

Waiting Was Not Doing Nothing

Acts 1:12-14

INTRODUCTION

There are times when God tells us to wait. And when we hear the word “wait,” we can get the idea that waiting means nothing is happening. We can think, “I cannot do anything yet. I am just waiting.” But Acts chapter 1 shows us something different.

Jesus had risen from the dead. He had spent time with His disciples. He had given them instructions, and He had told them what was coming. Before we get to our passage, notice what He told them.

Acts 1:4-5 “And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but **wait** for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. **5** For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”

They were told to wait. But what does that mean? Did they sit around doing absolutely nothing until the next thing happened? No. Acts 1:12-14 tells us exactly what they did while they waited.

And there is an important balance here. They did not run ahead of Jesus. But they did not become spiritually idle either. They kept doing what Christ had already made clear while they waited for what only God could do.

I. THEY RETURNED IN OBEDIENCE — ACTS 1:12

Acts 1:12 “Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey.”

Notice the first word: “Then.” Something has just happened. Jesus has ascended. The disciples have been standing there looking toward heaven. They have been reminded that Jesus will come again. Then what do they do? They return to Jerusalem.

That might look like nothing more than a travel detail until you remember what Jesus had already told them. He had commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait there. So when verse 12 says, “Then returned they unto Jerusalem,” this is not just movement. They are going back where Christ told them to be.

That is the first thing we see about their waiting: **they obeyed what they already knew to do.**

Sometimes we become so focused on the thing we are waiting for that we forget what God has already made clear. We want an answer about tomorrow while neglecting what we already know today. We want to know what comes next, but there are already things God has plainly told us to do.

These disciples had a great work ahead of them. Jesus had already spoken about their future witness in Acts 1:8. But they were not supposed to run out immediately and try to force the next stage. Their job right then was to return to Jerusalem and wait.

That teaches us something important. Waiting faithfully does not mean trying to make God's next step happen on our schedule. There is such a thing as running ahead. There is such a thing as trying to force what God has not yet brought to pass.

But there is also such a thing as using waiting as an excuse for neglect. The disciples did neither one.

They could not bring the promise of the Father themselves. They could not make Pentecost happen. But they could return to Jerusalem because Christ had told them where to be.

And that is the principle we need to remember: waiting on God does not cancel faithfulness to what God has already told us to do.

There are passages in the Bible where God's people are told to stand still. There are times when faith means refusing to take matters into your own hands. So the lesson here is not, "Always stay busy." The lesson is, "Stay obedient."

There is a big difference between the two.

The disciples were not searching for random things to keep themselves occupied. They were simply doing what Jesus had already told them to do. While they waited for what only God could accomplish, they remained responsible for what Christ had already made clear.

II. THEY REMAINED TOGETHER — ACTS 1:13

Acts 1:13 "And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James."

They returned to Jerusalem, and then they gathered together.

Luke could have simply said, "the disciples were there." Instead, he names them. Peter is there. James is there. John is there. Andrew is there. Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, and the others are there.

These are real men with different backgrounds and different histories. They had experienced different things. Some of them had been very bold at times. Some had failed badly at times. Thomas had struggled with doubt. Peter had denied the Lord. But now look at them: they are together.

The point is not that there was something magical about an upper room. The Bible does not tell us that the room had special power. The point is the people who were gathered there.

They were waiting, but they had not scattered.

That is easy to miss in this passage. When people are waiting, especially when something major has changed, there can be a temptation to pull away. These disciples had just watched Jesus ascend into heaven. Everything was changing. They knew something was coming, but it had not happened yet.

And what did they do? They stayed together.

That matters because the next verse does not say one man was praying alone somewhere. It says, "These all continued." Their waiting was shared.

The Bible continues to show this kind of togetherness as Acts moves forward. When we reach Acts 2, the believers are still together. Later, when opposition comes, they gather and pray together again. The circumstances change, but they do not abandon one another.

That is important for a church. There are seasons when we know exactly what is happening, and there are seasons when we do not. There are times when answers come quickly, and there are times when they do not. But uncertainty is not a good reason to pull away from God's people.

These disciples stayed where Christ told them to stay, and they stayed together.

And verse 13 is important because it keeps us from turning this sermon into nothing but a message about prayer. Prayer is coming in verse 14, and it is a major emphasis. But before Luke tells us what they were doing together, he shows us that they were together.

The waiting did not scatter them.

III. THEY CONTINUED IN PRAYER — ACTS 1:14

Acts 1:14 “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.”

Now we come to the strongest statement in the passage about what they did while they waited.

“These all continued.”

They did not pray once and quit. They continued. And they continued “with one accord.” The verse does not tell us that they agreed about every possible subject that anyone could ever discuss. We should not make the phrase say more than it says. But it absolutely does show that they were united together in what they were doing.

And what were they doing?

They continued “in prayer and supplication.”

Prayer was not doing nothing.

Sometimes we talk as though prayer is what we do when there is nothing else we can do. We say, “Well, I guess all we can do now is pray.” But that is not the picture we see in Acts.

Prayer was not a substitute for real ministry. Prayer continued when ministry became very active.

Acts 2:42 “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

Notice that word again: “continued.” Before Pentecost, Acts 1 says they continued in prayer. After Pentecost, Acts 2 says they continued stedfastly, and prayers are still there.

So prayer was not something they did only because they were waiting.

Later, when opposition came against the believers, they prayed again. Acts 4 records them lifting up their voice to God with one accord. Their prayer life did not disappear when preaching, persecution, and public ministry began.

And when we come to Acts 6, the apostles still speak about the importance of prayer.

Acts 6:4 “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

Do you see that? Prayer and ministry are not enemies. Prayer is not inactivity while ministry is activity. The apostles said they would give themselves “continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

That helps us understand Acts 1:14. These disciples were waiting, but they were not spiritually idle. They were praying.

And we need to be careful about what we say that prayer accomplished. Acts 1 does not say that they prayed enough and finally convinced God to send the promise. It does not say they reached a certain level of unity and then God was willing to act. Jesus had already given the promise before this prayer meeting ever happened.

They were not praying to force God's hand. They were praying while trusting what Christ had already said.

That is a very different thing.

Sometimes when we are waiting, we can become obsessed with making the answer happen. We think if we say the right words, do enough, work hard enough, or somehow become spiritual enough, then maybe we can make God move according to our schedule.

That is not what happened here.

They prayed, but they left the fulfillment with God. They obeyed, but they left the fulfillment with God. They stayed together, but they left the fulfillment with God.

That is faithful waiting.

The verse also tells us who else was there: "with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." This was broader than the eleven apostles. They were gathered together, and together they continued in prayer and supplication.

Mary is there praying with them. She is not being prayed to. She is one of the people gathered with the others in prayer. Christ's brethren are there as well. The passage does not stop to explain their whole history; it simply tells us that they are present with this praying company.

And what binds this whole verse together is that phrase: "These all continued."

They continued.

CONCLUSION

The disciples were told to wait, and they waited. But waiting was not doing nothing.

Verse 12 says they returned. They obeyed what Christ had already told them to do. Verse 13 says they gathered and abode together. They did not scatter while they waited. Verse 14 says they continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.

And that gives us the balance we need.

Do not run ahead of God. These disciples did not. There were things coming that they could not produce themselves, and they had to wait for what Christ had promised.

But do not use waiting as an excuse to stop being faithful either.

If God has already made something clear, keep obeying it. If you are waiting for an answer in one area, that does not mean you stop doing what Scripture already says in every other area. Keep praying. Keep gathering with God's people. Keep doing what you already know is right.

And remember this: prayer is not doing nothing.

The disciples could not control when the promised event would happen. They could not manufacture what only God could do. But they could obey. They could stay together. They could pray.

That is what they did.

So when you are in a season of waiting, do not think faithfulness has to stop until the answer comes. Do what God has already made clear, and trust Him with what only He can do.

Waiting was not doing nothing.

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