

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 4.6.2025

PART 9 - MARKS OF THE NEW COMMUNITY

I. INTRODUCTION

- Our text today is a portrait of life in the early church.
- What characterized and marked this new community that formed after Pentecost is distinct from what some people describe as church.
- What we find in our passage will serve as a mirror reflecting to us what should mark a church of Jesus Christ.
- And we will also find a model that we should, by the grace of God, strive to be as a faithful expression of his church.
- MAIN POINT: A vibrant new community was birthed through the Spirit and the proclamation of the gospel, demonstrating sincere devotion to Jesus's Word, Jesus's people, and Jesus's mission.

Acts 2:42-47

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

II. A DEVOTED CHURCH

- 42 And they devoted themselves...
- These were the 3,000 souls added to the church the day the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost.
- Acts 2:31 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.
- The phenomenal events of Pentecost and the powerful proclamation of the gospel results in the rapid multiplication of the Church.
- We don't know how the early church was organized but what Luke gives us in these six verses is a glimpse into the early life of the believers a short time after Pentecost.
- This is a description of what happened, not a how-to manual.
- We can derive principles from this account, not necessarily methods.
- What Luke provides for us in this summary of the life of the early church is the evidence of the dynamic presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

- They devoted themselves—the word means “steadfast, resolute, fidelity to a course of action.”
- The first mark of the new community that formed after Pentecost was devotion.
- The events of that Day weren’t just an emotional high that quickly waned.
- What marked these first Christians was a fierce devotion.
- Luke gives us a summary of four things they devoted themselves to: the apostles’ teaching, the fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers.

a. DEVOTION TO THE WORD

- 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...
- John Stott, *“The Holy Spirit opened a school in Jerusalem that day; its teachers were the apostles whom Jesus had appointed; and there were 3,000 pupils in kindergarten!”* The Message of Acts
- Consider how this community came into existence through Peter’s Pentecost sermon.
- The new community was birthed by the proclamation of the Word and it continued to be shaped by the Word.
- They were hungry for the teaching of Christ through the apostles.
- Isn’t it remarkable that the attitude was not an abandonment of the Word because now they each had the Holy Spirit.
- There was no anti-intellectualism.
- There was no discarding of human teachers now that they had the Holy Spirit that could teach them all things.
- They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.
- We see that emphasis on the Word and the teaching of sound doctrine in all of the apostolic letters.
- And we have that teaching now in its definitive form in the New Testament.
- We must also devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching as we study and preach and teach from God’s Word.
- The mark of a true church is devotion to God’s Word where its members submit themselves to the teaching and authority of Scriptures.
- You are called to humbly submit yourself to God’s word when it is faithfully taught.
- The Spirit of God leads the people of God to submit to the Word of God.
- Are you devoted to God’s Word?
- Do you humbly submit yourself to God’s Word?

b. DEVOTION TO THE LORD’S SUPPER

- 42 And they devoted themselves to...the breaking of bread...
- This is likely a reference to participation in the Lord’s Supper.
- By all accounts from historians, the early believers gathered for a communal meal in which the Lord’s Supper was a part of that larger meal.
- We see this in Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth where he is correcting some wrong behaviors in their gatherings when it came time to this important element of worship.
- 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.
- They were disrespecting other believers, especially the poor, who would go hungry.

- They were dishonoring the meaning of the Lord's Supper by their lack of reverence for the ordinance of Christ. They were dishonoring the body and blood of Christ.
- These first believers were taught by the apostles about the meal that Christ instituted on the last night he was with his disciples before his crucifixion and death.
- So central was this practice of remembrance that they were devoted to it, in the larger and smaller gatherings of the church—"they broke bread in their homes."
- The Word of God and the meal is central to our worship and unity.
- Don't let this practice become an empty ritual in which you go through the motions every week.
- It is a regular remembrance and rehearsal of the gospel truths about what Christ has accomplished for us.

c. DEVOTION TO PRAYER

- 42 And they devoted themselves to...the prayers.
- Prayer was central to this new community. They devoted themselves to the prayer services of the church.
- They prayed in the temple courts and in the homes, whenever they gathered.
- We see the vibrant prayer life of the new community throughout Acts.
- The apostles were devoted to prayer.
- We find prayer taking place during key events. (1:14, 24; 4:31; 6:4; 8:15; 9:11, 40; 10:2, 9, 30; 11:5; 12:5, 12; 14:23; 16:16, 25; 20:36; 21:5; 27:29; 28:8)
- They devoted themselves to the necessary work of prayer.
- The new community that formed was a praying church.
- It was corporate, not individual, and they expected God to answer their prayers.
- Acts 4, the believers pray for boldness in gospel proclamation in the face of opposition... and they continue to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:24-31)
- A praying church is a powerful church.
- A praying church is a persevering church.
- A praying church is a proclaiming church.
- As often as we are together we should be praying for one another.
- Do you pray with expectancy?
- Devote yourself to praying with and for your church.

d. DEVOTION TO OTHER BELIEVERS

42 And they devoted themselves to...the fellowship...

- We catch a glimpse of the life of the early church in terms of how they lived life in community.
- They were devoted to the fellowship, Greek word (koinōnia). It means: close relationship, or intimate association; communion.
- The root of the word is "common."
- They devoted themselves to the common life of the church. They shared a common way of life.
- As believers what we have in common is our faith in Jesus Christ, our union with Christ.
- We have our common share in God. That is what unites us!
- 1 John 1:3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.
- From our common share in and fellowship with the Father through Christ, we enjoy fellowship with our spiritual brothers and sisters.
- And this wasn't a once a week thing.

- The early Christians shared life together.
- They opened up their lives, their homes, and their hearts to others.
- The practical outworking of deep devotion to other believers was extraordinary radical generosity.

i. RADICAL GENEROSITY

- 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.
- This is echoed in chapter 4
- Acts 4:32-35 32 Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.
- This wasn't a mandate from the apostles.
- The distinguishing mark of this new community of believers was that there was such an overflow of love and sharing in the common life that there was an overwhelming response of generosity.
- They loved in deed not just in word.
- 1 John 3:17-18 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.
- They were willing to part with earthly possessions if it meant a needy brother and sister could be helped.
- Because they were involved in each other's lives they were aware of the needs within the community and they quickly responded to those needs by sharing their possessions.
- Regenerate people should be generous people.
- If Jesus truly changed your heart, if you've experienced the grace of God, giving freely, sacrificially, and generously should not be a problem for you.
- How do you typically respond when a need is made known?
- If you are oblivious to the needs around you and the needs of your church, you don't understand the gospel—you don't understand grace.
- Luke writes that these early Christians had "glad and generous hearts."
- They overflowed with thanksgiving and praise. That's the right attitude and response to grace.
- We also see that the practical outworking of devotion to other believers was that they had sincere relationships.

ii. SINCERE RELATIONSHIPS

- 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes...
- They loved to come together. They loved being around one another, not just one day a week, but day by day.
- They centered their lives around the fellowship and the gathering of the church.
- This wasn't casual, this wasn't only when they had time for other people or they weren't too tired.
- They lived out the shared life every day.

- One of the principles we see so clearly with the formation of this new community, the NT church was not individualistic, it was communal.
 - There is no such thing as private Christianity. Your faith isn't private.
 - What Luke summarizes for us in this passage of the early Christian life is a rebuke of the way we live out our Christian life today.
 - They met at the temple and from house to house.
 - They opened their homes for smaller intimate gatherings.
 - Our homes are to serve as outposts of God's kingdom; places of ministry and mission.
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- It is difficult to forge deep relationships, it takes hard work.
 - To build a strong and healthy community is a lot of hard work, but it is truly the most meaningful thing we can engage in.
 - Our brothers and sisters in Christ are a great encouragement and blessing to us.
 - It is a privilege that we have in Christ, it is a grace of God, never forget that!
 - Being with God's people is not optional—it's commanded by Christ.
 - Half the job of a Christian and church member is showing up! Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some (Hebrews 10:25).
 - You won't find deep, meaningful, sincere relationships if you aren't meeting with God's people.
 - If you are out of fellowship with the church, it is a strong indicator that you are out of fellowship with Jesus. We are not just united to him, we are united to his people.
 - The Spirit of God leads the people of God to love and be with the people of God.
 - Are you building deep relationships with others in our church?
 - Are you complaining about your lack of experiencing community?
 - Show up, devote yourself to the fellowship, be faithful in our large and small gatherings.

III. AN ATTRACTIVE CHURCH

- The things that were happening inside of the new community was having an impact on those who were outside, observing their way of life.
 - V43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.
 - V47a ... and having favor with all the people...
 - People outside were witnessing something truly remarkable as a result of the devotion of the believers.
 - There was awe as signs and wonders were being done through the apostles as authentication of their unique status as Christ's Spirit-empowered witnesses.
 - And favor with all the people. They didn't immediately join the new community, but they found the community highly attractive and compelling for all the right reasons.
 - Acts 5:13 None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem.
 - They were witnessing something truly special.
 - They looked at the people of God that formed this new community and they saw unity, peace, joy, caring, and life.
 - Isn't that what people all around us are looking for?
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- They were not shy about inviting others to be part of their newfound way of life by proclaiming the good news to them.
 - Notice the effect of this devoted and attractive church.
 - And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

- Jesus is building his church through the faithful witness of his vibrant and devoted new community.
- They were boldly and compassionately proclaiming the gospel and the Lord was working mightily through their steadfast witness.
- The church in Acts was not perfect, but it was a church devoted to the right things.
- May these marks define us as a church.
- Would you devote yourself to the very things we see that marked this new community?
- Would God in his grace enable us to devote ourselves to His Word, to loving unity in fellowship that manifests in radical service and generosity to one another, to fervent, expectant, and dependent Spirit-led prayer, and to faithful gospel witness.
- May we be attractive to outsiders for all the right reasons.
- And may God add to our numbers those whom he is saving by his grace and for his glory.

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?