

“Thy kingdom come.” (2)

I heard about a couple after spending a lovely evening out together, came home to the children they had left in the care of a babysitter. They had a great night out together and were very pleased to find the kids fast asleep in their own beds. So the babysitter was about to walk out the front door, she said to the proud parents, "By the way, I promised Tommy that if he would stay in bed, you would buy him a pony in the morning."

And I guess the point of the story is, don't promise something you can't fulfil. We are continuing our study of the **Books of Acts** which we discovered last week is about Jesus. Now Luke continues with the theme of Jesus, but he is now focusing on the days following His resurrection. Now we know that Jesus appeared to his apostles on several different occasions.

Luke mentions one of those times in **Acts 1:4**, “**On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about."**

Now we know Jesus did eat with his disciples following the resurrection because Luke tells us in his gospel. He says in **Luke 24:36-43**. “**While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence."**

Now Jesus eating with His disciples isn't the point I'm trying to make, the point I'm trying to make is that Jesus never promises something He never intends to fulfil. Luke's point is that Jesus instructed His disciples to remain in Jerusalem until the Father's promise, about which he had told them, came to fulfilment.

And what was that promise? The promise is the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, or Helper. Jesus said to His disciples in **John 14:15-18** "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

Now remember all the apostles had been baptised by John in water at their repentance. **Mark 1:4**. “**And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."** But Jesus told them that the time was coming when they would be baptised with the Holy Spirit.

In **Acts 1:5** Luke tells us, “**For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."** Now I don't want to go into too much detail in this sermon about being baptised with the Holy Spirit but I will say this, in **Acts 2:1-4** we find the fulfilment of that promise of Jesus'. We see the apostles being baptised with the Holy Spirit. But for now I would like for us to turn our attention to the Kingdom of God.

Have you ever been told something when you were a child and it wasn't until later on in life you find out it wasn't true? For example have you ever heard these sayings? It's bad luck to let milk boil over. If you break a mirror you will get 7 years bad luck. If you spill pepper you will have a serious argument with your best friend. If you put your shoes on the table you will have one day bad luck.

Now I don't know where these concepts originally came from but I do know that many people still believe these things today. Many concepts we develop in our childhood are sometimes difficult to change. Now the reason I mentioned these things is because the Jews were much the same in their thinking. Whenever you talked about God's kingdom to God's people they would have a different idea from what God had in mind.

A way back in the days of **Daniel**, God prophesied through him that a kingdom would come. When **Daniel** interprets **Nebuchadnezzar's** dream, he talks about kings and their kingdoms which are to come, he says in **Daniel 2:44**, "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever."

The apostles' like many Jews thought that Jesus was going to establish a physical kingdom here on earth. They believed it would be an earthly kingdom that would conquer all of its enemies. And they were itching to know when this great earthly kingdom was going to be established. When Jesus faced Pilate in **John 18**, Jesus said to him in **verse 36**, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." Time and time again Jesus had to tell people that His kingdom was not an earthly kingdom but a spiritual kingdom.

Have you ever been longing for an event to happen in your life? When my wife and I were going through the fostering process it seemed like years and we just couldn't wait to be approved so that we could get on and help some children. Maybe you're awaiting a visit from someone you know and love and you just can't wait for that visit to come. Or maybe you're awaiting a call from the doctor to tell you the results of some tests that you had done, so that you can get on with the rest of your life.

You see the disciples were the same; they wanted to get on with God's work. Luke tells us in **Acts 1:6+7** "So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority."

One of the biggest lessons we can learn as Christians is that we are working on God's timetable not ours. And maybe some of you are being a taught a lesson from God right now on patience. Maybe your longing for the day the congregation grows here at Great Barr. Maybe you're longing for a loved one or friends and family to become Christians. You see we're all working on God's timetable.

The Book of Ecclesiastes has a lot to say about God's timetable. **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8** "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace."

You see the disciples had to learn patience concerning the arrival of God's kingdom. But at the same time, it was also important for them to know and understand that what Jesus promised them that they were to receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them was going to happen in God's time not theirs. Because it was only when the Holy Spirit came, that they could get on with the work that God had planned for them to do. They were to be patient but notice also Jesus doesn't leave them in the dark about what is going happen to them.

He tells them what they have to do when the Spirit arrives. **Acts 1:8** "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus says, stay in Jerusalem until you receive power from on high but once you have that power I want you to tell people all over Jerusalem about me, go to Judea and go to Samaria and finally I want the gospel of Christ to go all over the world.

Now loved ones there's a real lesson here for us all. We can't just sit back in our comfort zones expecting God to send people to our meetings. We need to get out there and witness for Christ. And remember witnessing is not something you do, witnessing is what you are. Every time you open your mouth, every time you speak to your friends and family, every time you're faced with problems, you are witnessing for Christ.

There was a little boy who went to Sunday school for the first time and his mother said, "What was it like? Who was your teacher?" The little boy said, "I don't know I think it must have been Jesus' grandmother because that's all she talked about."

That's you loved ones, that's every one of us. People don't read the Bible, they read your life. When people look at our lives and listen to us talking were witnessing for Christ. And when people see us living our lives they should see Christ in our lives. **1 Peter 2:21** "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps".

Now the disciples should already be aware of what was going to happen.

Time and time again Jesus spoke to them about things which was about to happen and they were fulfilled. And Jesus ascending into heaven is one of those predictions. Acts 1:9-11 “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Now Acts 1:9 is the fulfilment of the Lord's own prediction when he asked his disciples in John 6:62 “What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!” And so having issued these final instructions, Jesus began to bless the apostles according to Luke 24:50+51 and then at that moment, Jesus was taken up into a cloud.

You see before Jesus came to earth, He was with the Father in Heaven. But the apostles saw Him begin His ascent back to the throne. Now can you imagine being there when Jesus was taken up into heaven? You can almost imagine the apostles standing there with their mouths wide open, looking up into the clouds where they had last seen the Saviour. What a sight that must have been.

But while they were looking, Luke tells us in Acts 1:10+11 that two men in white clothing stood by and told them Jesus would come again in the same way they had seen him go. Now who are those two men? Well I believe they were angels and let me explain why.

Just after the resurrection of Jesus, Matthew records in Matthew 28:2-4, “There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow.”

Luke himself in his gospel records in Luke 24:4, “While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.”

John in his account of the resurrection says in John 20:10-12, “Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.”

Now I believe it is very likely the two "men" who Luke says stood by the apostles are angels who appeared in the form of men. Now I mentioned earlier about patience and I believe the apostles are going to give us an example of what to do while the wait is on. Now those who had seen Jesus ascend went into the city of Jerusalem and assembled in an upper room. Now their time of waiting wasn't a sorrowful time, it was a time of joy.

Straight after Jesus is taken up into heaven Luke tells us in Luke 24:52+53 “Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.” Now this tells me that the time of sorrow following the crucifixion of Jesus was over and now the apostles realised the events they had witnessed were a reason for rejoicing.

Acts 1:12-14 “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

You know a woman when she becomes pregnant if she goes full term will carry that baby for 9 months in most cases. Now what do the parents do? They don't just hang around for 9 months and wait for the baby to be born. They get organised, they prepare the nursery, get food and nappies, toys and medicine.

Now what do we do while we wait for God's timetable to begin? We do what these eleven did. We do what Mary, the Lord's mother did. We do what Jesus' half-brothers did. We do what these other unidentified disciples were constantly found doing. We wait patiently and prepare with prayer.

These guys prepared themselves for what was about to happen with prayer as they awaited the promise of the Holy Spirit. And it was sometime during that period of waiting, that Peter addressed a group of about **120 disciples** to find a replacement for Judas.

Acts 1:15-19 “In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, “Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus- he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.” (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)”

Now if you ever wondered why Judas had to be replaced, I believe it’s simply because Judas had been numbered with them and had a part in the ministry the Lord had given to the apostles.

Now if you ever go to **Scotland** and mention the **Battle of Bannockburn** and the name **William Wallace** people will know exactly what you are talking about and what he did. If you go anywhere in **England** and mention the **year 1066** and the **Battle of Hastings** and the name **King Harold II of England**, people will know exactly what you are talking about and what he did.

Now during the days of Jesus, if you mentioned the place **Field of Blood** and the name **Judas Iscariot** people would know exactly who and what you were talking about. Remember after realizing what he had done, Judas threw the thirty pieces of silver down in the temple and went out and hanged himself.

And according to Luke, we can conclude that either the branch he used to hang himself on or the rope itself broke and Judas' body fell and burst open. And so the chief priests didn’t feel blood money should be placed in the treasury, so they purchased a field in which to bury strangers as **Matthew** tells us in **Matthew 27:10**. Everybody in that group who Peter addresses would have been acquainted with the facts surrounding Judas' death and the purchase of the **Field of Blood**.

And so quoting from **Psalms 69:25** and **Psalms 109:8**, Peter told those who were gathered that the Holy Spirit, through David, had said the surroundings of Judas, would become desolate and another would be chosen to take his office. **Acts 1:20** "For," said Peter, "it is written in the book of Psalms, "“May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,' and, "“May another take his place of leadership.””

Now to choose someone to take Judas’ place, they couldn’t just choose their best friend or someone who appeared to be spiritually mature. They had to meet a certain criteria. **Acts 1:21+22** “Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

Whoever they were going to choose had to have been with the Lord from the time that John baptised Jesus, right up to the ascension of Jesus. But they would especially need to have witnessed the resurrection of Jesus. And so Luke tells us in **Acts 1:23**, “They proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias.”

And loved ones there’s a real important point to remember here. Peter sets out the physical requirements for who is going to replace Judas but ultimately it is God who knows best. **2 Chronicles 6:30** “Forgive, and deal with each man according to all he does, since you know his heart (for you alone know the hearts of men).” They addressed a prayer to the One who knows people’s hearts better than any of us.

Acts 1:24-26 “Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles”.

And loved ones when we are faced with tough decisions in life, God needs to be our first protocol. Because you see when you pray for God to help you with any decision in life, you are doing **two things**. **First** of all, you are inviting God to look into your heart and the hearts of others you are praying for because you know that He knows everyone’s hearts better than we do. And **second**, when you pray, you are expressing complete dependence upon God to help you make the right decision for you.

And that's what these guys were doing in the upper room. They were acknowledging their own inability to see into the inward thoughts of others and they were expressing complete dependence upon God for making a correct decision. Think about it!

They asked that the Ruler of the universe to guide the selection process so that the right man would be chosen. And **Matthias** was that man. God chose **Matthias** to do His work here on earth like He chose you and I do His work here on earth.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." And those of you who are not Christians this morning can be assured of this; God is calling you today too.

As the hymn writer **Fanny J. Crosby** asks,

"Jesus is waiting, O come to Him now, waiting today, waiting today,
Come with thy sins, at His feet lowly bow, come and no longer delay.
Calling today, calling today, Jesus is tenderly calling, is tenderly calling today."

And so the stage is set loved ones, God's timetable is about to come upon them. **Remember when Jesus taught His disciples how to pray?** He said in **Matthew 6:10**, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We don't need to rehearse that prayer like some religious groups do today because as we are going to see next time, God's kingdom has already come. Jesus' spiritual kingdom is about to come in **Acts 2** and it is going to be established and His promise to His disciples of the Holy Spirit is about to be fulfilled.

May we always go to God in prayer for all the decisions we make in life and we He give us the patience we need to rely on His timetable while we await for answered prayers.