

5/29/22 - Acts 1:15-26 - "Connecting the Dots"

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Date: 29 May 2022

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[0 : 00] The testimony that's bound in God's word explains every problem of evil in the world and every promise of God in the world.

Similar to seeing dots that are scattered upon a piece of paper and you simply connect the dots. I used to love connecting the dots when I was a young boy.

Arguably, if I had a little activity book, I'd probably still enjoy connecting the dots. And for that reason, seeing this unfold and how it's unfolding in this passage, I've titled the sermon today, Connecting the Dots.

Because, think about it, it is upon this premise that Peter seems compelled by the Holy Spirit to turn this prayer meeting into a Bible study.

Peter, one of the twelve apostles who Jesus chose as a disciple, handpicked, began to connect all the dots that are scattered around, all the details of the occurrences that previously occurred.

[1 : 16] And how does he connect the dots? With the lines of scripture and how those dots connect. And in those connections, find their purpose.

Are you with me? You understand what I'm getting at? This is the line of scripture. This is the preacher's ultimate aim. If anybody is heralding God's word today, this morning, or any other day, they have one task in mind.

That is holding the line of scripture. Not adding anything to scripture. Not taking anything away. Holding the line of scripture. What scripture says is what scripture says.

And how we interpret scripture is by scripture alone. Not our opinions. And so this is precisely the point. The dots of life find their connection through scripture.

And through scripture find their purpose. That is the main point of the passage today. But do you believe that?

[2 : 24] When life takes an unexpected direction, and all of a sudden it seems like the world's falling apart, do you believe it? When our plans have suddenly collapsed, as if we have the best idea laid out on paper, we run to God and say, here, just sign on the line, God.

I figured it all out. I got it all worked out. This has to be your will. And then all of a sudden, everything collapses. Do you believe it?

When God's hand in life seems nowhere to be found, you're looking around, you're reading this thing from front to back, up and down, trying the Greek, trying the Hebrew, trying everything.

When his hand cannot be found, do you believe it? These remaining disciples that are stepping into their apostleship are not only witnesses to the grand displays of God's power through Jesus Christ and the signs that were proving his deity that he is who he said he was.

Not only did they eyewitness all of that, they were eyewitnesses of the greatest betrayal of all time.

[3 : 51] Judas. Judas. I know. It's amazing, isn't it? But come to find, this would be, the betrayal would be the providential means of which God intended to triumph over evil.

Connecting the dots. So let's play connect the dots today in three different points and sections of connecting the dots. As we enter this passage, let's finish this introduction section of the book before it takes off in its narrative.

The first section that we're gonna see today is the dot of betrayal and the line of judgment. The dot of betrayal and the line of judgment.

In verse 15, it says, in those days, Peter stood up among the brothers. The company of persons was in all about 120 and said, this is Peter, 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. Peter claims his first initiative as the leader of this apostolic body.

[5 : 19] This is the first time that we see Peter stand up and lead to strengthen the brothers just as Luke had previously talked about in Luke 22, verse 32, that Jesus said to strengthen the brothers, to lead the brothers.

And in this case, Peter stands. Check out that disposition, standing and leading Peter. It's at this moment of strengthening that Peter fixates this prayer meeting onto God's word.

And it's almost like he's standing there saying, guys, this had to happen according to scripture. This is making sense, right?

I mean, better late than never for Peter, who often finds his foot in his mouth, right? And David, David, guys, David covered all of this in the Psalms.

It's right here. The whole thing, it's fitting together. Scripture is connecting these dots. Aren't we opened up to the mind of this gathering at this time?

[6 : 31] Think about what would compel somebody to say this. Jesus? Well, all these 120 are obviously gathered and they're experiencing loss. They are experiencing the loss of not only Jesus ascending on a cloud.

There he goes. The main man. The leader among them. Gone. So they're compelled to pray. Not only that, if you could imagine a dinner table, anybody who's lost a loved one in their life and you see that empty seat where your loved one used to sit, they see a table here with an empty seat.

Not only is Jesus gone, they've lost Jesus here, they've also lost Judas. This is sheer loss. This is often uncertain loss, fearful loss.

But things seem bad, though. Like, horrifically bad. Because, concerning Judas, Luke actually interrupts this passage and you see in your Bibles it's in parentheses.

He interrupts this whole narrative with this gruesome depiction about this guy falling headlong, not only falling headlong, and how his body laid out, sprawled out with guts coming out all over.

[7 : 55] Why would he interrupt this passage with such graphic nature? I believe it's that it's indicating that sin can only run so far from the judgment of God.

That while Jesus was not present in proximity, his word has been left to them as a guide to connect these dots of utter betrayal, utter sin, but guess what?

That betrayal was punished. He fell headlong. Not only headlong, his guts spilt out. Just retribution for his crime against the Son of God.

And this is where Peter reflects upon the book of Psalms. He says, For it is written in the book of Psalms, may his camp become desolate and let there be no one to dwell in it.

He's quoting Psalm 69, 25. And then another, and let another take his office. Psalm 109, verse 8.

[9 : 02] Let's turn to the line of Scripture to connect these dots. Peter stands up and connects the dots. What does God's word say about it? Well, Psalm 69 is specifically a psalm of protest to God.

A psalm of plea to God. Not for everyone to have everything that they want in life, but for the wrath of God to be poured out upon evil and that they may be removed from the community.

This is what Psalm 69 is about. And don't we see that being spilled out? Headlong, bowels gushing out.

Church, we have great reasons for speechlessness in our distress, in the midst of betrayal in this life, or even in the distress of loved ones.

Sometimes when other people are hurting, you hurt even more. But we have no excuse to allow God's word to be speechless amid our distress. That God's word is the very means of which everything ought to make sense.

[10 : 19] As it was for Judas, and when evil befalls us as well, we are reminded that God's word roots us in the just retribution that comes from God's hand alone at God's timing alone.

I mean, Peter, being a guy who almost cut a guy's ear off, you would imagine he was going out for blood. I'm going to find Judas and I'm going to give him a piece of my mind, right? We do that at the Walmart line with customer service.

You gave me this, this hedge of lettuce. You kidding me? Look at these wilted leaves. And Judas just betrayed the son of God. Just retribution rests in God's hands.

Evil will be judged according to scripture. And our vengeance acted out in this life is simply unbelief with a mask.

When we are acting out our own retribution out of God's timing. And guess what, church? This is being disobedient to God's word. Why?

[11 : 26] Well, because God's word also solves the problem. Psalm 109, as David also proclaimed, as Peter reiterated, Psalm 109.

God's word solves it. This is a prayer, a psalm of prayer, of vindication, of vengeance. And it specifically speaks upon an assignment, a position specifically, that was abandoned.

And they are praying for replacement. David is praying for replacement at this time. All of that to say, the establishment of these 12 positions as the apostolic body is significant to this time and this place for these people at this time in church history.

And verse 17 says, Judas belonged to our number. He belonged to receive a share in our ministry.

There's something bound here to this time. You see, evil can have its fun, but evil never gets the last word, church. God will replace that which is lost.

[12 : 42] God will rebuild that which is broken. God will revive that which is dead. This is all in line with the history of the nation of Israel, of the story of God redeeming.

Israel's looking a little sketchy here, right? In some of these pages, we're like, oh, this is the end. God's just gonna pour out and it's gonna be like Sodom and Gomorrah all over again. This is bad.

But what does he do? He restores that which is broken. He revives that which is dead. We see that promise being unfolded since Genesis 3, where the seed of Adam would crush the skull of the serpent, a prophecy way back here concerning the man of whom just ascended right here, right now.

Evil can have its fun, but evil never gets the last word. And God is redeeming that which was lost at this moment. And Psalm 109 is attested to that promise.

And Peter stands up and says it to this group of 120. Nice little church plant there. This is why the greatest comfort we find amid ineffable circumstances, unspeakable circumstances, is found within the pages of God's word alone.

[14 : 09] Why? The dots of life find their connection through scripture and through scripture find their purpose. And here we're reminded that it is found in judgment and we are assured of that.

Not only that, we see another dot. we see the dot of loss and a line of promise. Verse 21 continues, 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.

You see, this office of apostle is like no other. This office is a supernatural office.

And I'm not talking about strictly like signs and wonders, miracles and everything we read, but this is supernatural that the natural inclination of realm exceeds anything that would ever make sense in the natural for this to be established.

That something this prominent as scripture attests to as laying a foundation for the church, that God would choose only 12 to start this. I would have thought that 120 sounds better than 12, right?

[15 : 47] Let's just get the sword out and just knight everyone, apostle, apostle, apostle, everyone. Now go out and we're going to continue, but God chose 12. And this is not any ordinary 12.

This is a, there's a criterion given. Number one, it had to be a man in this passage. There are some criterias here. They must be an eyewitness of Christ's life and a witness of his death and to attest of his resurrection.

And now, we got to ask, well, Peter, why not, why not, why not 120? Why not 13? Why, why, I mean, 11 is good.

I mean, you remember the story, Peter, about Gideon's army? I mean, whittling down this massive army to 300. You know, God works out miracles. You, we could be satisfied.

Let's just keep praying, right? Sit down, Peter. Hush, hush. Right? Not here. It's not 11. It's not 13.

[16 : 48] It's not 120. Why didn't Paul emphasize this apostolic office as he did the elders and deacons to all the churches that are springing up as the gospel is going to the end of the earth in Crete, in Ephesus, in Philippi, all these churches.

And Paul gave certain commands to these churches to be established with elders, to be overseen with elders, to have deacons. And he gave specific commands for them.

Why didn't Paul emphasize his apostolic body? Why are the apostles not needed any more in our day to day? Because the identity of the church as the people of God is directly tied to a 12 symbolically.

This is symbolic sense of 12. God saw it fit to represent the 12 nations of Israel within this 12 apostolic body.

And this is huge. Because this replacement isn't just any filling a seat. It is filling a seat, but it's not all of that. What is God doing for Israel here at this time by replacing that which was betrayed?

[18 : 10] He's restoring Israel, the nation of Israel, back to its 12 nations. This is not just a call for apostolic succession that we all of a sudden begin the apostolic body and continue that in our day to day.

This is something much grander in the picture of what God has been revealing for the nation of Israel, people. That just as he's restoring then, he's restoring now in the apostolic body.

The replacement is highly indicative that God is restoring the kingdom as well. God is restoring. And the central mission of this apostolic body is what?

To proclaim the arrival of God's kingdom through the life, the death, burial, resurrection, ascension of Jesus Christ, known as the gospel, of which is to spread.

Where? From God's people. Verse 8, look with me if you don't believe me, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be witnesses, my witnesses, in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in all Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

[19 : 24] And it's beginning with a symbolic number of 12, the 12 tribes of Israel. This is huge. Church. This is no ordinary office.

This is no ordinary number. This is no ordinary requirement and no ordinary people can proclaim in this capacity. This is indeed the foundation of the church.

Ephesians 2.20, the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles, built upon the foundation of the prophets.

As we see. Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. You see what's happening in the grand scheme of things. Evil is never given the last word.

And we even see it for the nation of Israel. The dots of loss that we perceive in this life are only the means by which God intended to triumph in provision to show that he's got it all together.

[20 : 27] It's like the children's song. He's got the whole world, right? And it is true here. And we see this happening in real time in the book of Acts. So while the symbolic 12 representatives were originally assembled, things were often great.

I mean, you could imagine. They were the A-team. This is whatever LeBron James is pairing up with on the court. I mean, this exceeds that.

This is the perfect team, right? But evil struck with vengeance, put to death the Son of God, and gruesomely took his life.

But God intended to restore. God intended for his hand to triumph over evil. What great hope, church, we have in the promise that God will restore that which has been severed of hope.

hope. That our hope isn't found in our situations. That our hope is directly correlated to who Jesus Christ is and what he's done.

[21 : 39] That the whole world could be going to pieces. Our health could be going to pieces. Everything falling apart. But we have no excuse to lose our hope.

hope. We have the greatest hope as a church. A promise that can't even be corroborated with evil.

I mean, we have all fallen short. Our promise is vindication as blameless one day by the cross of Jesus Christ. We are truly, utterly hopeless apart from Jesus Christ.

This is the call of the gospel. And if you aren't in Christ today, if you kind of wandered in and checking out what Steel Valley Church is all about, it is all about Jesus Christ and what he has done for us as an assembly of believers upon the cross.

That is our hope, where our hope is found. And you, if it's true for us, it's true for you if you're not in Christ.

[22 : 47] If you have not received pardon for your sin, if you know that you have been very distant from Jesus Christ and your life does not attest to a committed life to Jesus, I ask you to commit your life.

Because sin leads to a gruesome end, as Luke put it, headlong, with the bowels gushing out. That's what sin does. That is the end of sin.

Be forgiven today. commit your life to Jesus Christ. And if this is you, come talk to somebody too. You can't do it alone. And so we would love to walk with you.

So you see the dots connecting. The dots of this part of life, their connection is found in scripture. And if in scripture they are found, its purpose is found as well.

And in this case, the promise of God is found through assembling the twelve once again. And so we see this third section, more dots.

[23 : 52] It's a dot of uncertainty and a line of faith. Verse 23 through 26 concludes, and they put forth two.

Joseph, also called Justice, and Matthias. Two guys. We'll call them Joseph and Matthias. And they prayed.

The 120 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 apostles. Verse 24.

You, Lord, look at their petition. You, Lord, who know the heart of all. What a rich and profound reality embedded within all the Old Testament, all these pages previously.

[25 : 13] The God who knows the thoughts and motives of all is called upon in this situation to restore the symbolic twelve nations of Israel.

He knows what you're going to do before you do it. He knows what you would have done if you wouldn't have done it or if you would have done if you would have done that and wouldn't have done that.

He knows what you are going to do. He knows the words before you speak. He knows the thoughts in your heads. This is our God.

God operates under a theocracy that God chooses. While it is men who are used of where the lots fall upon, this is a cultural way of casting lots and similar to our voting system.

So while it's men who are casting lots and who the lots fall upon, it is God who is Lord over the lots. And God is actually choosing through the means of mere ordinary men.

[26 : 25] And so this church prays to God to reveal his choice. Who do you have, Lord? And allows the election to occur and reveal through the unity of their spirit who will rise.

And one man rose. This is found in Proverbs 1633. The lot is cast into the lap, but every it's every decision is from the Lord.

Lord. And upon the result of this casted lot, the assembly accepts the results as God's expression of his will.

And the void that evil made at one point was replaced by the plan that God had in mind all along. That while evil had its fun, you see who's actually in control.

He's Lord not over evil, he's Lord over the lots and Lord over all. This could probably be its own sermon. Maybe I'll write this down for a later time.

[27 : 29] Because it's theologically rich in who God is and how he interacts and how he even uses our mere sometimes broken election systems and things like that.

And we can hoot and holler all we want, but isn't God ultimately in control? Right? What a message for today's age. Only God knows.

This is an instance from Ezekiel 37 3 where God said to him, son of man, can these bones live?

Can this valley of dry bones live? Ezekiel answers, O Lord, you know. These are the choices that are not contingent upon our best guesses or our best efforts.

It is always God's work that is in control. And here, you know the heart of man. O Lord, you know. And so the office of the twelve is restored and once again the apostles symbolized the full encompassing reality of the twelve nations of Israel to restore the kingdom of Israel.

[28 : 44] A period of time that they were commissioned to undertake. And you see, the dots of life find their connection through scripture. And if through scripture, they find their purpose.

In this case, it's testing faith according to where the lot falls. What an encouragement that when our circumstances are perceivably uncertain, regardless of what that might be in severity, it is not our perception that we rely upon, whether it's uncertain or uncertain, whether it's sure or unsure.

Regardless of our perception of anything in this life, we know what is true. That God is in control even over what is uncertain. He's in control even over what is certain.

So who would we be to ever doubt God in the uncertainty of this life? Right? What a great message for the church today. God is always working. And if he is working, his working is for our good and for his glory.

Amen? This is not my opinion. This is not my suggestion. And church, this isn't an option. We come under this reality by the authority of God's word.

[30 : 04] We have no excuse right now. God said it and it is true regardless. And so we come to the end. I want to end with a couple closing thoughts of these connecting dots.

I want you to consider what Luke is trying to persuade and argue. remember the man, Theophilus. Raise your hand if you have no idea who Theophilus is.

Okay. There's a sermon you need to watch from last week on YouTube. Luke is trying to persuade this man who has commissioned Luke to write this account.

The gospel of Luke is the first volume of a two-volume set. Luke continued his writing into Acts. We are entering into the second volume of Acts.

And so he's trying to persuade to put together an orderly account to Theophilus. He says in the prologue, in the first book, O Theophilus, the book of Luke, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands to the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

[31 : 25] That's the prologue of this book. So we see lots of dots, don't we? Lots of details that are occurring, unfolding, and they're going to continue ever more so throughout the, through a lot of issues within Acts that we see around the churches today.

But the details aren't discussing necessarily any doctrine of apostasy. Well, was Judas saved or was he not saved? Okay, I'll go off on a rabbit trail and, and promote, you know, that, that, you know, apostasy or, or he's not talking about suicide.

He's not talking about this message of suicide and detailing all these things about Judas's death. He's not talking about how to do decision-making, how to hire your new pastor, how to elect a city official.

He's not talking about apostolic succession or the details, all these other dots in this passage. Because why? These details are governed by verses one and two that I just read in verse eight.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses. Where? Jerusalem, to Samaria, to the end of the earth. That this is the propelling of the church throughout history.

[32 : 48] And these details, these dots are connected by the lines of scripture in which we stand back and they receive their purpose. It's not just random dots.

It's not just random lines. They serve that purpose. And so the central emphasis of this passage is about the identity and the mission of the church that we see in verse eight.

An identity that begins with God's people, twelve apostles, and a mission to expand that proclamation to all people. The dots that they experienced at this time were dots of betrayal, dots of loss, dots of uncertainty, and the details of which find their grand purpose and place amid scripture.

And for this body, to them back then, it's not about the evil that befell them, but God's promise that triumphs over all. It's not about the evil.

It's about its triumph. And you see, the dots of life find their connection in scripture, through scripture alone. And if through scripture, they find their purpose.

[34 : 01] This is what God's word does for us to make sense of our dots. I don't know if you're jumping into the sermon right now on the live stream, you have no idea what I'm talking about, rightfully so.

But you understand that things happen in this life that are truly horrifying, that are truly cause us to experience pain and agony, but they find their purpose according to scripture.

Do you believe in the promises of God in your life, even in your own instances of betrayal, loss, or uncertainty? And might it be God working out his greatest plan in your life, if only you would stand firm, firmly reared in his word?

I'll end with this. May the dots we experience in this life wholly find their connection by God's word. And by God's word, ascertain their purpose.

Amen? Amen? Amen. This is God's word for us today. And we will continue steadfastly in it. Let's pray.