

Kev's sermon notes for eGroups

Sunday, May 23, 2021

Kev note: This sermon was from delivered to about 2,000 church leaders - that I attended live a few weeks ago at the Ballantyne campus in Charlotte NC USA - remarkable.

Elevation Church - Broadcasting from Ballantyne Campus – Charlotte, NC USA

Pastor: Steven. Furtick

Sermon Title: "Then They Gathered "

Here are Pastor Furtick's key points for those that are pressed for time:

- Here is what the Lord told me to focus on today in verse Act 1 vs 6 – "Then They Gathered."
- "There is a grace called adaptation - The adaptation of this church during the COVID epidemic is one of the most grace filled things that I ever witnessed. There is a grace for adaptation – there are situations where God gives us what we need during a situation that we never experienced before."
- "You might have felt last year that God left us during the global pandemic – but let's focus on "Then They Gathered" – the disciples all gathered after they scattered – and then Jesus gave them a super-natural experience to help them in their discipleship."
- "Mathew 18: 19 to 20 is not just a verse for a church event with poor attendance – During the pandemic, we adapted and still gathered."
- "Certain situations will thin out the "they" – and I want to speak to the "they" today – who you include in your life (and sometimes this is beyond your control) – the "they" – are the most important people in your life."
- "We tend to feel unworthy relative to the standard set by Jesus – and the enemy loves to use condemnation to prevent us from receiving the grace that we need to change."
- Before we receive power from God, we have to first release our death grip of the plans that we have for God.
- "Here's my message: Don't beat yourself up too much – Allow for the grace of adaptation to work in your life – as I observe myself in contrast with the standard of Jesus Christ – a lot of feelings of unworthiness can get in – the devil is very good at forcing you to dwell and focus on the condemnation – that prevents you from receiving the grace that you need to change – the devil gets tries to make you think that you are not part of "they" – Scriptures tells us "then they gathered"
- "This is "then" – Got is telling us today – this is then. Then "they" gathered – Then the nation will sing. "Then" is not always somewhere out there – Trusting in God to get us through – "Then" is now – either this church has a message or we do not have a message – we are either the bride of Christ or we are just playing around – just dating Jesus and conveniently hooking up with God only when we think we need something."
- "There is room for you in the heart of God and in the story that He is telling – Receive from God whatever He wants you to do next. We forge a foundation for what He wants to build next – Scattered seed and a dry seasons can form the basis for a harvest – We have so much to look forward to – Do give up and don't diminish your Gift – Embrace the grace of adaptation and mistakes. We sowed in tears and brought home a harvest – We sowed in tears and now we reaped in joy."

Elevation Worship:

- “My Testimony” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NyH9mDYEck>
- “Might Get Loud” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWeY8tltRQA>
- “Jireh” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mC-zw0zCCtg>
- “Welcome Resurrection”

Scripture for this week:

- Acts 1: 4 to 14: Jesus Taken Up Into Heaven - 1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 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. 5 For John baptized with[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” - 6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” - 7 He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 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.”9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 “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.” 12 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk[c] from the city. 13 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. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.
- Mathew 18: 19 to 20: 19 “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”
- Jer 29: 11: 0 This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”
- Psalm 126: 1 to 6: (586 BC) Psalm 126 - A song of ascents. 1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. 2 Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.” 3 The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. 4 Restore our fortunes, Lord, like

streams in the Negev. 5 Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. 6 Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

- **Please consider joining an eGroup (small group) so you don't have to walk this walk alone? – See www.elevationchurch.cc.**
- **Interested in joining Elevation Church: See: www.elevationchurch.cc**
- **Interested in leading an eGroup? See: www.elevationchurch.cc**
- **Interested in serving at Elevation Church: See: www.elevationchurch.cc**
- **Interested in attending or leading a watch party: See: www.elevationchurch.cc**
- Here Comes Church:
 - Interested in serving at Elevation Church: See: www.elevationchurch.cc
 - Please consider joining an eGroup (small group) so you don't have to walk this walk alone – See www.elevationchurch.cc. When you are isolated, you are an easy target for the enemy – and you don't have the benefit of friends to support you. Embrace the power of numbers.
 - Old Church Basement – just released – quote: “From Going back to the place where we discovered worship for the first time – not a physical place - accessing our first love (within ourselves) – bringing you back to a pure place – absent of self-consciences.” “Our prayer is that his album pierces through the darkness and creates light in people's lives.”
 - eFam reunion tour meets next in Phoenix, Arizona – over 1000 hours of outreach during these events and 185 baptisms.
 - YTHX 2021 – virtual event – July 11 to 18.
 - Love Week: July 24 to 31 – sign ups start on June 1, 2021 – See: www.elevationoutreach.org.
 - Holly working on a new eGroup study called “Essentials”
- Opening prayer by Pastor Furtick on Sunday, May 23, 2021 - “Come in the kitchen with me and let me show you something that God has prepared for us – Lick the bowl and taste for yourself that the word of the Lord is good.
- Don't let the familiarity of this text eclipse the importance of the moment.
- For the longest time, I thought the message from this scripture was that “we will have power” – whenever we release our pride - we receive God's power – and the Lord told me that that that is true - and we can preach this later – but not this time.
- There are all kinds of things that we see in this passage and Acts.
- Here is another thought: Jesus will return and his nature, purpose, and character do not change – Jesus is not made in our image we are made and his – and his purpose far exceeds the current political power or any other power on this earth – we change and then will behold Jesus – but that's not the message for today either.
- Here is what the Lord told me to focus on today in verse Act 1 vs 6 – “Then They Gathered.”
- At the start of the pandemic, I was asked if it was weird to preach to an empty room – My response to this is “it's not weird - it's remembering” what it was like when I first started out a ministry – a lot of spiritual growth is not learning something new - it is remembering.
- “Remember who you are” – from the book of 1 Simba in Lion King.

- Recall David: He was serving lunch to his brothers before he confronted Goliath – But he did remember how to fight – Despite the enemy that changes - The power that you're fighting in does not.
- **Every time your shift from one stage of your life to another- or one mode of leadership to another to another - there is room for adaptation – the adaptation of this church during the Covid pandemic is one of the greatest things I've ever seen in my life – such a demonstration of the grace of God – there is a grace for adaptation – just ask Moses – He needed a sign that God was with him – Just ask the disciples who were in a remote locations to minister and then needed to feed some hungry crowds.**
- A crowd is not a Church - and a crowd can turn into a mob very quickly.
- **In your life right now, I want you to know that there is a grace for adaptation – there is a grace for you by the very nature of the all-powerful Holy Spirit – as Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians - we encounter reality with no prior experience – and God gives it to us as we need it – this is the grace of adaptation.**
- **In Acts 1, Jesus has an encounter with the disciples – it is only been 40 days since Jesus died on the cross – and now Jesus is leaving them for good – and you probably felt that God left you a few times this past year - and the disciples are experiencing the same struggles that we experience today – lots of political unrest – many arguments of gender equality – being a disciple of Jesus Christ was hard – many Jews that converted to Christianity were treated as traders to their national identity. However, there is still grace for adaptation.**
- Recall that the disciples are at the mount of olives – which carries a lot of symbology – because olive oil can only be produced when the olives are crushed.
- Now let's talk about “then they gathered.”
- The disciples gathered – and there was no guarantee that they could worship in safety – and the fact that 120 of them are together again by itself a miracle.
- **Recall that when Jesus was crucified the disciples scattered – so I was happy to see in Acts 1 they gathered – despite all of their disappointment in their opinion of how God was supposed to work - they still gathered – despite the devastation of the crucifixion and even costing some of their faith to fail them – they still gathered – They even gathered after the crowds were long gone– So that God could provide them the divine supernatural empowerment – for the task of taking the gospel to the world.**
- We went through a season - where the way we gathered - change so much.
- See Mathew 18: 19 to 20: 19 “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”
- A Pastor Furtick classic: This is a great verse to justify poor church attendance. I started quoting this verse a lot with renewed fervor during the pandemic – Have you ever tried to gather something that was scattered? - What I love the most about our church is that we didn't stop gathering during the pandemic – we had to adapt but we still gathered – and we stood on the promise of what is stated in Matthew 18.

- **Now let's talk about they – blind Bartimaeus, the woman with the issue of the blood, and Lazarus did not gather – or at least are not reporting as gathering as the Gospels are written – Isn't it crazy how certain seasons will thin out the definition of "they"?**
- Before we give the disciples a lot of credit here - we've got to recognize that only John and the women stuck around for the crucifixion – no loudmouth Peter or honest (renamed) Thomas
- **Then they gathered - The reason I wanted to preach to you today is because I want to talk to "they" – there's a difference between them and they – and let me be clear - I don't think you're perfect because I don't want to put that kind of pressure on you – We all struggle and it would be naïve of me not to think that a few people in this room got high over the last few days - but still managed to press forward serving and leading – and I have to be real about this – because the "they" that God uses are imperfect - Sure we all need to grow up in the wisdom and immaturity of God – but it is also important for us to realize that there is grace that comes in the from adaptation – We are not yet all that we will be – and this does not stop us from being "they" – and the "they" in your life is the biggest determining factor in determining where your life ends up.**
- And some days we don't get to choose because it's determined by circumstances that are outside of our control – for the people in this room and listening on-line today you are my "they" – this is what God called me to give my life to – "they" gathered.
- Even though Peter cut off the ear of a soldier, he still gathered in mount of olives.
- Even though Peter, James, and John were sleeping when Jesus was confronted with the reality of dying on the cross - they still gathered.
- **Here's my message: Don't beat yourself up too much – Allow for the grace of adaptation to work in your life – as I observe myself in contrast with the standard of Jesus Christ – a lot of unworthiness that can get in – the devil is very good at forcing you to dwell and focus on the condemnation – that prevents you from receiving the grace that you need to change – the devil gets tries to make you think that you are not part of they – Scriptures tells us "then they gathered" – the same people that scattered at the cross – and there were not many people left – only 120 in the upper room.**
- During the first worship service at elevation church when we first gathered total attendance was 121.
- This pandemic brought me back to when I was a preacher + a worship leader (because I could only afford me) and preaching to only a few people – it made me realize that God didn't just give us a crowd called elevation church – who only listens to songs on Pandora and listen to sermons on YouTube once every 5 weeks – God gave us a core of committed disciples – imperfect and dysfunctional disciples that forget to read their bible and occasionally cuss some one out in a gasoline pump line – I came to remind you to tell you that you are still "they" – Holly, God gave us a "they" to help run this church – Back when we were praying for this at 33 Dellwood Dr. in Shelby North Carolina – back then, we were praying for "they."
- Peter preached at Pentecost after cussing out a girl at a campfire just prior to Jesus' crucifixion – there they go again – where it is better to give than receive.

- **Here is what has been the ultimate blessing for me: As the church has had to reinvent itself over the last 14 months from inside out – just like the disciples they were struggling with what they already knew and what they could not possibly predict – and in this process - God was creating for our church space for what we didn't even know what to pray for yet.**
- In Jan. 2021 we partnered with Maverick city music to create a new album called “Old Church Basement” – it was here that I became thankful for the space that God gave us in order to do something new that God wanted to do – while at the same time being frustrated with overworked nurses working 18 hour shifts and overworked teachers - and grieving for people that have lost family members or lost their means of employment.
- **One of the last songs written in the new album “Old church basement” was called “Come Again” – and Holly mentioned this in her sermon recently – and the song talks about being open – at a time where we have all of these empty seats in the church during a two-day recording – where we turned this sanctuary into a recording studio - where Chandler and Branden helped finish the song with these words: “it’s not a building you want to fill – it is our heart” – Followed by this prayer: “It is not a building you want to fill, this empty space is what you wanted a along” – while looking at the empty seats of the Ballantyne campus.**
- **What if this empty space is what God wanted – similar to where Jesus left his disciples in bodily form and then sent His he spirit to live within – And when the spirit came “greater works will you do in my name than I did in my body” – For the spirit to be received, the body had to be released – Before we shout about “you will receive power” in Act 1:8, we have to first talk about releasing the need to control our understand of everything God does – And isn’t this the hardest thing in the world? After all that we have been through, can we all agree that the hardest thing to do in the world is to release our death grip of our plans for God.**
- See Jer 29: 11: 0 This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”
- **See Jr 29:11: It says that God knows the plans that he has for us – not the other way around. The first step for those plans to be activated in a community it’s to release the plans that we had for ourselves – and be open for the plans that God has for you that you didn’t even know about.**
- **These buildings will be full again sometime in the future. These seats are going to be full again. By the grace of God these seats will be full again – I declare that these empty rows will meet a need that is exceedingly greater than what we can ask or imagine.**
- Then they Gathered and God had to make some space for they – Make room – it would be one thing to say that they gathered after they received the holy spirit – however the profundity of

the situation is that they gathered waiting for something to happen – this is why I love you all – because you are the ones that did not wait for things to happen – that you did not wait for restrictions to be lifted – that didn't wait to have more answers.

- The best thing that Jesus says to control freaks (like me) out there is this: we can't release that which we want to hold onto? "it is not for you to know."
- Did we all skip over this - and jump right to the section that says "we will receive power?"
- The unknown – this is the space – and we all don't like not knowing – did God put this sermon on the calendar to help us and where we are right now?
- **Then they gathered – when? After they scattered. We were scattered to gather - In addition to being more creative - And God bless the teams that God gave us – to keep the gospel going out into the world. What else has to scatter in order to gather?**
- **Psalm 126: 1 to 6: (586 BC) Psalm 126 - A song of ascents. "1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. 2 Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." 3 The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. 4 Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev. 5 Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. 6 Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them."**
- This was a song typically sung while going to church - and it was song after their exile from Egypt – it was a song about what God did for them after they've been in another place for a long time. And this is the song that God gave to the Israelites. This is then – God is telling us today – this is then. Then they gathered – Then the nation will sing. Then is not always somewhere out there – Then it was said – Trust in God to get us through – Then is now – Either this church has a message for or we do not have a message – we are either the bride of Christ or we are just playing around – just dating Jesus and conveniently hooking up with God only when we need something.
- This is then and this is they.
- **Closing prayer by Pastor Furtick on 5/23/2021: God please restore the fortunes of Zion – to visit your people again – with an outpouring of wisdom – and with a message of reconciliation – with peace flooding our veins so that when we walk in truth – urging each other to reconcile with God – These are the days of Elijah and a Ezekiel – dry bones becoming flesh – This is "then" and You are "they" – We are gathered to celebrate the person that knew no sin – the righteousness of God – so that we understand that we are a chosen people - a royal priesthood – a holy nation – And He has done great things for us – we are filled with joy – restore our fortunes Lord - like streams in the Negev – A dry place where it barely rains – But when it does rain in the Negev, it rips through and will wash away everything that isn't prepared for it – Allow us to be prepared for you Lord – So that we have room to receive it – Restore our fortunes Lord – Those who sow with tears, reap songs of Joy – For those that have been crying during this pandemic and feel like they have been scattered – reap for songs of joy now – Even though we've been weeping, we never stopped sowing – Even though**

some of us are filled with depression we keep doing what God wanted us to do – keeping our eyes on the joy that is before us – be among those that continue to sow – be among those that pray “anyway” – these are “they” that sowed anyway – Now let’s get ready for the gully washing promise - return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with us. For a season we wept – but then we gathered – in due season we shall reap – They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength – They that wait on the Lord will mount upon the wings of Eagles – Run and not grow weary for we shall walk – So God, now that we have made room – And we have remodeled the old paradigm of what church is – and not just within the confines of physical church – Lord I believe you scattered us (our priorities and fears) for a season so that you could gather a harvest – for Your eternal purpose – To bring a harvest onto you Lord. Thank you for sowing while you were struggling – Even if you scattered for a little while – There is room for you in the heart of God and in the story that He is telling – Receive from God whatever He wants to do next. We forge a foundation for what He wants to build next – Scattered seed in a dry season can form a basis of a harvest – We have so much to look forward to – Do give up and don’t diminish your Gift – Embrace the grace of adaptation and mistakes. We sowed in tears and brought home a harvest – We sowed in tears and now we reaped in joy. Amen.