

# Trusting the Fathers Plan

by Raymond Brown

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*The people of God trust the Father's plan, even when they don't understand what's happening, and welcome the Spirit's power to transform them.*

**Duration:** 27:47

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 23:34, Luke 24:47, John 14:1-3, Acts 1:8, Acts 4:18-20, Acts 5:40-41

**Topics:** "Plan Of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes that even those with vast knowledge may not have all the answers to life's problems. However, they do know that in times of great need, God provides the power through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The speaker highlights that the people of God are transformed by His power, both individually and as a group. The sermon also acknowledges that while there were miracles and achievements in the early church, there were also sadness, problems, and difficulties. The speaker encourages trust in God's plan and points to the sovereignty of God, the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of Christ as the sources of hope and transformation.

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## Transcript

But I thought it would be good if we had a look at some passages from the first, and in my view the best, church history book that's ever been written. That's the Acts of the Apostles. And I'd like us to look at some key passages.

And tonight particularly, as we're thinking about remembering the way and reflecting on the past, to look at this opening passage in the Acts of the Apostles, as our meeting draws to its close, and to think about some of the ways that Luke, one of the most gifted writers of New Testament times, some of the ways that Luke wants to put across at the very beginning of this church history book, the Acts of the Apostles, some of the ways by which the people of God are sustained. He's not just telling a story, Luke is one of the most fascinatingly gifted people in the life of the early church. I've often said actually that if I'd have had the opportunity to go back in a time machine to the first century, and I never will, but if I had, and I could have had the privilege of choosing one member of the first century church with whom I might spend an evening, I would choose Luke.

Now I wonder who you'd choose, but I would choose Luke. I'll tell you why. I don't mean I would choose him because he was the greatest.

I want to put the Apostle Paul and Peter among that group, but I would choose him because he could have told me everything I wanted to know about them, and a lot more beside. Luke was one of those remarkable people, the author of the Gospel and the second volume, the Acts of the Apostles. Luke was one of those remarkable people who crowd into the compass of one life a wide range of gifts.

I mean he was a brilliant doctor. He could tell you all about the kind of aches and pains of the first century, and he could tell you all about the illnesses, he could tell you about the sociology of the first century world, about the composition of the first century world, because illness is no respecter of persons. Wealthy people are ill and poor people are ill.

His work must have taken him to all kinds of homes. He was very well travelled, we know that from the Acts of the Apostles. Certain passages in the Acts, he's not just telling you what happened to Peter and to Paul, he was actually there.

He suddenly changes from saying they did this and they did that, and we came to such and such a place. Luke's there, so he could have told me about the ancient world, its ports, its sea travel, its roads, he could tell me not just about one place but villages and towns and cities and communities, what they were like. He's a very brilliant storyteller, and when he tells a story it's with graphic and arresting detail, very reliable, very good historian as well.

Not all good historians are good storytellers, I've been bored in many a history lecture, but Luke couldn't bore you. Luke has a graphic eye for detail, you find that in the Acts of the Apostles. And I believe too that Luke was a great theologian.

In other words we make a great mistake if we come to either the Gospel or the Acts by just thinking he's telling us a story. The very way that he puts the story together is to present us with great doctrinal truths and principles. And here's the beginning of this story, it's not all a success story.

Very possible, isn't it, to tell a story in such a way that you only highlight the successes and the brilliant achievements. That's not honest. Luke put some things into this story I would have left out.

I wouldn't have told you about Ananias and Sapphira actually. I would have said well, somebody always makes a mistake, there's always somebody to spoil it. I wouldn't have told you that.

But Luke wants us to know. Very important for us to know. You know that business of how Paul and Barnabas had a difference of opinion at the end of chapter 15.

Now that wasn't just a sort of casual discussion. It was very, very tense. The word that Luke uses where they come to discuss whether they're going to take John Mark with them on the second missionary journey is the word from which we get our word paroxysm.

I mean it was very, very tense. I wouldn't have told you about that. I wouldn't have told you at the beginning of chapter 6 about the fact that there was a strong difference of opinion, not just between Paul and Barnabas as individuals, but within two sections of the church in Jerusalem, the Jewish and the Greek Christians as it were.

But Luke is a good historian. He wants to tell you the truth as it is. What a marvellous thing.

Because when we came up against our first bit of church difficulty, if we found a New Testament in which nothing ever went wrong, we should say, well what's happened to us? But you read about problems and pressures and difficulties and anxieties and tensions within the life of the early church. And I'm just so grateful. So when we come to this story as it begins, Luke wants us to know the story as it is.

And as you look into it and see, remember the way that the people of God have been led, I think the first thing about them that emerges from this opening passage is these are people who trust the Father's plan. They really believe that God has plans and purposes. And that means that we sometimes go through experiences and difficulties that are hard to understand.

There will be problems in the work. There will be pressures. It's very interesting that when you come to it, you see, there in this opening section, there are two questions.

Do you notice that? There are two questions. First, there's a question that they ask the disciples. And that's in verse 6. When the apostles met together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time give the kingdom back to Israel? That's a question that they ask him.

And then when you come to verse 10, there's a question they are asked. They ask a question, they are asked a question. Why are you standing there looking up into the sky? There's two questions.

That's very fascinating because they concern two very real problems and difficulties that people have. This is the first question. Lord, when are you going to bring back the kingdom to Israel? When are we going to get the Romans off our backs? When are you going to be the Messiah? When is God's purpose so going to unfold that we should be liberated from the Roman oppression? When will you restore the kingdom to Israel? And Jesus says, it is not for you to know.

I like to linger with that. I know he goes on to say it's not for you to know times and seasons. I know in this particular context that's a very natural thing to say.

It's not for you to know times and seasons. The Father has it, this is it you see, in his own authority. God knows what he's doing.

God has plans. As Eric has reminded us of that marvellous Joseph story in the book of Genesis. Lord, God knows what he's doing.

He says to his brothers, you meant it to evil. God meant it to good. God has wise and sovereign purposes.

And he said, we hoped, remember the two on the road to Emmaus, the end of the previous book that Luke has written, we trusted it was he who was going to redeem Israel. We thought he was going to be the Messiah, the deliverer, the liberator, that we should get ourselves free from the Roman oppression once and for all. When he did such marvellous, powerful signs of majestic glory and uniqueness as the Son of God, it would have been as nothing to liberate us from the Roman oppression.

When is that going to happen? It's summing up the question, isn't it? It's dealing with the problem when you don't get what you want. That's what they wanted. When you don't get what you want.

Well, it wasn't a bad thing, was it? It could never have been good that they were in the captivity of the Romans like so many others at that time. That's a great problem, isn't it? When you pray, when you long for something which is good but it doesn't come. When you don't get what you want, you have to trust the

Father's plan.

And then, of course, when you look at verse 11, Jesus has just gone. He's just left them. Passed through the skies into the heavens.

Look, this is when you get what you don't want. Who would have wanted Jesus to go? Quite bluntly, I know you know and I know, it's the glory and the wonder of the ascension, it's the vindication of Christ, there's going to be the coming of the Holy Spirit. Look, wait a minute, that's all yet to be experienced.

I mean, you know and I know the wonderful story of what happened and the unfolding of the marvel of those events that they were going to do, as Jesus said, greater things, because whilst he was there, wonderful things could happen in a particular place where he was. But greater things you'd see, that is, things would be happening in his name and in his power and by his presence all over the world at the same moment of time. But they didn't know that then.

Look, my friends, they're bereaved. If you lose somebody who is more dear to you than anyone else in the world, you can't leap with joy. I mean, even you as a Christian believer, you know that your life is hid with Christ in God and the one you love loves Jesus and you will meet again, but you're bound to feel the parting and the pain.

They couldn't have been dancing with excitement when he left them. After all, he'd made all the decisions. Where are they going to go? I mean, he said to the uttermost parts of the world, but where and how are they to go and are they to go together or are they to go as individuals and how will they know they're to the right places and all that? And they're in Jerusalem.

That's there. Luke says at the end of his Gospel, you're to preach this message of repentance beginning in Jerusalem. That's what he's asking them to do.

He's left them. Oh, it would be wonderful to preach the Gospel of repentance whilst Jesus is with them. What a marvellous proof to his uniqueness and his deity and the power of God, but he's gone and Jerusalem was the place where they were all known.

It was the place where he'd been crucified. To say beginning at Jerusalem was the most dangerous place on earth. Look, if they'd crucified Jesus there, they could easily execute his followers.

They were determined to stamp out this way, weren't they? So two things have happened. You haven't got what you want, that is freedom for Israel. You've certainly got what you don't want.

Jesus is gone. It's possible, I say to you, to sort of look at the Acts of the Apostles as a story of bright and brilliant success and boyish expectation and wonderful trust and glorious achievement and all that, but you've got to put yourself back into their shoes within their experience to feel it for them. When you do that, you see it's our kind of world.

That's what's happened to the life of the people of God across the years. Sometimes they haven't got what they wanted. They certainly got what they didn't want from time to time.

That's the story of the Acts of the Apostles. Of course there were miracles. Of course there were glorious achievements.

They were bound to be. But there were great sadnesses and problems and difficulties as well, and all of us need to know that. You've got to trust the Father's plan.

You see, the Acts of the Apostles actually opens with an immense anguish, doesn't it? What's that about? Well, it's about Judas's vacancy being filled. Doesn't that confront you with the most terrible anguish? How could anybody who'd spent three years with Jesus sell him for a handful of money? I don't know. It's not for you to know.

How is it in the early chapters of the Acts, instead of things getting better and better, as you would expect, wouldn't you, with the fullness of the Holy Spirit and this new baptism with fire and power, how is it instead of getting better and better, they seem to be getting worse and worse? Look, first of all, they're rebuked. They're threatened, these preachers. They're silenced.

They've said, you mustn't speak any more in the name of Jesus. Well then, within a chapter or two, those of you who know the story well, they're being whipped. They're not being talked to, they're being beaten.

Look, at the end of chapter 7, they're being stoned. The most beautiful character within the life of the early church is meeting his death in the most gruesome way possible. Look, a fanatic seems to be having his way.

There's a persecutor of the church who's going from home to home. The actual word that Luke uses to describe Saul of Tarsus's activity is a word that you use to describe the breaking of a wild animal that's let loose. It's like a roaring lion, it's like a tiger on the loose.

Are you saying he breaks into people's homes, he arrests people, he wants people to be killed, really, to silence the message of this gospel? Well then, he's wonderfully converted. Of course, it's a marvellous story. Well, why couldn't he get converted because it before he caused all that trouble? I mean, that would have been better, wouldn't it? Instead of having these people's homes broken into and being led to prison and threatened by death, why didn't Saul of Tarsus get converted a bit earlier? Not for you to know.

Look, you come to chapter 12, at the beginning of chapter 12, there's James, a lovely leader of the church, another leader in the church of Jerusalem. Look, at the beginning of chapter 12, he's executed on the orders of Herod. Well, at the end of chapter 12, Herod himself dies under the judgment of God.

It would have been better if he'd died under the judgment of God at the beginning of the chapter, wouldn't it? And then James wouldn't have died at all. Why didn't he die first? It's not for you to know. Why does a marvellous preacher and ambassador and herald of the gospel like the Apostle Paul have to go through such physical trouble? Then he gets into Philippi, he's answered the call from the man of Macedonia, and Lydia's converted, and then a demon-tormented girl in the streets of Philippi is delivered.

Well, then he's arrested, and he's whipped and lashed, and when Luke writes the story of a doctor as a doctor, he says they're severely beaten, Paul and Silas. Luke looked at those wounds. He was there.

Is that what you get for preaching the gospel? Why is he shipwrecked? Why is he alone at sea? Why is he, as he tells you in 2 Corinthians, why is he often without food? Why is he in danger from rivers and danger from robbers? Hasn't the Lord got the power to build a protective wall around him so that he doesn't suffer these things? It's not for you to know. What this is saying to us, this wonderful, honest, glorious record in the first church history book, is God's people remember the way, and as they remember the way and look back, they trust the Father's plan. They really believe in the sovereignty of God, and they

don't always understand.

They don't know why at times they have to go through pain and hardship and difficulties where sometimes it isn't brilliantly rewarding, when sometimes the work is just sheer slog, when there isn't a great deal to encourage you. They've just trusted the Father's plan. It's not for you to know, Jesus says.

All these things are in the Father's control. They're part of the Father's sovereign purpose. And when you look back, that's the story of church history really.

There's been a lot of pain and hardship in it all, as well as triumph and glory, but God has been sovereignly at work, and in ways we can't understand. I don't think we ever will understand this side of glory. You've just got to believe that God is lovingly and sovereignly unfolding his own purposes, and doing it in our own lives.

I was brought to personal faith in Jesus, you see, in this city. I think directly through the worst crisis possible in my life as a 17-year-old lad. My mother died.

I was very religious, but I wasn't a Christian. And it was that terrible crisis. Now I don't believe that God visited our home in that way, in order to bring me to Christ.

I don't believe that. I mean, sickness and death is part of the unfolding nature of our limited life. And she was a young woman really.

She was only 42. I was devastated. But you see, through it all, I came to see in those months after, I came to see that I'd only got religion.

I hadn't got life. I didn't know Jesus personally. I was just going to church and opening hymn books and trying to be nice and gathering a little group of Sunday school children around me.

I did all that. But I didn't know Christ personally. But it was through the pain of bereavement I came to see in the crisis, I came to see my need of a saviour in Jesus.

And that's the story really of the life of the people of God. When you remember the way, it's people have trusted the Father's plan. They've really believed in the sovereignty of God.

And here's the second feature which emerges, doesn't it, clearly from this wonderful passage. They can't know the answer to everything. But they certainly will receive the resources they need for everything.

They trust the Father's plan and they welcome the Spirit's power. Jesus said to them, he said, go and wait. Actually, the word that Luke uses is, you must keep on waiting.

Not just go and wait once. But you must keep on waiting. Keep on waiting.

Don't leave Jerusalem. But keep on waiting for the gift my Father has promised. I'm going to leave you.

You will be bereaved. But you're going to have the most wonderful gift. And the gift in the person of God's Holy Spirit will make my life and my presence and my power a far greater reality to you than you've ever known through these three years we've spent wandering and preaching together and working together here in Israel.

They welcomed the Spirit's power. The story of the life of the people of God across the centuries is not the story of people who've always had it glorious and good. It is the people who've just trusted God's sovereignty, even in the darkest moments.

And they've always known that however difficult it was, however great the problems, however at times unrewarding the work, however uncertain at times the future, they've known that they were given all the power they needed. They welcomed the Spirit's power. And the story, isn't it, the unfolding story in this brilliant First Church History book, The Acts of the Apostles, is a story not of people who've got an encyclopedic mind, who know the answer to every problem in life.

Sometimes they don't know. It's not for you to know. They don't know why lovely Stephen should be taken, or they should be robbed of James, or why Paul should be whipped.

They don't know the answer to all that. But they do know that God in the moments of great need always gives the power that we need by the indwelling life of the Holy Spirit. And so these people are transformed people.

They're ordinary people, but in the power of God he transforms them. He transforms them as a group. Luke wants you to know the people who belong to the group.

And so he names them all. Those who go upstairs to this upper room are given this new dynamic as they keep on waiting, this indwelling life of the Spirit of God coming to possess them and do things for them that they would have never thought possible. However could Matthew and Simon the Zealot possibly have lived together but for this gospel of grace and this power of the Spirit, that life that they shared in Jesus? Matthew was a tax collector.

He worked for the Romans before Christ came to his tax-collecting booth. And Simon the Zealot was a patriot who wanted the Romans off their backs, as one who works for them at one time and one who's determined to work against them. But they come to see, both of them, that the answer isn't in their politics.

The answer is in their Redeemer and their Saviour who can transform individual lives by the indwelling life of this Holy Spirit. Well the story in the Acts of the Apostles is not of gigantic people who were made greater, but we people who were made strong. Doubting people who became convinced on certain people who were given all the guidance they needed.

And this is the marvellous story of the life of the people of God. Remember the way they trust the Father's plan, they believe in the sovereignty of God, they welcome the Spirit's power, they're convinced of the indwelling life of God's Holy Spirit who comes to make his home in our hearts and lives when we put our trust in Jesus. And the last thing is they become the Saviour's witnesses.

Jesus says you will receive power and you will be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, as I've said, the most dangerous place in the world, beginning at Jerusalem. You'll start here in Jerusalem. This is where, Luke says in the last chapter of his previous book, the Gospel, this is where you're to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name, beginning at Jerusalem.

Look, as I finish, I want you to linger with that. Beginning at Jerusalem. My friends, that was not only the most dangerous place on earth, that was the most awful place on earth.

That was the place where they crucified Jesus. That was the place where the most awful thing in the world had been done. Men and women screamed out, we will not have this man to rule over us.

It was in the place where God's Word in the presence of his lovely Son was rejected by people. It was the place where his best and most loyal supporters forsook him and rushed off to safe places in Jerusalem, getting themselves secure positions behind barred doors. It was the place where the people who loved him most said they didn't know him.

Beginning at Jerusalem, Jesus says, you go and preach the Gospel. Yes, even to people who can crucify the Lord of Glory. Give them the first opportunity.

The people who did the very worst thing that anybody could do in the presence of God is to crucify God's Son. Beginning at Jerusalem. John Bunyan in the 17th century put some of his best sermons into lovely books.

I mean, no preacher ever has the time to say all that he'd like to say. John Bunyan had an answer to it. The prison jailer used to let him out from prison, go and preach as long as he promised to come back at night.

That happened a lot. He could preach at night, but there had to be an end to it. They met in Bedfordshire woods and barns and all sorts of places in the cruel days of the late part of the 17th century.

A brave people, you know, our spiritual ancestors. He had a lovely sermon on that verse in Luke 24, preached this message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins, beginning at Jerusalem. John Bunyan, when he got back to prison, he wrote down all that he'd like to have said if he'd had all the time in the world.

And he called it the Jerusalem sinner saved. That's it. Look, is there someone here tonight and you're not sure about the forgiveness of God? You say, well, you don't know what I've done.

Was it worse than crucifying the Lord of Glory? Was it? Was it more terrible than hanging Jesus on a cross? Was it? Jesus says, beginning at Jerusalem. And that's the place where you're to start, says Jesus. Thank God for the people in the life of this church, in its beginnings, that have had a missionary vision.

Yes, certainly concerned about the uttermost parts of the earth. But he knew that the message had to start in Hume, actually, beginning at Jerusalem. Beginning as the Saviour's witnesses with a sense of immense privilege that, well, yes, if the Jerusalem sinner can be saved, the people who cried out crucify him, who mocked him, who railed on him, if they could be saved, well, anybody can be forgiven.

Anybody can be forgiven. That's part of the wonder and the miracle of it. And we are witnesses to this great truth, these great realities of the Christian gospel.

Remember the way. And when we look back, we can see what it is. It's about the sovereignty of God.

It's about the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. It's about the beauty of Christ, his grace changing us and transforming us and making us witnesses to the reality of all that he can do in an individual heart. And life.

Thanks be to God.

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