

Message #3
Acts

Kurt Hedlund
1/19/2025

COMMITMENTS FOR CHRISTIANS AND CHURCHES ACTS 1:12-26

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

In the wake of the fire in Paradise, California, in 2018, which resulted in 85 fatalities, state government officials announced a plan of action to prevent such devastations in the future. On March 22, 2019, the governor issued an emergency proclamation which required the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection to undertake projects to remove dead trees, destroy dry vegetation, create fuel breaks, and establish defensible spaces near populated areas.

In 2023 the Governor's Office of Emergency Services updated its plan to mitigate natural disasters. After mentioning the danger of wildfires the plan stated that it would **"reflect an integrated, multi-level, multi-sector, collaborative approach to risk reduction that builds community resilience and promotes equitable outcomes."** The equitable outcome in Pacific Palisades (PROJECTOR ON--- PALISADES FIRE) was that many rich and poor in that community lost all of their material possessions in the fire.

This all sounds like a nice plan. But it turns out that there wasn't a lot of funding for it. On the local level decisions were made that led to a bad outcome. The Los Angeles Fire Department had its budget cut this year by \$17.5 million. It turns out that of the 183 fire trucks in the city fire department about half of them were unusable because of maintenance problems. A major water reservoir was also empty, and fire hydrants went dry. But you may be encouraged to know that the city had invested \$400,000 in annual salary to pay an official in the fire department with the position of Equity Bureau Chief. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The success of any enterprise is dependent not only on planning, power (or financing), and the promise of some reward or benefit, but also on the commitment of those who will be called upon to follow through with the program. That is true in fire fighting, war, in politics, in business, in organizations, and in the church.

In our study last week in the Book of Acts we looked at the building plans of the church of Christ. We saw that our Lord Jesus Christ had established a plan for reaching out to the world. He had provided power that was to come from the Holy Spirit. He had also left His followers with a promise that He would return.

In our passage today we are going to look at the commitment that was necessary to bring our Lord's building plans to fruition. We are going to see that the early church had strength that came actually from several commitments. In examining these commitments we will hopefully learn something about how we can make our own church successful and how we can individually be faithful to Christ.

I.

(PROJECTOR ON--- COMMITMENT TO EACH OTHER) First, from vv. 12-14 of Acts #1 notice that there was a COMMITMENT TO EACH OTHER. Last time we looked at the ascension of Christ into heaven. Verse 12 implies that this happened on Olivet, or the Mount of Olives. (MOUNT OF OLIVES 01) The Mount of Olives is just to the east of the Temple Mount. Luke describes it as being “a Sabbath’s day journey away.” According to Jewish understanding, that was 2000 cubits, or about 2/3 of a mile. That was the distance that a Jew could travel on the Sabbath day. The lower part of the hill was that far from Jerusalem. The site of the ascension was somewhat further away.

When I was in Israel years ago (PROJECTOR OFF), I was in the West Bank near a place where a new Jewish settlement was going up on a hill in Palestinian territory. There were just a couple of trailers on the hill. But already around the top were these tall metal poles surrounding the new settlement. They were 2000 cubits away from the settlement, showing how far the residents could go from the community on the Sabbath.

If we take the reference in v. 3 to 40 days as the exact length of time between the resurrection and the ascension, then it was on a Thursday that the apostles made their way down the hill and back into Jerusalem. (PROJECTOR ON--- JERUSALEM FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES) This is what Jerusalem and the site of the temple look like today from the Mount of Olives. Where the Dome of the Rock, the third holiest site in Islam, stands is where the temple would have been in Jesus’ time.

(UPPER ROOM MAP) Verse 13 says that they then went to the upper room. It may well be that this was the same place where they celebrated the Last Supper with Jesus and where they saw Jesus on the day of the resurrection. This was probably in the southwest part of the city. In #12 v. 12 we are told that the upper room where the disciples met later was in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. The room where tourists are taken today goes back only to the Middle Ages. On the first floor of the building is a Jewish religious site. On the second floor is this upper room. On the third floor is an Islamic religious site. So it goes in today’s Jerusalem. There is some archaeological evidence that the site is original and that part of the lower walls do go back to the time of Jesus. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Upper rooms were the most likely part of first century homes for groups of people to gather. Rooms on the first floor were smaller. Their walls were used to support the upper story. First floor rooms were also usually noisier, less private, and hotter during much of the year.

The eleven apostles of Jesus, who are listed here, were staying in this upper room. Apparently it was a kind of headquarters for the Christians in Jerusalem. In staying here they were being obedient to the Lord’s command to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 14 mentions some of the other followers of Jesus who were also staying in Jerusalem, although not necessarily in the same house. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is one of them. This is the last mention of her in the New Testament. Also present were the brothers of Jesus. The natural way to understand this is that they were the sons of Mary and half brothers of Jesus.

This would contradict the idea that Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus. There is nothing in the Bible that points to the notion of the perpetual virginity of Mary. Matthew #1 v. 25 (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 1:25) would seem to imply the opposite. There Matthew says, "... **but [Joseph] knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.**" Mark #6 lists the names of four half brothers of Jesus.

The gospel writers indicate that the brothers of Jesus had earlier not believed the claims that Jesus made about Himself. Later in Acts we will find that James, one of the brothers of Jesus, becomes the leader of the Jerusalem church. (PROJECTOR OFF) The little New Testament book that bears his name is also attributed to him in church tradition. First Corinthians #15 v. 7 mentions that Jesus appeared to this James after the resurrection. This appearance was probably instrumental in changing James's view of Jesus. Either Jesus also appeared to His other brothers, or they believed the report of James about the resurrection of Jesus.

In Luke's gospel the author makes mention of women from Galilee who were among the followers of Jesus who had come with Him to Jerusalem. So it was probably this same group of women who are mentioned in v. 14.

What I would especially like for you to notice is that v.14 says that these followers of Jesus were of one mind. The Greek word for "one mind" refers to oneness of heart and mind. This word appears eleven times in the New Testament. Ten of those appearances are in the Book of Acts. A key factor in the success of the early church was the unity that the Christians experienced. Central to this unity was a commitment that the Christians had to one another.

These followers of Jesus spent a lot of time together. (PROJECTOR ON--- LUKE 24:53) The last verse of Luke's gospel says, "... **and [they] were continually in the temple blessing God.**" There have been a number of reconstructions and models made of the temple mount in the time of Jesus. (SOLOMON'S PORTICO) This picture looks west from the Mount of Olives. The eleven apostles may have met in the upper room, but the temple was probably the only reasonable meeting place large enough to accommodate the larger group of those who were willing to identify themselves as followers of Jesus. Verse 15 in our text indicates that there were at least 120 men in these gatherings.

The Book of Acts later mentions that Solomon's Portico was the meeting place of these early Christians. That portico area was on the near side, the east side of the temple compound along the outer wall of the temple compound. This might well have been where they were meeting together for prayer.

These Christians were spending much time together. (PROJECTOR OFF) Time spent together does not guarantee unity, but it is difficult to cultivate unity without it. When time together is based upon a common purpose and a common identity and comes from a common spiritual commitment, the chances that unity will develop are good. The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon them, but there was still unity. That unity came largely from a mutual commitment that these Christians had to each other.

One source of strength in a local church is the commitment that Christians have toward one another. There is a direct relationship between that strength and the amount of time and involvement that church people have with one another. People who spend time with other Christians and have regular involvement in church activities and meetings are going to provide strength to the church and will in turn find spiritual strength for themselves. Normally there is benefit for the church and for the individual that results from time and energy put into a congregation.

(PROJECTOR ON--- PEANUT MACHINE) One of my seminary professors liked to talk about the peanut principle. He argued that if you put a penny into a peanut machine, you get a penny's worth of peanuts. Amazing how this works! In a similar way if you put a penny's worth of time and energy into a church, you get a penny's worth of strength and support in return. The church in turn is a penny stronger. If you put in five pennies, you get a five penny benefit. And so it goes. (OVERHEAD OFF)

This is one of the limitations of participating in church via a streaming service, such as what we offer. Some people are confined to home because of health reasons, and that is perfectly understandable. But if Christians are physically able to come to church services and do not, there is a Biblical fellowship that they are missing out on, and the church assembly is also missing out on by virtue of your absence. So you should go to church if you can.

There are other legitimate priorities that limit the time and energy that we can commit to the church and to other Christians. We may have jobs. We may have marriages and kids that need attention. We may have community involvements, which are good things. But we will experience strength individually and corporately from the commitment that we make to fellow Christians. If we aren't getting that much out of our church experience, it may be because we have not put all that much into it. It is the peanut principle. The benefit to self and to the church comes from becoming involved and committed to other Christians. That may mean singing on the praise team, attending a Bible study, serving on a church board, helping with the youth group, or helping out with a practical need--- like helping the Buchanans to move this Friday.

II.

Notice also in vv. 12-14 that among these first Christians there is also a COMMITMENT TO PRAYER. (PROJECTOR ON--- COMMITMENT TO PRAYER) Verse 14 says, "**All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer...**" What were they praying about? I imagine that there were a number of subjects that were covered.

Perhaps the betrayal of Judas was one. The vacancy that he left among the apostles was perhaps a concern. Jesus had also told His disciples to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I suspect that this was a subject of prayer.

My interpretation of the New Testament is that this is not something for which we Christians need to pray today. The Book of Acts describes a transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The baptism of the Holy Spirit had not yet happened. It would happen at Pentecost. After that it seems to be something which happens at the time of an individual's salvation. In 1 Corinthians #12 v. 13 (1 CORINTHIANS 12:13) Paul tells Christians, **"For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."** In Romans #8 v. 9 Paul says that if someone does not have the Holy Spirit, he or she is not a Christian (ROMANS 8:9): **"...Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."**

When we were living in Connecticut, the pope made a visit to New York City. There was an article in our local paper in which a church official from town described his visit to see the pope in glowing terms. (PROJECTOR OFF) He said, **"You are in contact with someone that is in direct contact with God. And your life is changed."** That struck me as being sad. One of the purposes of Christ's death was to eliminate the need for a separate priesthood. When Christ died, the veil of the temple was ripped in half, signifying that believers now have direct access into the presence of God. The Book of Hebrews in the New Testament says that Christ is our high priest. If we have trusted in Jesus as our Savior, we have direct access to God. We don't need a pope or a priest or a pastor to get us in to see God. We can go direct. We should take advantage of the opportunity. We ought to be committed to prayer.

A Christian writer by the name of Leonard Ravenhill says, **"The church has many organizers, but few agonizers; many who pay, but few who pray; many resters, but few wrestlers, many who are enterprising, but few who are interceding... That is the difference between the modern church and the early church. In the matter of effective praying, never have so many left so much to so few. Brethren, let us pray."**

Verse 14 in our passage suggests that this prayer was not just individual, private prayer. They all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer. There was group prayer. This commitment to prayer transformed the early church and transformed the world around them. I wonder what changes we might see in our individual lives, in our church, and in our community if we really believed that. Perhaps you would consider joining us one Wednesday mornings at 11 AM as a number of us participate in a Zoom prayer meeting. Let us know if you are interested, and we would be happy to connect you.

III.

The Christians in our passage demonstrated a commitment to each other, a commitment to prayer, and a COMMITMENT TO THE SCRIPTURES. (III.)

COMMITMENT TO THE SCRIPTURES) In vv. 15 & 16 Peter, who again seems to be the leader of the apostles, speaks to a group of about 120 people, perhaps gathered in the temple. Peter is the featured human actor in the first seven chapters of Acts.

The original Greek address in v. 16 actually uses two terms: "Men, brethren." "Men" in Greek is the specific word for "males." So apparently the Christian women were not around on this occasion. If this was indeed the case, then the total number of Christ's followers was more than 120.

Paul says in v. 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.**" From the very beginning of the church the Scripture was the basis for examining the experiences of life. Here the issue was Judas.

The disciples had witnessed a lot of things in the space of a short time. They had seen the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. It took time to analyze and reflect upon all of these events. At some point they got around to thinking about the betrayal of Judas. Right up until the incident in Gethsemane the other apostles had regarded him as an equal partner in the mission of the gospel. Now they had to deal with the fact that he was a traitor.

So Peter looks to the Scriptures for some understanding of this betrayal. He makes general reference to David and the Psalms that he wrote. Many of the Psalms deal with David's kingship and the opposition that he received. Jesus Himself had appealed to some of these Psalms, indicating that the experiences described there were types, or foreshadowings, of the experiences that He would have as the Messiah, which term literally means "anointed one." David was anointed as the king. Jesus was anointed as the Messiah. At His baptism the disciples saw the Holy Spirit as a dove descending upon Him. Jesus' tie with David is also seen in the fact that Jews in His day hailed Him as "the Son of David."

Peter may well have remembered something that Jesus said at the Last Supper. Jesus had made reference to a traitor in their midst. For Scriptural support He referred to Psalm 41 v. 9, which originally spoke of Ahithophel, a counselor to David who betrayed him. In John 13 vv. 17 & 18 (JOHN 13:17) Jesus indicated that the ultimate fulfillment was to occur in someone else. Jesus said, "**If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (JOHN 13:18) I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'**"

Peter doesn't quote this passage here. Instead in v. 20 of our passage he quotes from Psalm 69 v. 25. That Psalm speaks about the enemies of David. But it also seems to have application to Jesus and His enemies. (PSALM 69:21) Verse 21 of Psalm 69 says, "**They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.**" These things, of course, were offered to Christ on the cross.

(PSALM 69.25) Psalm 69 v. 25 says, **“May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents.”** But Peter believes that this is not the end of the matter. More action needs to be taken. Jesus had told the apostles that they would sit in His coming kingdom on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Judas was a betrayer. He was not a legitimate apostle. So one of those twelve thrones needs to be filled.

Psalm 109 was another Davidic Psalm that spoke of the enemies of the king, the anointed one. (PSALM 109:8) Verse 8 described what should happen to the enemy of David: **“May his days be few; may another take his office!”** Peter also quotes this part of the Psalm in v. 20 of our passage. Peter saw in this Messianic Psalm a further support for the action that he was about to suggest.

Jesus did not appoint a replacement for Judas. He left that to His apostles. Two men were put forward as possible candidates to replace Judas. (PROJECTOR OFF) My guess is that they were the only two men who fit the qualifications that Peter described. They had been with Jesus from the time of His baptism with John. They had seen Him resurrected from the dead. They were close to Jesus. In one sense, that is what the church is always seeking in its leaders--- people who are close to Jesus.

The term “apostle” means “a sent one.” A few times in the Bible reference is made to apostles who were sent out by the church. But there are only two sets of people in the New Testament who are called “Apostles of Jesus Christ.” One set is the individuals described here in Acts #1, chosen and called by the Lord Jesus Christ and eyewitnesses of His life, death, and resurrection. The other set is limited to the Apostle Paul, who had a miraculous experience in seeing the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus.

What I would especially like for you to notice is what prompted this action on the part of Peter and the other apostles. It was their concern to fulfill the Scriptures. It was their commitment to the Bible. These guys had a good grasp of the Scriptures. Apparently Peter was quoting from memory these various passages, which to us might seem to be obscure.

What is even more interesting is that these guys were not trained rabbis. Peter and several of the others were fishermen by trade. They had not been to seminary. They had not been to Bible college. But they had studied the Bible--- probably as children in the synagogue in Capernaum. It did not hurt any that they had Jesus as their teacher later on. I suspect that during the forty days before the ascension Jesus had done additional Bible study with them.

(PROJECTOR ON--- FORT SILL) Between 1958 and 1960 a particular army officer taught classes at the artillery training school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The attitude of the men, he observed, was so lax that they often seemed to be dozing off. When this officer taught these classes between 1965 and 1967, using the same lecture material, the attitude of the students was entirely different. They were alert and taking extensive notes. What was the difference? In less than six weeks the second group was shipping

out to Vietnam where they would be involved in combat. Likewise a realization of the spiritual conflict in which we are involved should motivate us to study the Scriptures.

IV.

In this passage it is also evident that a source of strength for the early Christians came from their COMMITMENT TO CHRIST. (IV. COMMITMENT TO CHRIST) The concern of the apostles in this passage is how to deal with the situation of Judas. Judas was not another follower of Jesus who just fell away from his commitment to Christ. He was a betrayer. He never was truly committed to Jesus. He was in this Jesus movement to get what he could out of it. When he was treasurer of the group, he took what money he could for himself. When it became clear to Judas that Jesus was not about to set up a political kingdom, he got what he could from the priests and from his inside knowledge.

Humanity has a special hatred for betrayers. The betrayal here was especially evil in that it involved God come in the flesh. It was also difficult in that the other apostles seemed not to have a clue that his was a false commitment until the arrest of Jesus in Gethsemane.

It often is in the heat of spiritual warfare that true commitments are revealed. Some seemingly drop out. Others, sometimes unexpectedly, shine forth.

Verses 18 & 19 describe the demise of Judas. (FIELD OF BLOOD) Tradition going back to the third century says that this is the location of Hakeldema, the Field of Blood. Our text indicates that Judas bought it with the money that he got from the priests for betraying Christ. It also says that he fell headlong, and his intestines burst open.

In the gospels we are told that Judas hanged himself. Perhaps the branch on which he hung himself broke, and he fell down. Or when he was cut down, his body may have fallen and his intestines burst open. (PROJECTOR OFF)

So in v. 24 the men gathered together to pray for guidance. The "lord" whom they addressed is probably Jesus. In v. 2 Luke says that it was Jesus who chose the apostles. Now they call upon Him to choose one of these two candidates.

The method of selection that they use is interesting. They cast lots. The same word "lot" is used in v. 17 where Judas is said to have cast his lot among the apostles. Here they may have put two small stones in a container with Matthias's name on one, and Joseph's name on the other. The first name that came out was the one chosen. Thus the lot falls to Matthias.

The Old Testament speaks of a similar method of decision making. The high priest had charge of the Urim and Thumim. The Old Testament Law said that these lots were to be used by the high priest in certain situations requiring decisions. (PROJECTOR ON--- PROVERBS 16:33) Proverbs 16 v. 33 says, "**The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.**" So the apostles appear to be acting in faith when they use this method of choosing a replacement for Judas.

Again we see the transitional nature of the Book of Acts. After this occasion we don't see lots used in the New Testament to make decisions. The reason is that the Holy Spirit comes upon believers. He becomes the source of guidance for them.
(PROJECTOR OFF)

So these disciples appear to be acting out of a commitment to Christ. They displayed a commitment to each other, a commitment to prayer, a commitment to the Scriptures, and a commitment to Christ. Perhaps the first three commitments could all be described as evidence of their commitment to Christ. For it was this commitment to Christ which would distinguish these early Christians. Despite the obstacles that they faced, despite the persecution they suffered, they clung tenaciously to Him, and, as we shall see from this book, their world was turned upside down.

It is this same kind of commitment to Jesus that will make a difference in our church and in our world. Pastor Lloyd Ogilvie says, **“Our need to be in charge of ourselves, others, and situations often makes our relationship with Christ life’s biggest power struggle. We are reluctant to relinquish our control and allow Him to run our lives. We may believe in Him and be active in the church and in Christian causes, but trusting Him as Lord of everything in life can be scary. Even though we pray about our challenges and problems, all too often what we really want is strength to accomplish what we’ve already decided is best for ourselves and others. Meanwhile we press on with our own priorities and plans. We remain the scriptwriter, casting director, choreographer, and producer of the drama of our own lives, in which we are the star performer.”** Is Christ truly Lord of your life? Or are you still the scriptwriter, casting director, choreographer, and producer?

Our local congregation will be successful not so much when we focus on making the church “successful,” whatever that might mean. Rather our focus should be on the commitments necessary to give the church strength. Our focus should be on being committed to each other, on being committed to prayer, on being committed to the Scriptures, and on generally being committed to Christ. When and if we make these commitments, the Lord’s purposes are sure to be accomplished.