

3/15/2020 - Psalm 66:16-20 - "Prayer: A Church Called to Pray"

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Date: 15 March 2020

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[0 : 00] And so let's dive into extending past the prologue now in the first section that I've titled A Season to Stay and Waits.

From verse 1 to verse 14 as a whole, it's known as the introduction of the entire book. And so breaking that up, we had the prologue in verse 1 and 2.

And so it said previously in the first book, O Theophilus, 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.

So he explains that a little bit. He goes into detail about that. He presented himself, verse 3, alive to them. After his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

And 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 heard from me. For John the Baptist, John baptized with water.

[1 : 14] But you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. I gotta hand it to Luke for including something like this, expounding about the situation at this time period.

Because I think our human propensity, after seeing all that stuff going on, throughout that we studied in the Gospel of John, I mean, after Lazarus came out of that tomb, I would imagine that I would be very resilient in probably leaving and probably saying, what are we wasting time for?

This is earth shattering. This is world changing. We gotta go. But they're called to stay and to wait.

And so many readers may actually be left in confusion of the details that Luke is recording for us today, following those eyewitness testimonies of what they've heard, which they've saw, and felt, and tasted, and touched with everything, with every meal they were with Jesus, with every interaction with Jesus.

It is unusual, I believe, to understand why the tarrying around. We've got work to do. And he says, do not depart from Jerusalem, but wait.

[2 : 43] And so while keeping in mind Luke's aim of the book, our confusion should be remedied in comprehension. If we're confused about what's going on here, we should understand Luke intended a formal treatment to Theophilus of the launching of the church.

And so we have to keep in mind not only the pattern of the book, as we just looked at in the introductory remarks, but the promises that are fulfilled through God's working.

These disciples were called to stay and wait. Don't you see something important here? Waiting for the promise of God.

You see, the promises of God are some things that we struggle with simply waiting for.

We often, I would say, if the promises of God were an ocean, I would imagine if we want to be real, sometimes we get so impatient of waiting for God's timing in life that we are prone to lighting a stick of dynamite and just throwing it in the ocean to create our own way.

[4 : 04] Right? To wait on the promises of God. You see, the promises of God are worth waiting for in your life. Often we can identify the illogical timing of God's plans, but regardless of what we perceive as logical or illogical, we know for certain what is true.

God never fails His promises. And so we can look at our lives and the promises of God as I just spoke with a gentleman today who was just in a very uncertain situation, unsure of what job he was going to take, where he was going to stay, where he was going to live.

There's a baby on the way. And all this time of uncertainty. And come to find, he stayed, he waited for God's timing.

Staying and waiting. Doesn't God often test our faith through our patience? It happens more so than not. And what these disciples are experiencing right now is that staying and waiting.

But not only that, we see in the second section of this passage God's commissioning of big plans. God's commissioning of big plans in verse 6 through 8.

[5 : 32] Luke continues the details of the narrative through the brief dialogue between Jesus and His disciples. And he's expounding upon what we just read in the prologue, verse 1 and 2.

He says, just as he said that he was standing there with the disciples after he had rose. And he talked to them many times in 40 days, speaking about the kingdom in verse 3.

And then we see here. So they had come together and they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?

And he said to them, it is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and the end of the earth. When will this happen? You want us to stay here?

[6 : 36] Stay in Jerusalem? Well, when's it going to happen? Lord, when will you restore Israel to the very status that you promised to us from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, all these promises.

And here we are suffering, right, under the Roman government. Right? And while the disciples seem concerned about the when the time would come, as I believe all of us would probably struggle with that question in this time period, they were gravely mistaken.

It is not about when. The when is left up to God of when his promises will come. What he's concerned about is the who and the how.

The who and the how. Right? It would be these remaining disciples, along with the anticipatory Matthias, that will be coming next week.

We'll introduce him. Who will bring about the gospel movement in Jerusalem. And not only there, this would be a worldwide movement that would extend past Israel.

[7 : 50] And we see something that the promises of God is exceeding their expectations. And even after revealing it to them. It's exceeding their expectations. The who and the how are given meaning because that is exactly the very purpose of which God is sending the who and the how.

It's because of the why. It's that big graph of what God is doing in the grand scheme of redemption of humanity. The why.

Isn't our scope of God's plans similarly so narrow in the vast power and the supremacy of God on this earth, just as we studied last week?

Sort of have this like narrow view of God. And it's sick, I believe. That we're reluctant to pray and to ask and to seek, as the Bible tells us to.

But God desires for us to trust him in the big things. Even the insignificant things that we may deem insignificant.

[9 : 02] Church, what would happen if we yield our unbelief, our attitudes of prayerlessness, of not seeking God in all of our plans? What would happen if we yield that unbelief to his supremacy over all things in our life?

What would happen? That when we desire God to act on our behalf, that we are the quickest to be on our knees in prayer.

That it's not, well, that's going to cost a lot of money to do that. Or, eh, we're stuck in Ohio. What's here in Ohio?

I want to be on the beach. I think a different climate would be, you know, suitable for us. What if it wasn't all about doom and gloom and this depressive Eeyore Christians around?

And that we would seek God diligently in prayer and petition. What would happen? Well, we must remember the why.

[10 : 14] We have to remember not only the why we do that, because we know that God is at work. And it's only his power that can bring illogical situations into logic. Or just exceed all expectations of his movement in this city.

And the city does need Jesus Christ to alleviate the racial tension, the violence. Lord, have mercy on this city. And we see this even true of knowing the why in our own salvation.

That we have not achieved anything in our own salvation. That God has done all the work. And so our limited scope often of like, well, you know, I'm a sinner saved by grace.

And I'm imperfect, but I'm going to continue to live in my sin. And I'm a work in progress after all. You know, I'm getting better. I'm not as bad as I used to be.

And while that might be true, the attitude is very sinful in that way of thinking. Have you forgotten the why in your life?

[11 : 21] That God has saved you from the road to hell. That he has literally rescued you from destruction, from his own wrath. You have been saved from God.

Through the blood of Jesus Christ. Through the work of the cross, he has brought you out of darkness and into his marvelous light. And you are no longer slaves to sin.

You are a child of God. That's the why. The greatest promise of God that often we can see a narrow view on. So in turn, we can see the big things.

The big things. As verse 8 wraps up here. Because in turn, the reader has us being the audience of Luke's writing now as well as Theophilus.

They're giving insight to the very purpose of the entire book. What's God doing? What's the promise that their view is narrow on with the restoration of the kingdom of Israel? Well, it's a thesis statement known as, You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

[12 : 29] This is going to be a powerful testimony, a witness to Jerusalem, all of Judea, to Samaria, the ends of the earth. This is a big thing.

This is a thesis statement that is going to guide our contextual understanding throughout this series. It's like a river that's flowing through the pages of this scripture that will bind us to the very purpose of why is this being included by Luke.

We must trust God in the big things. And so we see this third section as we come close to our time being up.

We see ordinary people with extraordinary purpose. Yeah, I got a little creative there with the extra.

So, verse 9 continues to unpack this introductory section of Acts.

[13 : 33] It says, There's some weird now what moments in our life, I believe, that we're just kind of looking at.

It would be my wife. She's not here, so I'll talk about her. You know, where I'm just like, well, now what? What do we do? You know, there's a season in the life of this church where I was with another elder. I'm like, well, now what?

You know, those moments where you're just like, it could go this way, it could go this way. So you can kind of sense the pin drop at this moment. Obviously, these disciples, there goes Jesus.

Right? The man. The man who was laid in the tomb. The man who came out victoriously. When are you going to restore the kingdom of Israel? Where are you going, Jesus?

We got work to do. You will be my witnesses. He tells them. Boy, this is sharing quite a moment.

[14 : 57] If you know what happened in 2 Kings between Elijah's departing from Elijah. I mean, this is a similar instance that the disciples are seeing right here and now.

Elijah's sitting there like, that guy's going and now it's me? You can imagine those moments of uncertainty.

I mean, these men had nothing to really boast at at all. And so they needed a little bit of help. Behold, the Lord sent two men in white.

Behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

Now what? Boy, that adrenaline rush of the gospel narrative of his resurrection is still beating through their veins, you would imagine.

[16 : 07] After such a time of earthly ministry, experiencing the eyewitness, the eyewitness of the various testimony of what Jesus did on this earth.

And the most recent ascension. Where better to turn, church? Then to pray. And isn't that what they do?

It says, then they returned. They were corrected by the men in white. So they turned. They trusted in God's promise. They turned to Jerusalem from the mountain called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day journey away.

And they had entered. And when they had entered, they went into the upper room. And they're saying, all the disciples, as we just read. And they were all in one accord.

They were devoting themselves to prayer together with even women, probably some spouses in there. And Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers in one accord. We find out later in the pages next week that this was a number of 120 that are gathered in this place together in prayer.

[17 : 20] And you see, it's important to know that it is in times of our most uncertainty that we are most called to pray. In our now what moments, regardless of what the situation is in life, whether our kids are suffering a severe illness that we're just like, well, we've tried everything.

I don't know if our child's going to make it to this age or that age. Now what? It's the moment in this life where we see the uncertainty come ahead that the church ought to find its greatest call to pray.

You will be my witnesses, Jesus says. Who? Well, a couple fishermen. Two of which are angry fishermen.

They're called sons of thunder. Tax collector. Nobody likes them, right? Anarchist, Simon the Zealot. A doubter, Thomas. And other no names, Philip, Bartholomew, and the other James, and Jude.

Imperfect, ordinary, insignificant. People who are commissioned to significant purpose. I find it fascinating in the rawness of the rebuking men in white.

[18 : 53] Followed by such resilience in simple obedience. Simple restraint. Simple faith. Is what Jesus, in what Jesus Christ had just promised to them.

It's those moments of hesitating that we often have to find our rebuke as well. When we're thinking about the possibilities of the promise of God in our own life.

We ought to be rebuked in our hesitations as well. Might we fall victim at similar times of sharing similar attitudes, of hesitating?

So many songs out there. Like, come, Lord Jesus, come. And you got a whole church standing there looking to heaven. And there they are, you know, looking to heaven. Come, Lord Jesus, come. Well, there's people starving on the streets.

There's people dying on the streets. There's a world that needs Jesus. Longing for Jesus to come back. Staring in the clouds as the world continues in their hot mess.

[19 : 57] Might we become rebuked similarly? To understand that God is not done in this world. And the problem is not the absence of God in this world.

It's not because Jesus is gone now that we blame him. Right? It's not the absence of God. It's the absence of the church. Churches found their comfy seats on Sunday morning.

They are reluctant to going to hard places where the gospel is needed. Jesus fixed the eyes of the church horizontally. In his departing.

And the church has to remember that. And we rebelliously neglect those around and assign honor to our distracted vertical gaze. As if our gaze has any devotion, sign of devotion to God.

It actually, without proper context, would be disastrous sin for a church to be doing. To neglect the needs of this world.

[21 : 02] And it may be difficult to hear. I understand that you might be in this place. I'm not picking anyone out. This is my grappling with the text as I'm looking at the disciples gazing to heaven and being rebuked by these men in white.

How many times, though, do we make excuses? Of neglecting the world in the name of prayer. In the name of devotion. Right? You see, if our devotion to God is not balanced with our devotion to serve the world, to continue the spread of the gospel, we dishonor God.

You see, our devotion to God ought to propel our devotion to the world. And praying has its place. Worshiping, God.

And marveling at his creation have its place. But if that's the only thing that is governing our lives and our sanctification, we're getting it wrong. And so we have to be challenged by this passage.

This is a hard reality, but better we allow God's work to speak now. To correct our attitude. To correct our behavior. Than to find out it's too late. At another time.

[22 : 13] One thing is for certain. This corporate prayer time didn't last too long. These 120 people in this upper room, it didn't last for too long. God saw that obedience.

God works mightily through obedience. And if time frame is ever an issue for us of thinking that wasted time in prayer, we just don't have time for that.

We should remember that God works very mightily and swiftly through our obedience. So, we are at the end now.

And I've posed a couple challenges and I'm not going to hold us hostage too much longer. What's the argument though, church? What's the argument of this entire 14 verses this morning?

What was Luke's point of including all of these details? What's the why? Will we trust in God's promises that he works through our lives using us?

[23 : 19] Ordinary people. Will we trust in the promises of God that he works through the life of average, ordinary people? More than that, why do we have confidence that the spirit that empowered the ministry of these apostles is the same spirit that resides in us?

The very baptism of which they were baptized, we are baptized into one baptism. And you see, Jesus promised and provided the power of God's presence through the Holy Spirit.

It's true for them. It's true for us today. Now, if there is any glory due to the activity of God's work on this earth, we are reminded, church, that it has little to do with us.

It has everything to do with him. We could be the greatest speaker in the world and many can come, but it has nothing to do with our speaking abilities. Moses is a testimony of that. We see that it is God's work through us.

That the more inadequate that we are, the better qualified we become in the promises of God's plan of redemption in this life. Jesus says, come, ordinary people.

[24 : 37] He could have sent Jesus. He could have brought him out of the clouds again. He could have sent some angels to do the work. Probably more effective, more expediently to get this gospel, send a bunch of angels down and we'll be wrapped up.

We'll be in the new creation and we'll call it a day, right? Send the angels and we're done with this, right? But no, he didn't choose to choose the angels to come.

He could have chosen the rocks to jump up and start preaching the gospel. He could do anything and out of all creation. And the same remains true today. He has chosen us.

To be his ambassadors as his church. Out of all creation, he chose you. Just as he chose these men. Ordinary people for extraordinary purpose. And lastly, how does that purpose begin?

It begins with calloused knees. It begins with calloused knees in prayer and obedience. That a moment of prayerful restraint is never a moment wasted.

[25 : 45] Even amid the most dire urgent of circumstances. It begins with prayer. And I'll leave you with this. If your desire is to see the gospel of Jesus Christ to continue to spread through the ends of the earth, it begins in a holy restraint.

It begins in a holy restraint. Heart and prayer. It begins in a mind of humility. And it begins with a focus, our eyes of faith.

That God can only work and do what he wants to do through us. And the horizontal gaze of the church depends entirely on the life and the work of Jesus Christ, of who he is, of the power of the Holy Spirit empowering the church, by his word, to do his work.

So let's never get too antsy to see the promises of God. God desires to use us. Let's not move unless he says move.

And be sensitive in his leading and his call in our lives. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.