

May 28, 2017
"Chosen"

(7th Sunday of Easter)

Acts 1:6-14; 1 Samuel 16:7

The reality of Christ ascending into heaven is we are CHOSEN to further Christ's ministry.

In all our talk about God's love, God's mercy, it can be easy to drift into a sense that our salvation was inevitable. That God couldn't help but send Christ to suffer.

But it didn't have to be.

If the legacy of Noah's story is any indication, there are any number of choices before a God who made all of them possible. One of the principal concepts in Reformed theology (the theology of our church) is the idea that God is sovereign: God cannot be compelled to do anything God doesn't want to do. God is free.

So what do we do with the idea that God freely, even wantonly, *chose* to save us, chose to make us children, chose to make us agents? Both encouraging and humbling a concept (or at least should be), how do we come to the place of choosing God back?



Acts 1:6-14

6 As a result, those who had gathered together asked Jesus, “Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?”

7 Jesus replied, “It isn’t for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. **8** Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

9 After Jesus said these things, as they were watching, he was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight. **10** While he was going away and as they were staring toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood next to them.

11 They said, “Galileans, why are you standing here, looking toward heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you saw him go into heaven.”

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a sabbath day’s journey away.

13 When they entered the city,

they went to the upstairs room where they were staying. Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James, Alphaeus’ son; Simon the zealot; and Judas, James’ son— **14** all were united in their devotion to prayer, along with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

- Jesus’ words in v.7 is about more than just the “endtimes.” It is a great perspective on our walk of faith in general.
- What power are we receiving in v. 8? For what purpose? How have you used this power?
- What do you make of v.14? To what degree do you think this is happening in our church? In your home life? Among your friends or colleagues?
- Why do you think the author took space and time to mention that there were women there along with Jesus’ brothers? (Hint: read the prophecy of Joel in the next chapter)



1 Samuel 16:7

7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven't selected him. God[a] doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the Lord sees into the heart.

Footnotes:

1 Samuel 16:7 LXX; MT lacks "God".

- Considering the kind of life David would end up leading, what do you think of God's criterion?
- How do you imagine God is measuring YOUR heart?



Reflection on Acts passage by Steve Godfrey

<https://churchintheworld.com/2014/05/26/perspective-acts-16-14/>

How easy to get caught up in the vagaries of the weekly news cycle.

We read the daily news and think, "God, are you asleep at the switch?"

Jesus' disciples didn't have the

Drudge Report but were nevertheless very much like us. Just before Jesus' ascension they asked him, "So Lord, now that you've been resurrected, is this (finally?...) the time you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Jesus response is telling: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." What?!

But we've been working so hard to chart this out. We want to know the plan, Jesus. What's the plan?! (Exasperated sighs).

"Here is the plan," Jesus responds.

"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." Perplexed disciples' faces ... So ... how does that answer our question about restoring the kingdom to Israel?

Answer: you are thinking far too narrowly. God's plan involves far more than wresting political control of 1st Century Palestine from the Romans. God's larger plan is actually to restore all of creation to himself and everything that has happened from then until now is in the unfolding.

So put away the charts, stop assuming you have it all figured out, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, tell everyone you can what you are witnessing in our midst. Hallelujah.

Commentary on Acts passage by Sarah Hinlicky Wilson

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/
preaching.aspx?](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3261)

commentary_id=3261

This is a funny sort of episode to kick off a book all about mission.

The founder tells his followers to spread the word across the entire face of the earth, but then he vanishes into the clouds, so the newly commissioned apostles just go back home, sit tight, and pray. Good luck with that, guys. (And girls: along with those “certain women,” we have here the last reference to Mary in the New Testament, other than Paul’s minimalistic “born of a woman” in Galatians 4.)

Furthermore, the question they ask -- now will you restore the kingdom to Israel? -- is proof that they still don’t get it, even after the resurrection. “Not getting it” is a distinguishing quality of Jesus’ disciples. Think of Peter’s constant stumbles, the disciples bickering about who is the greatest (not once but twice in Luke: chapters 9 and 22), or James and John asking to sit at Jesus’ left and right hands to demonstrate how well they’ve understood what he’s said about being mocked and flogged and spat upon.

So there’s been Jesus doing all this teaching, feeding, healing, dying, rising and raising, not to mention his relentless hammering on sin and the forgiveness thereof -- and what the excitable apostles distill from it all is that now is the time for the

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

“...Not temporal power, such as they dreamed of, but spiritual and moral power.”

–BW Johnson

restoration of the kingdom. Apparently, they missed the “my kingdom is not of this world” memo. (Perhaps because it was only circulated among John’s readership.)

This is not an error likely to be made by twenty-first-century, probably Gentile Christians with the long burden of church history trailing behind them. But Jesus' response is as timely as ever: "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority."

Speculation as to the grand pattern of history, and our place in it, is a pastime venerable only because of its age. Augustine did about the best job that can possibly be done with it, employing (to use the terminology of a thousand years later) a theology-of-the-cross hermeneutic: the true city of God is hidden and suffering, and earthly glory is no proof of anything.

Most other efforts toward cracking the code of history have been pretty lousy. Eusebius wrote the first church history to vindicate the semi-Arian march of triumph toward the Constantinian establishment. It's hard to see how the Christians of the time could interpret the end of the age of martyrdom as anything but God's blessing; little did they know, however, the fatal compromises and collusion that would follow in the wake of political power aligning itself with ecclesiastical power. But then the end of that arrangement, as has been unfolding over the last five centuries or so, is hardly an unambiguous success, either.

And those are still only mild attempts to sort out the flux of history. Others



**What is it that
God has placed in
our hands? In our
hearts? Do we
dare act on this
access?**

have gone into excruciating detail in mapping out the epochs, based on Daniel or Revelation or the Trinity, from patristic chiliasts to Joachim of Fiore in the twelfth century to the Scofield Reference Bible in the twentieth. Even the eager affirmation of growing Christianity in the Global South serves a particular glorious narrative of history, assuaging fears and assuring hope -- but still based on our knowing "the times or the periods."

Whoever plays the game, it's dangerous. It can't not be self-serving, whether in triumphalist or paranoid ways. Claiming to know the pattern of history ultimately doesn't

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

“You and I are the place of the promise of the kingdom now. Yet ultimately the kingdom is God's reign, God's effort, God's gift. We are not asked to usurp God, but to share his purpose and by his Spirit become his action in the world.”

–William Loader

commend faith in God but faith in one's knowledge of the pattern. It encourages one to place oneself on the winning side of history, at whatever cost.

We've seen no end of regimes, theologies, churches, and governments claiming history on their side. It is all too common in U.S. political discourse, flip-flopping between messianic hopes and armageddon panic. Karl Marx

thought he figured history out with communism, Francis Fukuyama with capitalism, and ISIS with the Islamic State. If history awards prizes to whoever manages to drain the most blood, then one (or more) of these theories may be right. Good reason to prefer a kingdom not of this world.

Jesus betrays no hints about history's course. What he gives us -- besides himself! -- is now and eternally. Now: you don't know the pattern, the times, or the periods. You don't need to. What you need to do now is get going as witnesses to the good news about God breaking into history. Eternally: God's justice will be wrought on all sin and evil, God's mercy will be poured abroad, the body will be raised up to live in a city without temple or lamp where God is all in all.

Stirring words. Stirring enough to send the happy disciples right back to where they started, a familiar place, to pray and hang out. It's not a bad start. It's not enough, either. But they don't know what to do without the Holy Spirit egging them on. A little Pentecost fire, a handy martyrdom of Stephen, and they'll start on that long road to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. In God's time, not theirs. It is enough.

Additional Thoughts

- If you really have God's Spirit within why can't you always "feel it"?
- What have done with the power God's given you over the years?
- What do you do daily or on occasion to acknowledge that you are chosen?
- Think of three ways to complete the sentence: "God has chosen me for_____."
- Think of three ways to complete the sentence: "God has chosen our church for_____."
- How will you celebrate the resurrection this final week of Easter?

