

Our study of the risen and ascended Christ continues, focusing on Christ's parting ministry to His church and His sending of the Spirit on Pentecost.

Monday: Read Acts 1:12-14

Waiting in Hope

Prayer is defined in our Shorter Catechism # 98 as, "an offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to His will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of His mercies." This reminds us of the church in the book of Acts as they give themselves to prayerfully waiting for the promised Holy Spirit. Only when the Spirit came to lead the way would the church be equipped for going out into the world to declare the Gospel. Jesus had promised that the Spirit would come (Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4). His followers literally had no other option but to wait on God: waiting for God to take the initiative, to open closed doors, to change the most hostile of hearts, and to shine His light on the way forward in a hostile world.

Highlighting the waiting church in Acts 1 is a helpful place to start our study. What do you think was on their minds as they gathered with one accord to wait on God in prayer? Surely they wanted their ascended Lord to lead them as decisively as He had done up to this point! "You have done all things well to save and keep us until now – don't stop with your daily care and protective guidance!" That is how they prayed, and that is how we need to pray today. For still this world is no friend of our Lord Jesus, and we need His daily, reviving grace as much as ever!

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank our Lord Jesus that His ministry through the Spirit is every bit as effective and all-prevailing for us as it was in Acts. Sing about such care, and plead for it in our days of weakness and trial, using the words of this old hymn:

*At even, ere the sun was set,
The sick, O Lord, around Thee lay;
O, with how many pains they met!
O, with what joy they went away!*

*Once more 'tis eventide, and we,
Oppressed with various ills, draw near;
What if Thyself we cannot see?
We know that Thou art ever near.*

*O Savior Christ, our woes dispel;
For some are sick, and some are sad;
And some have never loved Thee well,
And some have lost the love they had.*

*And some are pressed with worldly care
And some are tried with sinful doubt;
And some such grievous passions tear,
That only Thou canst cast them out.*

*And some have found the world is vain,
Yet from the world they break not free;
And some have friends who give them pain, Yet
have not sought a friend in Thee*

*And none, O Lord, have perfect rest,
For none are wholly free from sin;
And they who fain would serve Thee best
Are conscious most of wrong with*

*O Savior Christ, Thou too art man;
Thou has been troubled, tempted, tried;
Thy kind but searching glance can scan
The very wounds that shame would hide.
Thy touch has still its ancient power.
No word from Thee can fruitless fall;
Hear, in this solemn evening hour,
And in Thy mercy heal us all.*

Tuesday: Read Acts 1:4-5 and 1:12-14**Waiting in Obedience**

Faith is strengthened by waiting on God to act. The church in Acts dared not take one step until the Lord sent His Spirit to equip them to witness before a watching world. Let's consider further the realities which drove this small group of believers to sheer reliance on the Lord.

Being sent back to Jerusalem (Acts 1:12), they were obeying a difficult command, before He ascended: to go back to this very city, full of those enemies which had crucified their Lord (See Acts 1:4). How did they find the courage to sit still in such an oppressive place? In their previous trial, on the night before the Lord's crucifixion, they had failed to stand! Why should they act differently now? Drawn to the Lord out of a sense of their own weakness, they could not help but gather together in corporate prayer. They had no other options but to seek God's face! They no longer trusted in their own strength, but now they had seen a miracle, life out of death, so they had hope.

Meditate and Pray: Here then is our first lesson on the living reality and power of prayer. We can't pray without real neediness, coming from empty hearts which long to be filled with the good things of God. Nor can prayer arise from our lips without constant reliance upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, praying in the name and by the saving work of our Savior. In a real sense, we are to pour our prayers into the priestly, spotless but Cross-scarred hands of Jesus and let *Him* take them into Heaven to the Throne of mercy, confident that He knows our hearts, wants and needs. Indeed, **Psalm 62:8** urges us to do just that: "Trust in Him at all time, O people; pour out your heat before him. God is a refuge for us."

Wednesday: Read Acts 1:15-22 & Psalm 109:1-8**Waiting for Leadership**

The theme of casting ourselves on the Lord in prayer continues, as we see the church prayerfully decide what to do about the vacancy caused by Judas Iscariot's apostasy and death (Acts 1:16-19). The wound inflicted on the church by Judas must be healed, and another one chosen to replace him, even as the quotation of Psalm 109:8 predicts, "Let another take his office."

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks that the Lord of the church is never short in providing leadership for His church. Ephesians 4:10-13 reveals the very same Lord Jesus who "descended into Hell" for our sins on the Cross who now has ascended far above the heavens in order to pour out the Holy Spirit of leadership on His church:

He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:10-13

Lord, help us also to pray that you prepare and reveal godly leaders to fill every facet of our local ministry. May we wait on You in prayer until we have unity on each choice and continue upholding our leaders in prayer after they take on their roles.

Thursday: Read Acts 1:21-26**Waiting in Ignorance**

The theme of prayerful reliance upon the Lord continues as the early church, under the leadership of the Apostles, seek out the Lord's choice for a replacement for Judas by the use of lots. Commentator Albert Barnes speaks well here:

Casting lots was common among the Jews on important and difficult occasions, and it was natural that the apostles should resort to it in this. Thus David divided the priests by Lot (1 Chr 24:5); the land of Canaan was divided by lot (Num. 26:55; Josh. 15:1-17, 18). Jonathan, son of Saul, was detected as having violated his father's command, and as bringing calamity on the Israelites, by lot, (1 Sam. 14:41-42. Achan was detected by lot, (Josh. 7:16-18). In these cases the use of the lot was regarded as a solemn appeal to God, for His direct interference in cases which they could not themselves decide. Proverbs 16:33: "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." The choice of an Apostle was an event of the same kind, and was regarded as a solemn appeal to God for his direction and guidance in a case which the apostles could not determine.

Meditate and Pray: First, Lord, we ask forgiveness for prayerless self-reliance, and for making so many decisions in the light of human reason, without waiting on You in prayer. Secondly, we thank you for the Holy Spirit and the Word, our rod and staff of guidance in cases which we do not know our right hand from our left. Help, Lord.

Friday: Read Acts 2:1-17**Waiting for the Outpouring of the Spirit**

When it comes to the Old Testament's promise of Christ's sending the Spirit on Pentecost, "pouring" is the word that predominates. In fact, after the prophetic promises of our Savior's birth, death, resurrection and second coming, it is the promises of the *outpouring* of the Spirit of God that fill the pages of Scripture. Whether it is the promise of such an outpouring on individual covenant families (Isaiah 59:21), or the outpouring "on all flesh" which Peter quotes from Joel 2:28-32, God's response is immense and all-pervasive. Nothing can stand in the way of the flood of God's Spirit, poured out to make all things new!

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank God for the power of His Spirit to make all things new in our scarred, war-torn, and devastated lives of profound spiritual need.

Use *Trinity Hymnal* # 339 as your prayer for this outpouring to heal our lives as a church family:

*1 For your gift of God the Spirit,
power to make our lives anew,
pledge of life and hope of glory,
Savior, we would worship you.
Crowning gift of resurrection
sent from your ascended throne,
fullness of the very Godhead,
come to make your life our own.*

*2 He who in creation's dawning
brooded on the lifeless deep,
still across our nature's darkness
moves to wake our souls from sleep,
moves to stir, to draw, to quicken,
thrusts us through with sense of sin;
brings to birth and seals and fills us
saving Advocate within.*

3 *He, himself the living Author,
wakes to life the sacred Word,
reads with us its holy pages
and reveals our risen Lord.
He it is who works within us,
teaching rebel hearts to pray,
he whose holy intercessions
rise for us both night and day.*

4 *He, the mighty God, indwells us;
his to strengthen, help, empower;
his to overcome the tempter
ours to call in danger's hour.
In his strength we dare to battle
all the raging hosts of sin,
and by him alone we conquer
foes without and foes within.*

Sat/Sun: Read Acts 2:1-17

Waiting for Completion

As we see the gathered Apostle band, along with 120 or so followers, we marvel at the *fullness and generosity* of the Divine response to the church's need. To appreciate the *immensity of this grace at Pentecost*, let's think of the church's utter need and weakness as they waited for the Spirit's coming.

Peter was, humanly speaking, the best spokesman and representative the church had. But he was the Apostle who would be forever branded as the one who had denied the Lord. *Only an amazingly undeserved outpouring of Pentecostal grace would enable such a one to be effective in the winning of souls for Christ* – so that 3,000 men would be converted (Acts 2:4).

The cynicism of the crowd (Acts 2:13) is like so many today who dismiss the Spirit's preached word as mere "drunkenness"! *Only the infinite power of the outpoured Spirit of God can break through to save such*, so that even the most hardened enemies of Christ; even some priests (Acts 6:7) are soundly converted to the very Lord whose words a few days before had seemed like drunken ramblings!

The sheer number of different nationalities, with their many divided languages (Acts 2:5-12), means a host of communication problems and insurmountable cultural differences. Even though these different peoples gathered in Jerusalem claimed to follow the God of Israel, we know from Bible history how differences in life situations and commission of personal sin can divide Lots from Abrahams and Sauls from Davids! *Only the Spirit of the God who rejected humanistic alliances at the Tower of Babel* (Genesis 11:8-9) can bring real unity of faith and understanding to people of every tribe, tongue and nation!

Meditate and Pray: Lord, by your Spirit, please restore in our world, nation, families and even in our own hearts, the unity of faith which comes from the Spirit of God's outpouring. Amen.