

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 1 of 13

Today I want to call your attention to a passage of Scripture that tells us a great deal about the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ views His church. It tells us a great deal about what is truly important to the Lord about His church. That passage is part the account of the one hundred and twenty disciples who waited in the upper room at Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit, during the days between the Lord Jesus Christ's ascension into Heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

We find this account in the book of Acts chapter one, beginning at verse twelve. So turn with me to that passage, if you are able – Acts chapter one, beginning at verse twelve. Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us this:

[He says, verse twelve, that after Jesus had ascended to Heaven, the disciples] returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

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.

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 2 of 13

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, "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; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry."

Now there is more to this account, but today I want to focus our attention on the portion of it that we have just read. And as we do that, let's look to the Lord in prayer. Our Father, as your Holy Spirit inspired a holy man of God to write the words that we have before us today, I pray that Your Holy Spirit will illuminate Your Word for us as we consider this account, and the implications of what we have just read for the thinking and the conduct of your people as the body of Christ in the present day. Sanctify us by Your Word, Father. Your Word is truth. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Introduction

Today, the Lord willing, I am going to preach a message that is completely contrary to the thinking of much of the Evangelical church in our time. That is because much of the Evangelical church today is focused on the wrong things. Much of the Evangelical church today is focused on bigness, on size, but is neglecting sound doctrine. In many of the mega-churches today, you will find that the one true Gospel is not being preached, because the focus is on numbers. The

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 3 of 13

focus is on the size of the crowd. And that's the term you often hear used today. Preachers don't talk about the size of the *congregation* in a mega-church. As often as not, they talk about the size of the *crowd*. They say that it is necessary to reinvent the church so that it will draw a *crowd*. They talk in terms of doing and saying things that will appeal to the *crowd*.

And many of those churches do draw crowds. But it is highly questionable that they are truly Christian crowds. If you don't preach the Gospel, you draw people who don't believe the Gospel, because they've never heard the Gospel. And those people bring in more people like themselves, because they find what really amounts to nothing more than a large, somewhat religious social club.

The tragedy is that the churches that follow this way of thinking are no longer truly churches. They are large gathering places for the kind of people that the Apostle Paul described in Second Timothy chapter four, when he spoke of those who will not endure sound doctrine. They won't put up with it, because it doesn't appeal to them. So the church gives them what appeals. And so, Paul says, Second Timothy chapter four, verse three, "according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers" – false teachers, teachers who tell them what they want to hear – "and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

This is the picture of much of the postmodern Evangelical mega-church. It is the church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation, chapter three – a church that is

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 4 of 13

“neither hot nor cold” – a church that says, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.” But the Lord Jesus Christ says, Revelation chapter three, verse seventeen, you “do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” You have all the outward trappings of success, but you have nothing inwardly that counts for eternity. The Laodicean church is the church with a superiority complex.

But yet on the other hand, I know that there are many churches – small churches, even struggling churches – that have an inferiority complex. Perhaps that would be a fitting description of some who are listening to me right now. You think that your church is inferior because it is a small church. You think your church is inferior because you don’t have a big building, or maybe you have no building at all. You think your church is inferior because you don’t have a big budget, and a big staff. You think that your church is inferior because you aren’t what the Purpose-Driven church gurus today call a “full-service church”. But what they call a “full-service church” most of the time has little or nothing to do with serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear friends, what I am about to say flies in the face of much of the thinking of the postmodern Evangelical church, but here it is. We find, on the authority of God’s Word, that God is not at all interested in numbers in the way that fallen man, and much of contemporary church leadership, is interested in numbers. We find, on the authority of the Word of God, that this is not the way in which Christ builds His church. In fact, in the pages of the Word of God we find just the

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 5 of 13

opposite. We find that God deals in remnants. Most of the time, God deals in small things.

How do we know this is true? I want to call your attention to a number of passages in Scripture that tell us that this is true, and the first one is in the book of First Corinthians chapter one, beginning at verse twenty-six. First Corinthians chapter one, beginning at verse twenty-six. Let's hear what God's Word tells us about the kinds of things in which the Lord deals:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen [in the original, the small, or lowly, or insignificant things], and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption — that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

The Upper Room Remnant

Now with this in mind, I want to return our attention to the passage that we read from Acts chapter one as we began today. This passage tells us about a remnant. A

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 6 of 13

remnant of 120 people. And actually, this wasn't the original New Testament remnant. The original remnant was eleven men – eleven apostles who spent three years with the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry. But by this time, a very short time after Jesus had ascended to Heaven, the remnant had become over ten times that number – 120 people, gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. That's tenfold growth in a short time. And there was greater growth in numbers soon to come – 3,000 and then 5,000 and then more. But let's put those numbers in their proper, Biblical perspective.

Archaeologists tell us that hundreds of thousands of people, probably a million or more, had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost. But out of all of those, only 120 were in that upper room. Only 120 true believers were obeying Christ's final instructions and waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. And even when 3,000 were converted and added to the church on the Day of Pentecost, it was still a small remnant in terms of that vast number of religiously observant Jews who had been in Jerusalem for the feasts. The three thousand who were converted on the Day of Pentecost were not ten percent. They weren't even five percent. They weren't even one percent. They were about three-tenths of one percent of the total number of people who had gathered in Jerusalem for religious observance.

But notice who was there, in the upper room, as part of the remnant –

Notice verse 13 of Acts chapter one – The remaining eleven of the twelve original apostles were there, and Luke lists them by name.

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 7 of 13

Verse 14 – “The women” were there. No doubt, these were the women that Luke often speaks of in his gospel account, since this is a phrase he also uses in that book. Who were some of these women? There was Mary Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons. There were other women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, and had ministered to Him along the way. And these same women, the gospels tell us, were looking on from a distance as Jesus suffered and died on the cross. They also came and sat opposite the tomb and observed where Jesus had been buried. And early on the first day of the week, some of these same women were the first to come and discover the empty tomb, and to learn from the angel that Christ had risen from the dead.

Throughout His ministry, and even in the providential acts of His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus had given special – and in those days unaccustomed – status to women. Throughout His ministry, He dealt with women with a kindness and a respect and a sympathy that was simply not the way Jewish or Gentile men treated women in that day. And He made it clear that although there is to be male authority in the church, women are not to be spiritual second class citizens. So it is not insignificant that these women were part of the 120 in the upper room.

And Luke names one particular woman. “Mary the mother of Jesus” was part of the remnant. But she doesn’t occupy some elevated status. She is here along with other women as part of this small faithful group – in fact, this is the last we read of Mary by name in the Bible.

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 8 of 13

But this is not the last we hear about Mary. Think about this – according to Acts chapter 2 verses 1 through 5, all of those gathered in the upper room were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. So Mary was one of those. This dear, faithful lady who had been the mother of her own Lord and Savior, and who had endured seeing Him suffer and die, was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke supernaturally in other languages of the wonderful works of God on the Day of Pentecost. And no doubt, she was among those who were in the temple daily after that, praising God and proclaiming Christ. What a glorious and fitting end to the Biblical account of Mary the mother of Jesus.

We also read here that Jesus' brothers were in the upper room – and I want to say more about them in a few moments.

One person, we read in these verses, was not there. Among all of these – the twelve, and then the 120 – none had been lost, except the betrayer, Judas, as Jesus had said in John chapter 17, and as Peter comments here in Acts. And I want to have more to say about Judas in a few moments as well.

Notice what the remnant was doing in the upper room. They were doing what Jesus had told them to do – stay in Jerusalem, and wait, and pray, until the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you receive power from Him to do the work I have called you to do.

A praying, supplicating remnant, a remnant that waits upon the Lord for His resources, is a remnant that receives power from God

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 9 of 13

We Are A Remnant Today

Dear friends, we are a remnant today.

Where are most people on the Lord's Day? They're mowing their lawns. They're out on the golf course. They're going out shopping. They're going to a sporting event. Or, no better and perhaps even worse, they're going to church. What I mean by that is that some of them are going to a church where the Bible is not honored and the Gospel of Christ is not preached. The fact is, they would probably be better off home in bed or out on the golf course, than they are in going to a church like that.

The fact is, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are a minority among a minority. A small minority of our population is in church on the average Sunday morning. But most of that minority consists of people who are in a church service where they are being led astray from the truth. They're actually being inoculated against the truth. We, and others around the world each Lord's Day who gather to worship God in Spirit and in truth and to be faithful to His Word – we are indeed a small remnant on any given Sunday morning.

But what does Christ say to us? He says this, Luke 12:32 – "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 10 of 13

We Can Have Wrong Ideas About God's Remnant

As we consider God's remnant here in Acts chapter one, I'd like to call our attention to two things:

The first thing is this: Sometimes there are those who are numbered among the remnant, by our own estimation, but in the end, like Judas, they prove not to be believers.

Some are like the different kinds of people in the parable of the soils in Matthew chapter 13. They may identify visibly with God's remnant for some period of time, but then they fall away. Some receive the Word with joy, but they only endure for awhile, and then they fall away "when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word." With others, "the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word" – and I think many people in the churches that preach a prosperity gospel today are like that.

Others are real betrayers of God, like Judas. Paul warned the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20 that the time would come when savage wolves would come in among them, even from their own visible number, and they would speak perverse things, and they would seek to draw people away from the truth.

In 2nd Corinthians chapter 11, Paul warned that church of the same thing – he warned against "false apostles, deceitful workers" who adopt the outward

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 11 of 13

appearance of being apostles of Christ, when in fact inwardly they are ministers of Satan.

The Apostle John in his second epistle warned against antichrists who for a time were among the brethren, but, he says, "They went out from us in order that they might be made manifest, that in fact they were not of us."

The dividing line that inevitably differentiates these people from true believers is "the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." In the end, they outright deny Christ, or they insist that it has to be "Christ plus" something else, or God's Word plus something else. They will not abide in the truth.

So that's the first point – that sometimes, in fact often, there are those who are numbered among the remnant, by our own estimation, but who in the end, like Judas, prove not to be believers.

The second thing I want to remind us of is this: God is the One who adds people to His remnant, and it is never too late for God to add someone to His remnant, and who He adds to His remnant may surprise us.

In this account in Acts chapter one we find that Jesus' brothers are here among the 120 – Jesus' brothers who did not believe on Him before He went to the cross, Jesus' brothers who were offended by Christ and His message, Jesus' brothers who were convinced that He was a madman.

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 12 of 13

But now here they are, in the remnant. And of those brothers, one of them, James, would become the leader of the church at Jerusalem and the convener of the council at Jerusalem which dealt with the first seeds of legalism and false gospels in the church.

Another brother of Jesus, Jude, would write that short but powerful epistle of the defense of the faith that comes right before the book of Revelation. And in the first verse of that epistle, he would refer to himself simply as "Jude the servant of Jesus Christ, the brother of James." He didn't insist on any special status simply because Jesus' mother and his mother were the same woman.

We never know who the Lord is going to place within His remnant or how He might use such a person.

The Apostle Paul was another such surprising addition to Christ's remnant. He calls himself "one born out of due time" – a blasphemer of Christ, a zealous hater of the truth, a persecutor of the church, until one day on the road to Damascus, Christ Himself confronted him and brought Paul into the remnant. And no people were more surprised at this, than the Christians themselves. In fact they were afraid of Paul, and Ananias and the others had to be convinced that Paul's conversion was genuine, and God Himself stepped in to do that.

Well as we continue this message on our next program, the Lord willing, I want to tell you about some other unexpected people who became part of God's remnant. One was a man who most people thought was too deep a sinner, too

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "Fear Not, Little Flock" (Acts 1:12-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/15/2011

Page 13 of 13

hopeless a sinner, to ever come to Christ. Another was a woman that everyone thought was saved, but she was not. And then I want to point out some other occasions in the Word of God where the Lord did mighty things through remnants. As Jesus said, we are to fear not, because it is His good pleasure to give His little flock the kingdom – a kingdom that is not a kingdom of this world, but a kingdom of the world to come, a kingdom that will last forever and ever.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to preach the Gospel to the lost, and to equip believers to stand upon and live by the sole authority of God's Word, to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The prayers of our listeners and supporters are vital to this ministry. Thank you for praying for us.

The broadcast is supported entirely by the gifts of God's people. If the Lord leads you to help us, you can do so in any of these ways:

- Call us toll-free at 888-804-9655 to give a gift using your credit card
- Give a gift by credit card at our secure website, www.teachingtheword.org
- Mail your contribution to TTW, Box 2533, Westminster, Maryland 21158

TeachingtheWord Ministries is recognized as a tax-exempt religious organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the U. S. Internal Revenue Code. Your gifts are fully tax deductible.

**May the Lord richly bless your personal study
of His inspired, infallible, inerrant Word.**