

# WAIT WATCHERS WIELDS RESULTS

ACTS 1:9-26 JUNE 12, 2019

It's a familiar scene in movies: A beloved character is *thought* to be dead, leaving behind a grieving family whose world has been shattered. After enough screen-time has passed to extract just enough heartache, the character is revealed to be alive after all. And there is, often, an emotional moment when the hero returns home, to the speechless astonishment of his loved ones. The payoff for viewers is great.

Very *rarely* is that character then forced to leave a *second* time. As far as the plot is concerned, he's done his part and, as the camera turns to other things, we're confident the emotional rollercoaster is over for the weary family. We're sure that they'll *now* be able to put their lives back together and live happily ever after.

Imagine having to say *goodbye* to Jesus, your Faithful Friend. Your tender King. The Desire of Nations. There, He hung on the cross, though He did absolutely nothing wrong. But you watched Him die, there was no question about it. No chance that, *maybe*, He wasn't *really* dead, like T'Challa or Aragorn or Commissioner Gordon. No, you saw your Jesus die and your whole world falls apart.

But then, *amazingly*, He returns in the flesh. More powerful. More glorious than ever, but still the *same* Jesus. Still your Friend. Still the Shepherd. Now, the Risen Lord, Savior of the world. The One Person who could put your life back together.

Now, imagine having to say goodbye to Him *again*, after just 40 days of Him popping in and out of your sight. You're closer to Him than ever before. You're more full of faith than ever before. All He said was really true and now, He was with you in a way like you never could have anticipated. But, now, He's leaving. You would have to say goodbye again and stay behind, left to go into all the world so that *others* could be adopted into the family of God.

Our text tonight covers a unique transition period in the history of God's people. The Lord ascends, but the Church age is yet to begin. That would be 10 days later at Pentecost. The verses divide into 3 sections: The disciples watch, they wait and they wield the Word of God. First, in verses 9 through 11, we see them *watching*.

**Acts 1:9 - <sup>9</sup> Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.**

Many scholars feel that this is referring not to some generic cumulonimbus cloud, but the Shekhinah glory of God, receiving Jesus into heaven. He was *taken up*, lifted and exalted in His ascension. Jesus was *lifted up* on the cross, He was *lifted up* in His ascension. And now, He is *lifted up* through the witness of our lives. Psalm 99 commands us to "exalt the Lord our God." Paul said that Christ is to be "magnified" in us, whether by life or by death.

That day the Lord was taken out of their sight, but He wasn't really gone. After all, one of His last promises was that He would *never* leave us or forsake us. In verse 10, these disciples get an instant reminder of the reality of the supernatural realm and God's presence in our lives.

**Acts 1:10 - <sup>10</sup> And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,**

Two angels of heaven reveal that they were also in the audience that day. I find it interesting that no one is shown being terrified or afraid, which is *usually* what happens when an angel shows up. But, then again, what's an angel or two in comparison to the glorious power of the risen Christ?

Luke tells us that the disciples were watching the skies intently. They fixed their gaze and who could blame them? They don't want to miss anything. But, the angels pull the plug on the viewing party.

**Acts 1:11 - <sup>11</sup> who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."**

Some commentators make a lot out of their statement, saying that it's this huge rebuke to the disciples. I don't see that. They were giving instruction, to be sure. The disciples didn't want to miss anything, so the angels are giving them the ok to leave. It's like when you go to a movie and there's no after-credits scene. No one really *wants* to sit through 12 minutes of credits for nothing. The angels assure them, "Look, when Jesus comes back to earth, no one is going to *miss* it." And, in their statement, they affirm some important truths about the second coming. First, it will be *visible*. This is in contradiction to groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses who teach that Jesus returned *invisibly*. They say that the Lord will return with the clouds. This is a frequent image in prophetic passages, but for us it's yet another reminder that Bible prophecy should be interpreted *literally*. Daniel, Revelation and Matthew all prophecy of the Messiah coming *with clouds* and the angels clearly mark that as a true, literal expectation. We also recognize that Jesus will return to the same place from which He left: The Mount of Olives. Zechariah 14 says this specifically, but when the Lord touches down that time, the mountain will be split in two.

For now, the disciples were instructed not to watch the sky for His return, but instead they would begin a life of watching for the Lord's leading, for His direction, for Him to give them opportunities to be used. And that's what they would do. But first, they had to do some waiting, which is what we see in verses 12 through 14.

**Acts 1:12 - <sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.**

The distance is a little more than half a mile. But note this Sabbath day's journey reference. It's my feeling that the Holy Spirit, through Luke, is dropping a little hint about this transitional time that can help us discern what has become a very controversial moment in the history of the Church.

**Acts 1:13-14 - <sup>13</sup> And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James *the son* of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas *the son* of James. <sup>14</sup> These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.**

These believers, about 120 of them (we'll be told), show a wonderful unity and humility during this waiting period. There's no name calling. No, "where were YOU when I was at the foot of the cross?" They had one heart, even though they were still a mix of old and young, men and women, tax collectors and zealots, educated and unlettered. The local church doesn't need to be broken down into 1,000 ministry segments. It needs communion, with the Lord and with one another.

We learn in verse 14 that Jesus' brothers had become disciples. The Lord had at least 4 half-brothers: James, Joses, Simon, and Jude. During His earthly ministry they did *not* believe He was the Messiah. In fact, they thought He was *out of His mind*.

Those stubborn loved ones of yours, those family members who just won't believe? Don't give up. Keep praying for them. God loves them. The Gospel *can* reach them. Jesus had spent nearly 3 *decades* in the same home as His brothers, but they refused to accept Him as Lord until after the resurrection. This should be an encouragement to us that God *can* do what seems impossible in your family. Think about the impossibility of Jesus' brother James becoming an apostle himself. Or how 2 of them would go from writing off their big Brother to becoming writers of the New Testament. It hurts to see our family members refusing to believe. But, while there's life, there's hope.

When Luke says they "continued...in prayer," he's using strong language. It means they were attending to it constantly. They were "holding on" in prayer. Their waiting wasn't passive. It was *involved* and alive. It was a personal *and* a communal endeavor. And it was *full* of corporate prayer.

This *waiting* led to something else: The *wielding* of God's Word as they applied it to themselves.

**Acts 1:15-16 - <sup>15</sup> And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, <sup>16</sup> "Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus;**

We were told that, during Jesus' 40 days with the disciples, He opened their minds to understand the Word of God. With the others, Simon Peter had been pondering through many passages. And several from the Psalms kept tugging at his heart. Now, remember: Jesus had given them *no plan*. No specifics about what should be done to fill the spot left vacant by Judas. So, they waited and they prayed and they meditated on the Scriptures.

As Peter read (or remembered) these Messianic Psalms, something clicked in his mind: "Oh. This prophecy was, in part, literally fulfilled by the betrayal of Judas Iscariot. What impact does the *rest* of this have on us *right now*?"

His wielding of the Scripture grew into a conviction and he felt *compelled* to draw the attention of the rest of the disciples to this section of God's word and immediately apply it.

**Acts 1:17 - <sup>17</sup> for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry."**

Everyone in this transition period understood that there was an important role for what is referred to as "the 12" in God's plan for the Church. There were more than 12 apostles - and more than 12 plus Paul. James, the brother of Jesus was called an apostle. So was Barnabas. But there was a specific office of "*the 12*," who had been given particular relationship to Israel, according to Jesus. And they were to be pillars of the Church. Peter knew this, and so, only having 11 guys simply wouldn't do. But, Jesus hadn't addressed the issue. So, what was the fix? Before we get there, Luke gives us a biographical parenthesis on the death of Judas.

**Acts 1:18-19 - <sup>18</sup> (Now this man purchased a field with the wages of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out. <sup>19</sup> And it became known**

**to all those dwelling in Jerusalem; so that field is called in their own language, Akel Dama, that is, Field of Blood.)**

Some deniers of the Bible try to cite an inconsistency here, but there isn't one. The accusation is that, in the Gospels, we're told the *priests* bought the field, but here it's attributed to *Judas*. The truth is, when ill-gotten funds were given to the Temple, those funds were returned. Or, if a return wasn't possible, the money would be used to buy something to benefit the community *in the name* of the giver, rather than go into the Temple treasury.

What a sad legacy left by Judas Iscariot. A life and name forever ruined. Wherever we find ourselves tonight, it's not too late to set our course to be following hard after the Lord and allow that to be our legacy. Alfred Nobel is known for the peace prize. It's nearly forgotten in the common culture that he was the was an arms dealer and invented dynamite. After an accidental obituary was printed, condemning him as a "merchant of death,"<sup>1</sup> Nobel decided to change course and leave a different legacy. We aim even *higher* than Alfred, we aim to join our lives to the eternal legacy of Jesus Christ.

Now on to Peter's suggested solve for the 12th apostle problem.

**Acts 1:20 - <sup>20</sup> "For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.'**

These references are taken from Psalm 69 and Psalm 109.

Here's what we see: Peter looks at their current situation through the lens of Scripture and found that, "Oh wow! This addresses what's going on with us *and* gives us a directive to follow."

When those passages came alive in his heart, he understood that they contained a *command* to be obeyed. Not ignored, not explained away. Not put off, but *applied* and *obeyed*.

Some commentators brutally criticize Peter for his actions in this text. They think this whole business from verse 15 to 26 was a huge, sinful mistake. That the Church should've waited for *Paul*, the *natural* 12th apostle, since, after all, he was so great. They have the nerve to suggest that *they* know better, sitting two thousand years later at a desk than this group of people who had been in the presence of the Risen Christ. People who were *days* and *days* in prayer together. People who had just been instructed *by Jesus*, having their understanding opened concerning the Scriptures.

I'll let Pastor David Guzik summarize: "The disciples obeyed. The disciples were in unity and fellowship. The disciples were in prayer. The disciples were in the Scriptures. The disciples wanted to do God's will. The disciples used sanctified common sense. The disciples did what Jesus did. The disciples did what they could do to rely on God."<sup>2</sup> I'd add to that the total agreement throughout the process of all 120 people, not to mention the fact that there is *never* a rebuke from the Lord recorded, and that Paul clearly considered himself *distinct* from "the 12" in his writings.

At the end of the day, the office of the 12th member of the 12 was important. It was *necessary* for the foundation of the Church. But how would he be selected, since Jesus wasn't there to choose as He did the others? Or was He? The solution was quite elegant.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.history.com/news/did-a-premature-obituary-inspire-the-nobel-prize>

<sup>2</sup> <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/acts-1/>

**Acts 1:21-23 - <sup>21</sup> “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup> beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” <sup>23</sup> And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.**

So, they go back to the pool of guys that were there when Jesus first *did* choose the 12. Had Judas not been around, it stands to reason someone from that pool *would* have been. Not a bad idea for a Galilean fisherman! All 120 people are on board. They’re being thoughtful and purposeful. And they give us a great example to follow: When a Scripture tugs at our hearts, don’t just dismiss it. Don’t assume “oh, I don’t really need to obey that right now.” These critical scholars would’ve had them wait at least *ten years* before “filling” Judas’ spot. I wonder, if they want us to wait 10 years before obeying other directives the Lord gives us? When the Word of God speaks to you, when some verse leaps off the page, *obey it*. If you’re not sure *how*, get with other Godly believers in your church and pray about it. That’s what these disciples did. And, even when they *had* a plan, they went *back* to prayer again.

**Acts 1:24-25 - <sup>24</sup> And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen <sup>25</sup> to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.”**

The idea being communicated here is *not* that Judas messed up, made a bad mistake and so he was kicked out. Not at all. I mean, compare him to Peter. Peter *also* had made a huge mistake, denying the Lord 3 times. And yet, there he was, holding his office. What was the difference? The difference was that Peter believed and repented and was restored. Judas *never* belonged. He was a devil. He deserted his post and went his way.

**Acts 1:26 - <sup>26</sup> And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.**

“Aha!” Many scholars say. “Look at them using this un-churchlike method!” But the church wasn’t born yet. And remember that little hint about the Sabbath’s day’s journey? I do think it’s a little breadcrumb left for us to signal just how *unique* this transition period was. These were Jews, faithful Jews, seeking to be faithful to the Jewish Scriptures. Proverbs 16:33 says, “the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision *is* from the Lord.” Their behavior is entirely consistent with what faithful, obedient believers would do.

Now, this *would* be the last time the lots were ever cast, because, in the Church age we have the Holy Spirit to guide us and the completed word of God that we can wield for our decisions. But it makes sense that they used it here.

Those who suggest Paul was the *true* replacement for Judas often use as an argument the fact that “Matthias fades away from history.” But that’s not an honest piece of evidence. We know *nothing* of James the son of Alphaeus or Thaddeus. None of the exploits of *any* of the 12 other than Peter and John are recorded in Acts. Church history *does* tell us that Matthias took the Gospel to Cappadocia and the coasts of the Caspian Sea. One historian records that he lay down his life for the Gospel in modern day Georgia.

Some commentators would’ve had the believers wait for the “great one,” Saul of Tarsus. But God doesn’t just wait for *great* people to do His work. He takes all kinds. What an encouragement that

God might tap any *one* of us on the shoulder to do something we never expected as we remain faithful to Him. Matthias had been around a long time. But we don't see him demanding a spot. He didn't nominate himself. Or, on the flip side, look at the remarkable humility of Justus. Effectively he and Matthias were equally qualified. Yet, God didn't choose him for that office. But did Justus split off and start his *own* church and call himself an apostle? No. He remained and was, no doubt, used in wonderful ways.

We want to be numbered with the disciples. And that means we will be people who are watching for the Lord in our lives, waiting on Him and wielding His word, doing whatever He asks *when* He asks it. That is Christian living. The kind of living that leaves a great legacy of spiritual power, the kind we want to work toward.