

Resurrection Witnesses

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[0:00] Well, good morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis 6. We're going to preach on Noah and the flood this morning. No, seriously. I want to start this morning with a question. What is God up to you in the world today?

We might have a whole list of things that we wish God were up to. We wish that wars would end. We wish that poverty would be eradicated. We wish that disease would be cured. We wish that ungodliness would not run rampant. We wish that sex trafficking and sex crimes would be stopped. Many, many things that we long for, and these are all good desires that we would have. There are also things that we wonder about when we think about this. In the church, we wonder, will God return soon? And if He's not returning soon, what is He up to? What is His work doing? Well, I believe that these are questions that the early church was asking as well. As we begin our series in the Book of Acts, actually, this is the second week, so if you weren't here last week, we're preaching through the Book of Acts this fall, actually this year, we'll be looking through the story of God's work in building His church.

[1:36] If you didn't get to hear the sermon last week, I really encourage you, go to our website, go back and listen to it again, because it's a great introduction to the work. But we're going to preach on the second passage in the Book of Acts.

In your pew Bibles, it's going to be page 855 or so. We're going to look at Acts 1, verses 12 through 26, and it's a little bit of an odd passage.

Interestingly, lots of sermon series just skip over this passage. When they want to preach through the whole Book of Acts, they just skip this one. But we believe that all of God's words are profitable for us, and so we don't want to set our own agenda by picking all the passages.

We want to preach through God's word as it is written. And so we're going to preach through this passage and see what God has for us as we think about what is God up to in the world today. As we get there, we want to set the scene for what's going on in the narrative. This is after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He appeared to many people over a period of 40 days, and then, as we saw in the first eight verses, He then ascended into heaven, disappeared from view, miraculously, supernaturally.

[2:54] He ascended into heaven, and the disciples were left with the instruction, Go back to Jerusalem and wait. Wait for what God has next. Now, can you imagine these men and women?

They had believed in Jesus. They had left their old faith commitments, their old communities, and said, We will follow you.

Many of them had left their livelihoods and their homes and even their families to follow Jesus. And now He's gone. What happens next?

Well, we're going to pick up the story. We're going to read, starting in verse 12. And then we will consider together a few things we can learn about what God is up to.

So, Acts chapter 1, verse 12. Then they, that is the disciples, returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath-stage journey away.

[3:55] And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John, 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 were, 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 in 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.

For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in the ministry. Now, this man bought 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, a keldama, which is field of blood.

[5:11] 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 to his resurrection.

And they put forward to Joseph, called Barsabbas, who was also called Justice, 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.

And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven disciples. This is God's Word. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for your Word.

Thank you for the instruction that you give us, and the way that you reveal yourself to us through it. Lord, be with us this morning. Lord, make our minds alert to understand your Word.

[6:29] Make our hearts soft to receive your Word. And may our hands be quick to respond in faithful obedience to it. Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. What is God up to? God is fulfilling His promises to create for Himself a people who will worship and serve Him forever.

A renewed people. And what we see in this passage is the beginning of what we're going to see throughout the book of Acts, which is a picture of what this renewed people of God look like, which we now call the church.

And the church called it the church back then too. But this renewed people, this is what God is up to in the world. He is making a new people to worship Him, to glorify Him, to proclaim Him, to serve Him in the world.

There are four things that we can learn about this renewed people of God from this passage. So that's what we're going to explore this morning, four of them. The first one is, and as we see in the first couple of verses, God's renewed people fulfill God's sovereign plan.

[7:50] Okay? So, this renewed people is a fulfillment of God's plan. The disciples return to Jerusalem, both the apostles, that is the eleven that are named, and a lot of others, as you see there are 120 in verse 15 are mentioned.

And they return back to Jerusalem in obedience to the command, go back and wait for what God is going to do next. Right? And then in verse 16, Peter gets up and he says, we need to replace Judas.

Now, the first question that we should ask is, why? Why do we need to replace Judas? Well, the reason is because this renewed people of God is a fulfillment of a pattern that we see in the Old Testament.

So, we're going to do this really quickly. Go all the way back to Genesis 12. God comes to a man named Abram and He makes a promise. Abraham, I'm going to make you the father of a great nation.

Right? Even though he had no children. Father, I'm going to make you the father of a great nation and I'm going to bless you and through you, I'm going to bless the whole world. This was the beginning of a promise to make a people for himself.

[9:03] And Abraham miraculously had a son and Isaac had two sons and Jacob was the chosen line and Jacob had 12 sons. And Jacob's family was removed to Egypt because of a famine and lived there for 400 years and became a structure of 12 tribes.

12 tribes descended from those 12 sons. Not perfectly. We're not going to get into the details of that. But this structure of 12 tribes, this picture of completeness, this is the whole people of God. And when God miraculously saved them from slavery in Egypt and brought them out, in Exodus 19, he says, I will make you my people and I will be your God if you keep my commandment. And then he leads this nation now, the nation of Israel, out of Egypt and towards the promised land. Now, the whole Old Testament is now a complicated story of the people of God failing to be the

people of God over and over again, God continuing to be faithful to his promise over and over again.

But when we see in the history, the end of it was the unfaithfulness became so great that God judged the people of God by sending them into exile. And the 12 tribes who had taken up residence in the promised land that God had given them were removed from that land and they never returned and never were reconstituted.

[10 : 31] And when you come to the time of Jesus, the remnant of the people of God, the God of Israel, had returned to Jerusalem but they saw, they're wondering too, God, what are you up to?

What God is doing is creating a renewed people for himself. The 12 disciples of Jesus became the 12 apostles who are the foundation of the church.

And this is the pattern where God is saying, this is the fulfillment fulfillment of what I have been up to from the very beginning. Now, we want to be careful on this because Tyler mentioned in his prayer, but I'll say it again.

The apostles, the original apostles, the 12, were a unique part in history. Right? There are no ongoing apostles with the same role and the same authority. Why?

Because they were literally eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection. And we can't replace them. But we also see that in Scripture that when James the apostle dies in chapter 12, they don't replace him then.

[11 : 36] So this is the hinge point of the changing from the Old Testament people of God to the New Testament people of God. And there's this sense of fulfillment in a renewed people of God based on now something different.

Not the Old Testament promise to Abraham or Carl Moses, but those things are fulfilled in the person of Christ. And this new people of God is based on the resurrected Christ and his work of redemption for us.

So this is the big picture. I want to make one more note before we go on. Luke is really careful to say and notice that these, that this new people of God led by the 12 apostles included both men and women.

Now we might think today, duh, of course, that must be true. But in that cultural patriarchal time, that would have been groundbreaking. That would have been, for it to be explicit, the women were a part of this from the very beginning.

Because this is a part of the renewed people of God in a sense where God was making sure that he had the doors open wide for this people to be for all peoples everywhere, men and women from every tribe and tongue and nation.

[12 : 52] There's so much more to say about that, but we'll pick it up as we go along because it's going to be a part of the rest of the book of Acts. This is a beautiful thing. This is what God is doing, creating the church as this unique place where his people are displaying his glory in fulfillment of these Old Testament prophets.

So I want to end this point by just reading from Ephesians chapter 3 verses 7 through 12 so you can hear how the Apostle Paul talks about this new people of God. He says this, of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me by the working of his power.

To me, though I am the very least of all these saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.

Here's the key part. So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This was according to the eternal purpose that he had realized in Christ Jesus our Lord in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. God said this church from now on is the place where I am displaying my glory in the world.

[14 : 18] And the church hasn't done that perfectly by far. But that is still God's plan A. Right? The gathered people of God as we worship here this morning we are a part of fulfilling this plan that God has given to his people.

Not only so that God would be worshipped but also so that he would be made known. So we proclaim him. we preach we share we live lives that invite others to come and see who this Jesus is and what he's done.

This is God's plan A for the world. So if you're wondering today what's God's plan for my life? Well here's one of God's plans for your life.

He wants you to be a part of his church. He wants you to find your place of service and worship in it. Okay. Second thing we see not only is this God's people fulfillment but we also see that this renewed people are centered on God himself.

I just want to pick up on verse 14 for a second where what we see is that as the people gathered together it says two things about them. They were with one accord devoting themselves to prayer. [15 : 35] Right? This was not an ultimate frisbee club where they came together because they like to do the same kind of activity. Right? God had gathered them around himself and he is in the center.

And so being of one accord with people remember the disciples weren't all from the same place. Matthew was a tax collector. Peter was a fisherman. Many of them were from Galilee but not all of them.

And God was bringing them together and calling them into a unity. And again we'll see this theme play out in the book of Acts but calling them together for only one reason because they followed Jesus together.

And friends I just have to say one of the things I love about this church is that I feel like we taste that at least a little bit because New Haven is a very diverse city and when you look at who comes here on Sunday morning like look around.

Do we have things in common? Do we cross paths in everyday life? Probably not. Not that much. But we gather because of Jesus and we're so glad that we have this kind of community.

[16 : 47] And here's my challenge to you this morning. How do you want to how can you be a part of this church? Well one you can stay for the potluck afterwards. Two you can sit with people that you don't know you can sit with your friend and other people you don't know but sit with people you don't know and ask them about their life.

Ask them about their faith journey. Ask them about how God has worked in their lives. Spend time this morning and in the weeks to come as you have time in fellowship hour or however you interact in small groups or whatever find out about the other people in God and become in one accord over the shared faith in Jesus that gathers us as a church.

So that's my encouragement with you about that. Not only were they in one accord but they were devoted to prayer. They seek they were seeking for the promised Holy Spirit to come. You see at the end of this passage they were seeking God to lead them in guidance about who they would choose to be this new apostle.

They lived with a picture of a vibrant relationship with a living God who heard their prayers and who responded to them. Friends, we live in a world where we just so desperately want to be self-dependent.

We hate depending on other people and we don't really even like depending on God. But the picture of the people of God here is a people who have embraced the fact that of course we're dependent on God.

[18 : 22] This is what the gospel tells us from the very beginning because we need Jesus to save us from sin that we can't save ourselves from. And if that's the foundation of how we know God, let's continue in that.

Let's continue to be dependent on God. And as we depend on God, let us also bring others, the people of God into our lives trusting and believing that God will use them to help us grow in faith together.

If you need help in your prayer life, there are lots of good books out there, but I'll just say one. Paul Miller's book, A Praying Life, is a wonderful book. It's very real, it's practical, it will help you develop a plan so that you can be purposeful to create a discipline of prayer because the discipline of prayer will help shape your heart in the spontaneousness of a real prayer relationship with God.

The other thing I'll say is in two weeks there's a women's conference. Do you know what the topic is going to be? Prayer. What a great thing. If you're a woman here, please sign up and go.

We'd love for you to join there. And finally, if you're wondering what do I pray, well, I'm going to read Paul's prayer from the book of Ephesians for you just as an example of how you can pray for yourself and for others.

[19 : 46] Paul says this in Ephesians 1 verse 16 through 23. I do not cease to give thanks for you remembering you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give

you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

Having the eyes of your heart enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him in his right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named not only in this age but also in the one to come and he put all things under his feet and gave him his head over all things to the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Friends, pray this that you may know the hope and the riches of the inheritance and the power of God at work in you that you may know Christ in all of his exalted glory.

Okay, so what have we seen so far? God's people are fulfillment of his promises. God's people are centered on Christ. We move through the passage in verses 16 through 20, we see that God's people are preserved despite human sin by God.

God's people are right? Look with me again in verses 16 through 20. Peter stands up and he says, hey, we need to fulfill, we need to fill this role that Judas has abdicated, right?

[21:26] He had this role as an apostle. He was deeply involved with us, right? He was involved in our ministry. He was counted as our number. Remember, thinking back into the gospels, he was called by Jesus.

Jesus knew who he was. He called him in. He walked with him. He disciplined him. He entrusted things to him. Judas was fully engaged as a disciple, as a follower of Christ.

And with his betrayal, one of the questions that the early church had to ask was, God, can we trust one another? Can we trust you to do this?

Right? Because it was a crisis that one of Jesus' 12 disciples had betrayed him and had led the authorities so that they could arrest him and ultimately crucify him.

So this is one of the questions. Peter's saying, hey, we need to replace him. And then do you notice in verses 18 and 19, there's a parenthesis? This is because it seems very clear this was not a part of Peter's sermon.

[22:30] Luke, the author of the Acts, is interjecting, oh, by the way, do you know what happened to Judas? In case you're wondering, because everyone in Jerusalem knows this, he died.

Right? Now, there are two different accounts. There's one in Matthew 27 and there's one here. They emphasize different details. I don't think they're contradictory. We can get into that another time if you want to ask me about it.

But they emphasize different details. But it's very clear that the end of it is that his acts of wickedness led to his destruction. Matthew tells us that he hanged himself.

Luke here describes that after hanging himself, his body hung there for so long that it decomposed and fell apart. And that the place where he died was an accursed place because they knew that this was a place where condemnation and judgment, a just result for Judas' betrayal, had happened.

Peter goes on. In verse 20, he says, okay, so that's what happened to Judas. But now, Peter says, we must fulfill what God knew was going to happen anyway, right?

[23:48] Because in verse 20, he ends up quoting two psalms. And they're psalms from the Old Testament. They're psalms of David. And they're psalms David crying out to the Lord about his enemies, the people who stood up against the anointed king of Israel.

And he's praying for God's work, right? And the first one is that this man, that the enemy's camp would be made desolate and no one would live there, right?

And then the second one is that he would be removed and replaced. Christ, okay? Now, I could have preached a whole sermon on the use of the Old Testament and the New. I'm not going to do that today.

We'll talk about that a lot throughout the book of Acts. But for here, what I want you to see is that Peter's saying God knew that Judas was going to do what he was going to do.

Jesus knew that God was going to, that Judas was going to do what Judas did. And God sovereignly oversaw the work of redemption despite the human sinfulness that happened, right?

[25:05] So rather than fearing that God would keep his promises, Paul reminds his people God knew that this was going to happen from the very start. Jesus promised that God, that he would build his church and the gates of hell would not stand against it.

No human sin can thwart the work of God. Now look, as a church, this never excuses our human sinfulness. We never say, oh, well, it's okay because God's sovereign so it doesn't matter. I can sin all I want. That is, if you're thinking that way, you come see me afterwards. We'll talk about it. But that is so far from the biblical picture. But what it is saying is that despite the reality of human sin, God is at work accomplishing his work of redemption to redeem a people for himself. And so, you'll see that this is exactly what Peter says when he preaches the gospel in Pentecost in the next chapter of Acts. So in Acts 2, 22 through 24, Peter will say this, Men of Israel, hear these words.

Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst. As you yourselves know, this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. [26 : 31] Do you see that? Together, God ordained it and sovereignly ruled over it at the same time that godless men, lawless men, did the most unjust thing that has ever happened in the world, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

So this is a part of what God is doing through his people, is accomplishing his plan even through human sin.

And friend, again, isn't this true because of the gospel that we believe in? Right? That Jesus Christ was wronged in his accusation, in his judgment, in his crucifixion.

It was all human sin. And yet it was exactly God's plan that he would suffer unjustly so that he might be our redeemer.

Because we deserve to suffer justly. And Jesus took our place. And so if we have a problem with God wrestling with, as we wrestle with, like, how can God, who is just, work in an unjust world, how does he work this out?

[27 : 54] Friends, look to the cross where justice and mercy meet. And wrestle with the problem of evil based on that perspective.

And I'd love to talk to you more about it. Okay. Fourth thing. We've seen God fulfill this promise. We've seen God's people centered on him.

We've seen God preserving his people, his church, despite human sinfulness. And finally, God's people are called to be witnesses to the resurrected Jesus.

This is what we see in verses 21 through 26. We finally get to the action point. Peter's preached a sermon saying, hey, we have to do this, and then how are we going to do this? Well, what are some criteria?

They have to have seen and been with Jesus. They had to have been with Jesus from the start so they knew who he was, so they'd heard his teaching and could represent it again.

[28 : 52] They had to be those who witnessed his resurrection or witnessed the resurrection, resurrected Jesus, so that they could testify, as we read earlier in 1 John, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have heard, what we have touched, we know this is real, right?

So we have to replace someone because these apostles were going to be the foundation of the new church, right? They had to represent Jesus in his teaching.

They had to speak about his life and death and resurrection because their teaching became the core of the church. And it was then laid out in the scriptures for us so that the New Testament account that we have is based on eyewitness accounts of those who had seen Jesus, right?

And this is the ongoing witness then of the church, right? I haven't, I didn't see Jesus physically raised from the dead, but I can proclaim this because this is a trustworthy witness.

And that's what the apostles were doing. And that's why it's so important to have replaced someone like this. And so, as, and again, we're setting up, chapter two is really exciting in Acts.

[30 : 12] They're great. God does amazing things, right? So this is the setup. The people are being set up in place to receive what God has next for them, right? So they sought God in prayer.

God, which one are you going to choose? Now, they cast lots, right? And this is a fascinating thing, but do you notice how they talked about it? Casting lots was not like, oh, this is a game of chance.

I wonder which guy's going to get picked. No, because they saw that God was in the middle of it from the very beginning. God, who have you chosen? Who have you chosen and selected, right?

They considered men who met the criteria, and then they cast lots. And casting lots literally is probably like a bunch of marked stones in a bag, and they reached in and pulled one out. You know, that's probably as simple as it looked.

But they believed that God was sovereignly active in that, and that he had already prepared someone, and that Matthias was the one who was picked, right? And so, this is how God works for them to fulfill the twelve again, so that they can play their apostolic role.

[31 : 25] And you see in verse 25, it repeats this, right? To take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside.

This is the role that the apostles had. The ministry, that is, they were going to serve God and serve his people by teaching and proclaiming and bearing witness to the people of God.

And they were apostles, meaning they were sent ones. They had a particular role and a particular job that then become a pattern for the church that follows them to continue in.

That the church is called to be those who serve one another, serve God, and serve the world. We are meant to be sent into the world as followers of Jesus to do what?

To proclaim the resurrected Jesus. This is what the church is meant to do, bearing witness to the life-saving power of the gospel.

[32 : 28] So, friends, let me close with the words of Peter as he wraps up some of these things and puts it in a different language in 1 Peter 2, 9 and 10.

He says this, But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. Why?

So that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people.

Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Friends, what is God doing in the world? He's building his church.

What is the church called to do? To declare the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into light. Not because we are great, because we are nothing, but because he is great, because he is everything, and he has done everything in the resurrected Christ for us to know him and to be his people and to represent him until he returns.

[33 : 37] Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for your word. We pray that you will help us, help us, Lord, to internalize your plan for your people, that it might become our plan for our lives.

By your Holy Spirit, Lord, fill us. Lord, if there are those here this morning who are wondering about the resurrection of Christ, I pray that you would help them, help them to become convinced and certain that because you were raised from the dead, Lord, all of your redemptive work is real and is for us.

And, Lord, that you would show us your great love so that we may come to know that love in faith in you.

Lord, be with us, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.