through the great trials and tribulations that this world experiences.

And we recognize that we need wisdom in how we pray in these things, not just to pray for peace, but your word reminds us that again and again, the church is built through times of persecution, times of hardship, times of sorrow.

And we pray, Lord, that the joy of the Lord will be the strength to your people in all of these circumstances, near and far.

[12 : 18] And we do know, Lord, that there are many who go through so many different trials, even in our own midst of a people here and in our communities. We see so many great needs around us, even so many that may be hidden from many.

And yet we hear of so much that goes on around us, and we despair and weep and mourn in the midst of it. But we thank you for the power of the gospel, to reach out, the power of the gospel to heal, to heal hurting, to heal broken hearts, to heal even physically at times those who are unwell.

We thank you for the amazing ways that you are able to restore and to heal those who are unwell. And we know at times, Lord, that we go through periods when these prayers that we offer maybe aren't answered as we would wish.

But even in the midst of that, we look to our Saviour, the one who in many ways asked that a cup that was so difficult would pass him by. And yet his prayer was, not my will, but yours be done.

And we pray that as we come to you in all our different needs, that we would be able to pray that prayer, not my will, but yours be done.

[13 : 37] And that will also be a prayer that comes from faith, because faith helps us to understand the things that we do not understand, just naturally.

But it helps us to know that your plans and your ways are beyond ours. And so we pray, build our hearts up, build us up in our faith, strengthen us, Lord, and help us to know that you are God, and that with you on our side, we have that great hope and that great assurance, that great comfort.

So bless us, we pray. Continue with us in our worship at this time. Bless all who gather in your name in the same way as we do here, whether it's our communion services over this weekend, or as we gather around your word here, we pray for your word to be blessed to many.

And in this coming week, that you would go with us into it, Lord, guide us and help us to go into it prayerfully and looking to you, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author, the perfecter of our faith.

And so hear our prayers. And as we pray, we confess our sins anew before you, Lord, the sins of what we have done or what we haven't done. There are so many things that may trouble our hearts, but yet we thank you that with you there is forgiveness.

[14 : 58] So hear us, Lord, and heal us and help us in all our different needs as we ask all in that precious name above every name, the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for his sake and glory.

Amen. Amen. We're going to continue by singing to God's praise in Psalm 127. This is in the Sing Psalms version, page 171.

You can sing the whole of this psalm, and the tune is Evan, a psalm that reminds us that it is the Lord who builds his house, and that is what we look to at all times.

Unless the Lord builds up the house, its builders toil in vain. Unless he keeps the city safe, they vainly watch maintain. We'll sing the whole of this psalm. We'll sing the whole of this psalm.

To God's praise, we stand to sing. Ameri we have a good yet. A lamp and a Mephth Stream.

[16 : 14] Blessed is the city safe, Amen, we watch maintain.

In vain, we rise before the dawn, And lay out daily, That you may time for food to eat, The images of one's three.

Some are a precious heritage, A blessing from the Lord, The children that are born to us Are truly His reward.

Like a rose in the waters, And our children of what do, The harvest will offer, His blessed high God in truth.

Such men will not be put to shame, That will not be their fate, When they contemplate their hearts, Who face them in the name.

[18 : 32] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We'll turn together to read God's word In the book of Acts, The Acts of the Apostles.

We're going to read in chapter 1, Taking up our reading at verse 12. Acts chapter 1, Reading at verse 12.

You'll find this around page 1095 of the church Bibles. The Acts of the Apostles begins with the ascension of Jesus as He was taken up into heaven.

But He had given instructions to the disciples that they were to wait in Jerusalem until the promise of the Spirit had come upon them. And as we read in verse 12, They've seen Jesus depart from them.

And then it says, Then they 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.

[19 : 43] Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, the son of Alphaeus and Simon, the Silat and Judas, the son of James.

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

The company of Persians 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.

For he was numbered among us, and was allotted his share in this ministry. Now this man bought a field with 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 language, a kildama, 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.

[21 : 02] 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 with 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.

And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabbas, 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 an apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.

And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." And so on. And may God bless that reading from his word.

Before we turn back to look at this passage, we'll sing again. This time in Psalm 37 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 37, page 252. We're going to sing from verse 1 to verse 7.

There's a contrast here.

[22 : 35] Here, when the psalmist then says in verse 3, Set thou thy trust upon the Lord, and be thou doing good. And then at verse 7 it says, Rest in the Lord, and patiently wait for him.

Do not fret. So there's great reminders for us in these words. We're going to sing from verse 1 to verse 7, and the tune is Free Church, and we'll stand to sing.

For evil do not fret thou not thyself and quietly, nor do thou let me dare to those that work iniquity.

For evil may unto the last should be cut down shall we, And like the green and tender hair, They will never shine away.

Send thou thy trust upon the Lord, And be thou doing good. And stroll thou in the land shall dwell, And e'er thee thou food.

[24 : 40] Feel like thyself in God, Feel in thy heart's desire to lead.

Thy way to God, God, For all of it in trust, In pain to us shall we.

On thy path unto the light, He shall thy righteousness display, And be thy righteousness display, And be thy judgment shall bring forth, Thy good tide of the day.

Rest in the Lord, And patiently wait for Him, Do not fret, For Him will cross, Sing in history, May success in sin of death.

We can turn back to a reading in the book of Acts chapter 1, in this section from verse 12 down to verse 26. We see the disciples return to Jerusalem along with some others that are in the upper room.

[26 : 43] And it says in verse 14, All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the woman and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers.

There's a lot going on in this section, these verses, verse 12 to verse 26. Now we want to look at it this evening together under the heading of a faithful fellowship.

There's a people who are gathered together faithfully in the name of God and waiting on Him. And in some ways we're following on from where we were last Sunday evening, when we thought of that great commission where we are told to go.

The disciples were told to go and make disciples of all nations and the promise of the Lord being with them. And also what Gordon had this morning in John chapter 20, kind of just comes just before this as well, where there was an element of doubt with the disciples and Thomas about what was happening, what was going on.

And in all of these situations, it required the same thing. It all required the Lord's help and looking to the Lord and trusting the Lord and waiting on the Lord.

[27 : 58] And the Lord gives that. And there's a reminder to us in the book of Acts from the outset that the Lord will fulfill His promises. And yet, when you look at the beginning of the book of Acts chapter 1, and you look at the end of the book of Acts, if you go right to the very last words of the book, you see a great transformation has taken place from a small beginning here in Jerusalem with just a few gathered together in the upper room.

You go to the end of the book and you find this man, Paul, who was converted amazingly, miraculously, by the grace of God, and then who went on missionary journeys throughout so many different places.

You find him in Rome. And the gospel has spread far and wide through so many different places. What happened in between?

When you look at from Jerusalem to Rome, what was happening? The book is called the Acts of the Apostles. It was about a people who were taking the word out, but it's more than that.

It's about the Lord who was working, who was building His church. And He was building it in the midst of a time of concern, a time of worry, a time of anxiety for the disciples.

[29 : 21] They have seen His crucifixion. They've come to see Him in His resurrection body. And now it's the beginning of the book of Acts. They've seen Him ascend to heaven.

And there's all these different things going on. And here is the humble beginnings of the early New Testament church.

Humble in so many ways when you see a dependence on God. They were all with one accord, devoting themselves to prayer in verse 14.

But it's so interesting that it mentions the names in verse 13. It names who was there. The disciples are named.

So this was just a small group. And it doesn't seem like the beginning of something remarkable, something amazing that's going to take place.

[30 : 17] That this is going to be the beginning of the New Testament church that's going to go out into all ends of the earth. It seems unremarkable in so many ways. Just a small group.

It doesn't seem like much could come from this place. And yet God was in their midst. God was working powerfully. And He was going to use His church.

Going to use His people. And we see here where faith and trust among a faithful fellowship can make so much difference.

Though there were few, God had a plan to build them up and to lead them into greater things.

And if we look at ourselves tonight, we might think of ourselves. We may be not a small group as we would name one another of everybody's here. But it wouldn't take us too long, I'm sure, to gather the names of everybody here.

[31 : 18] And you look at this list of who is here tonight and you think, we're not that big a group. We may be bigger than some congregations, but we're still not that big in size.

And what can we do? What can we achieve? Where do we start? These are often the questions that we ask. What can we do? Well, we look at ourselves and we say, it's not about us.

It's about God who is with us. And we think of our own situation just now, a time of vacancy. It's always a strange time. And I'm kind of just touching on it this evening because I find it's a strange time for myself.

I've never been in a vacant congregation before. As a member and as a minister, you're not normally in a vacant congregation. This is different. There is a vacancy in the congregation.

So it's a strange time and we're wondering where we're going. We wonder what direction we might go in. But the Lord has a plan. And what's important for us is as we see in this section is that we stick to the Lord's plan.

[32 : 27] That we look at things in his perspective and not just our own desires, but we seek his will. That's the key.

We seek his will. When I was in school, I remember we were always told about safety and the Green Cross Code.

I remember hearing it in primary school and I'm sure to this day that it's a message that's still put out there into schools. And we all hear it. Maybe we remember it ourselves. These key steps of what we do with the Green Cross Code.

We stop, we look, and we listen. That's for our own safety. It's for our own protection. Well, it's these kinds of lessons I want us to think about together this evening from this passage.

For our own good, for our own safety, for the glory of God. That we are to be a people who stop, who look, and who listen. And that's really what we see of the church here in the book of Acts.

[33 : 32] They stop, they look, and they listen. And so we're going to look at these three headings and see what it says to us from this passage.

Stop, look, and listen. First of all we see is stop. What we find here is that before Jesus left them, he gave them a command.

They weren't just returning to Jerusalem blindly. They weren't returning to do their own thing. They were going back to Jerusalem because they had been told.

They had been told to stop and to wait there. In verse 4, you see there Jesus speaking to them. While staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, you have heard, you heard from me.

They were given instruction. And you can almost say in many ways this was a testing time for them. Would they listen? Would they wait?

[34 : 43] Would they stop in this way? Or would they go and do their own thing? You look at those who are named there in the upper room.

The first name on the list is Peter. And Peter, whenever you look at Peter, you find the one who was so often impulsive, who would go and do things, maybe his own way sometimes.

But you see him here and you think to yourself, well, is this another time where we're going to see Peter maybe decide to lead them in a different direction, to tell them to do something differently.

He was known for vast decisions. It's maybe not fair, though, because it was a genuine love for the Lord that so often made him impulsive. He wasn't one who would really want to sit and wait and stop.

He was a doer. He was one who would go and one who would lead in so many different ways. But you find him here. He is stopping. And with him are others.

[35 : 45] And they're waiting. They're waiting. And they're learning that it is better to seek the Lord's will rather than their own. And isn't that true for us as well?

How often in our lives do we have to learn these things again and again? We take things into our own hands. We decide ourselves what we're going to do. And we find we've been impulsive.

We've made a rash decision. And we have to come back and say, Lord, I wasn't patient. I didn't stop. I didn't listen. I need you to re-guide me.

And just imagine what it was like for this group of believers. It's hard to enter into their experience at this point where they've seen the crucifixion.

They've been with the Lord. They've seen his ministry for three years in their midst. The amazing miracles he performed. The preaching. The teaching that he gave them.

[36 : 48] They've seen all this and now he's been crucified. And then comes the amazing news. He's risen. He's not dead. He is risen.

And they've met with him. And now they've just witnessed his ascension. And they're being told that there's more to come. There is a day coming when the Lord will pour out his spirit upon you and you are to stop and to wait for that.

There's so many mixed emotions. What's this going to mean? What's it going to look like? What's it going to do for us? How long will we have to wait?

And yet there's this waiting. There's this stopping before God. They're waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled.

And they're praying in the midst of it. And this stopping just shows that they are trusting God. Trusting God that he will prosper them in his time.

[37 : 59] Are we waiting in this way? Are we stopping with God at this time ourselves? Are we looking to him? Are we waiting for the same thing that they were?

No, we're not waiting for the Holy Spirit to be poured out. That has come. The day of Pentecost has been. The Spirit has been poured out on the church of God.

Are we waiting for the command to go? No, we're not waiting for that either because that has been given. We looked at it last week. Go and make disciples of all nations.

The command is there for us. So what do we wait for today? What do we stop and look to God for today? Well, in many ways, we're all looking to God for his help.

We're looking for God to work in our midst. Like we sang in Psalm 127, Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders build in vain.

[39 : 01] We are waiting. We are looking to God to build in our midst. We are waiting and looking to God to answer prayer. To answer prayer.

Maybe that we've offered up again and again. Or maybe a prayer we've offered up so long ago and it seems unanswered. And yet we are to wait on God. To stop before God.

It's not about taking action ourselves, but to look to him. To wait on him working by the power of his spirit in our midst. We look to that.

But we look to it in hope. We look to it in anticipation. All these things can be difficult. It can test our patience. But we trust.

We are to trust God in the same way that they did here. Waiting can seem an inconvenience. It can be frustrating. You think just even of the last couple of days.

[40 : 01] And people who have been trying to either fly off the island or fly into the island. Waiting at an airport. Waiting. Watching the fog that just doesn't seem to want to clear. Flights being cancelled.

The frustration of it. There can be so much frustration in waiting. Waiting. And yet to just try and go and fly in the fog would be dangerous. It would make no sense.

You have to stop. And sometimes with God we just have to say, It is not for us to go. It is for us to stop until you show us the way.

So we stop. And we wait on God. That is what they were doing here. But the second thing we see is, They look.

They look. Stop. Look. And if you want to know if Peter has learned through experience or not, You see it here in verse 15.

[41 : 01] In those days Peter stood up among the brothers. He stood up. Not just to give his own thoughts, His own words into this situation.

He stood up with the word of God. He says in verse 16, Brothers, the scriptures had to be fulfilled.

They are looking to the word of God. Looking to see what does the word of God tell us? What does it teach us? It is in the word of God that we read, There is nothing new under the sun.

In Ecclesiastes. It is in the word of God that we read that the Lord will hear the cries of his people. It is in the word of God that we see so many of his promises.

So it is the best. It is the greatest place to turn and to look to as we seek the Lord's will. It is scripture that guides us at all times.

[42 : 05] And as somebody once said, If you are looking at the word of God, A good question to ask is, Or a few different questions to ask is, Why did the author include this material at this point?

What is his line of reasoning? What is his purpose? What does God want us to know?

So as you are looking at God's word, You can have all these kinds of questions as you are turning to see what it is saying to us. What is the reasoning here? What is the purpose of what we are reading here?

What does God want us to know? And as you apply that to looking at God's word here, And as you see Peter stand in their midst and open up the word of God to them, You see the purpose.

You see the reasoning behind it. And it is all reminding the people that God has had a plan and a purpose in all of this long ago.

[43 : 06] The scripture had to be fulfilled, Which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas. Now David and Judas are hundreds of years apart in the Psalms.

And in David, what we read of David, you find that so much of it is looking ahead hundreds of years. And yet it is God's will that is always being worked out.

And as they look to the word of God, and as we look to the word of God, What we find is the word of God is giving us warnings, it's giving us guidance, It's giving us encouragement at every step of the way.

Just think of the Psalms of David that we sing so often that we know so many of them. And just what they are saying to us.

And you think it is warning us of Judas. It is warning them of Judas and turning away from the Lord. And the Psalms speak of a saviour who was coming.

[44 : 14] It speaks of the one who would ascend, who would rise from the grave. It speaks of all of these things and the wonder of it. And so as they were gathered together, they studied the word of God together here.

There were a faithful fellowship around the word of God. Gordon, he mentioned that this morning as well about the need to be together. We need a time away by ourselves, but that's not to be our pattern.

Our pattern is to be together around the word of God. And what you notice here is that although there's a small beginning here, And although they're still waiting in many ways on what's to come, The church is growing.

They are still seeing the church growing. It goes from them being named in the earlier verses in verse 13 to verse 15.

We're seeing there there's a company of persons that was about 120. Now we know numbers aren't important. And yet in the early chapters of the book of Acts, you see this growth coming in.

[45 : 29] They're named. Then there's 120. And before you know it, there's thousands being added to the number being saved right in the very early chapters of the book of Acts.

And what you're seeing is that God is never abandoning his work or abandoning his people. The work of the Lord never stops.

And so as we look to the word of God in these days, In a time of vacancy, although it's a time of change, It's not a time of stagnation.

It's not a time of going backwards. It's still the same. We're looking to God to build his church. And so that as we look to the word of God, We see that through the Old and the New Testament, There are so many examples to us of the way God works.

You think of the life of David and how God used him in so many ways. You think of Judas and the warning that gives to us of turning away from God.

[46 : 37] You think of Peter himself. Like so many of us, we can be glowing hot and cold in different ways and different directions. And yet Jesus said to him, Peter, you're the rock on which I will build my church.

You think of Esther in the Old Testament, Who says for such a time as this, She was there among God's people to work in an amazing way.

You think of Ruth and how she saw the amazing ways of God working. There are so many examples of trust and obedience and looking to God, As well as the ones who failed in different ways as well.

All of which we learn from. There are examples of churches. As Paul wrote in the New Testament, Whether it's to Galatia or Ephesus or Corinth.

So many different churches. The churches that we read of, the seven churches in the book of Revelation. We learn so much. Where there's warnings and encouragements given.

[47 : 44] Where they've gone wrong. What they did right. And we learn from the word of God. Somebody once said, A wise man learns from the mistakes of others.

Because nobody lives long enough to make them all himself. We all make mistakes. But we look to the mistakes of others and learn from them.

And that all comes by looking to the word of God. And so at this time we also have a need to look at ourselves.

To examine ourselves. And even examine others around us. Whether it's individuals or churches. We can learn whether it's to heed warnings where mistakes have been made.

Or to see a need to change where we can do better. It's a time for looking. It's a time for learning. Days of waiting.

[48 : 48] Days of vacancy. They're not days where we do nothing. It's days where we are to be a faithful fellowship. It's days where we are to look to God and to trust in Him.

That His word gives us so much that we need to go forward. To continue to grow and to learn together. So we are to stop.

We are to look at the word of God. And then thirdly and finally, we are to listen. We are to listen to what the Lord is saying to us.

We are not just to be hearers of the word. We are to be doers. And that's very much what we see as Peter teaches here about Judas and his fall away.

But also as he's saying here of the need to replace him. Just because they were waiting didn't mean that there was nothing to be done. There was still work to be done.

[49 : 56] And what did they do? Well, you see that in this chapter and in the early chapters here, they were very much a faithful fellowship focused around praying and organizing themselves.

Preparing themselves for this time when the Spirit was going to be poured out. They knew it was coming and they prepared themselves in it.

And as we have time, as we stop, as we look, we are to be a people who listen. It wasn't in activity. It wasn't just sitting still.

This waiting on God was an active waiting. And Peter stands up as he does and he guides them. He helps them along the way and he encourages them.

And you see these two things stand out. Praying and organizing. And as a church, these are two things that we should always be looking at for ourselves.

[51 : 01] A praying people and an organizing people. A people with a vision. A people with a plan. A people who are looking to the way ahead as being actively engaged in the ministry and the work of the Lord.

And the Lord was showing them here through his word just what they were to do. And it's nothing new. It's what you see throughout the scriptures.

If you go back to the days of the Exodus. In the book of Exodus chapter 2. As God was about to lead his people out of Egypt in amazing ways.

Where they had seen this change that had come in. And they were put under harsh labor. And they thought God has forgotten about us. In chapter 2 of Exodus verse 23 it says.

During those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.

[52 : 10] And God heard their groaning. And God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel. And God knew.

God knew. God knew. God knew what had to be done. God had a plan for what was about to take place. Matthew Henry writing on these verses.

The commentator Matthew Henry says. Before God unbound them. He put it into their hearts to cry out to him. Before he unbound them.

He put it into their hearts to cry unto him. And there's so much in that for us as well. How God puts it into our hearts to cry out for help.

Whether it's individuals. Whether it's seeing our sin and our need of a savior. Before he unbounds us. He puts it into our hearts to cry to him for help.

[53 : 11] But also collectively as well. It's what we need to do ourselves. Before God shows us his way. Shows us his will. He puts it into our hearts to cry out to him.

And that's what you see as the people are gathered here. As you go down to verse 24. Remember. They prayed.

They prayed. They cried to God. They were seeking someone to replace Judas. They didn't know who. And so they prayed.

They prayed. Prayer shows their dependence on God. And as we think of our own time of vacancy.

Are we not dependent on God? We don't know which way to go. Of ourselves. We'll have our own ideas. But we don't know which way to go.

[54 : 11] We pray to God. And so. Whenever we are gathered. Whether it's on the Lord's day. For our worship here.

We pray for God's help. But maybe especially as we gather in times of our prayer meetings. Whether it's on Wednesday or a Saturday. Or whenever it is. Our prayer is to the Lord.

For guidance. And for help. And to listen to God. When you look at these verses. Verse 24 and 25.

They said. In verse 24. 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. There's two things to notice here. When it speaks in these verses.

[55 : 11] You Lord. Who know the hearts. Of everyone. When you look at that word.

It takes you back. To Samuel. When they were trying. To choose someone. To go with the people there. And it says in Samuel.

I can't remember the verse just now. But it says in Samuel. That man looks on the outside. But God looks on the heart. God knew. Who would be chosen then.

And he knew. Who would be chosen here. Because God looks. On the heart. And we think of our own hearts. And we think that we know.

We think that we have. Maybe the right person. In mind. But imagine if every one of us. Got our own way. How many.

[56 : 09] New ministers. Would we have here. It would be more than one. We need to build. New mansions. To accommodate. Our own desires.

Of who. We would want. And that's why. We need a faithful fellowship. To listen. To God. They prayed.

And they said. You. Lord. Who know. The hearts. Of all. Show us. Which one of these two. We need.

To look. To God. But you notice. The second part. There is. Well. We need. You. To show us. Which one of these two.

You. Have. Chosen. And what. It's saying. The Lord. Already knew. The Lord. New.

[57 : 05] It would be. Matthias. He already knows. And so. That's. The key. For us. As well. our own individual desires. It's not about our choice, but asking the Lord, show us the one that you have already chosen. The one whose heart you know for this place. The one that you know is the man of your choosing. And so there is our prayer, to pray to the Lord, to show the one that you have chosen. And in doing that, we wait on him. There was a young minister, an experienced minister, who had a visit from a more senior minister who was staying with him for a few days. And the young minister at breakfast one morning decided to ask his guest a few questions. And one of the questions he asked was this, can a man be sure that in the hour of uncertainty that he will be rightly led by God?

Can he feel secure about, against making a false step? He was obviously thinking about his own future, what lay ahead, and just how he would know. And the older minister said to him, yes, I'm certain we can be secure in God, if he will but give God time.

As long as you live, remember that, he said, give God time. And it's that wisdom that we don't rush, that we don't just go ahead with our own thoughts and our own desires, but we give God time. Time to show us together who is the one of his choosing. We look at this chapter and we see the work of the Lord is always going on. It's not about huge numbers being involved, it's about the word of God. It's about the God who is behind and the spirit who is working. What we are to do is to stop and to look and to listen. God still has a work for us to do. No matter how long a vacancy goes on, the Lord's work keeps going. And we seek his will in the way ahead. And we are looking to the Lord to fulfill his plan and his purposes here for us and through us. But we look to him. Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders build in vain. So we look to you, Lord. We pray to you, Lord. We pray, show us your ways and teach us your will for us that we might go the way of your choosing. Let us pray.

Lord, our gracious God, we do thank you for your word and for the promise of your spirit with us. We thank you that you have given all that we need. And yet in our hearts, Lord, we can always drift so far away. But Lord, teach us to pray and to trust in you, to look for your will and for your guidance for us in all things. Individually, Lord, that you would lead us to our saviour, Christ Jesus, that we would walk ever closer with him. And in our collective unity, Lord, may you guide us, may you protect us, may you keep us at all times trusting and looking to you. And we just pray, Lord, your will be done in all things as we ask it in your name. Amen.

Amen. We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 138. And we'll sing from verse three to verse five, these two stanzas, the tune is Herongate. Psalm 138, page 179, verse three, the very day I called to you, you gave an answer to my plea. You made me bold within myself with new resolve. You strengthened me. We'll sing these two verses three to five to God's praise.

[61 : 59] Amen. O Lord, let all ask thee. You made me bold within myself with new resolve. You strengthened me.

O Lord, let all ask things give praise. When from your mouth they hear your word, let them exalt the ways of God. For grace the glory of the Lord.

After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my left. We'll close the benediction. The benediction.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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