

A Holy Spirit Directed, Thriving Church!

Text: Acts 2:37-47

Introduction:

Having explained the phenomenons that have taken place, showing their fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and their irrefutable connection to the crucified, risen and ascended Christ, Peter brings the reality right home to the hearts and consciences of his listeners, declaring that, God has made the very Jesus, whom they had unlawfully crucified, both Lord and Christ. Indeed, the present pouring out of the Holy Spirit, was the very work of the risen and ascended Christ!

And so, the people are cut to the heart; they are pinned down in their guilt and shame, with no place else to turn, leading them to respond, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter then charges them to repent and to be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of their sins. God would yet, graciously cleanse and forgive them, by the very atonement of the Christ, whom they had unjustly crucified, and thereby freely give them the gift of the Holy Spirit, who was here poured out on His people. And this wonderful promise of forgiveness and grace, was not only for them, but for all who likewise repent and believe. For, as Joel had stated beforehand, "Whoever calls upon the Name of the Lord, shall be saved!"

And following this great charge, we are told in verse 49, that Peter, "with many other words [unrecorded] testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.'" While we don't know the precise content of Peter's additional teaching, we do know, in a general sense, that he unravelled the reality of the present, perverse generation, and the deception within which they were enshrouded, charging his listeners to be saved from it. He opened up and exposed the terrible deception of the times, so that they might, by the grace of God in Christ, seek to be freed from its hell-bound grip!

II. The Blessed Outcome

And what is the blessed outcome of the Spirit's work, through His disciples and Apostles, here? In verse 41, we find that there were some, in fact, about three thousand souls, who received the Word gladly; who believed and were baptized into Christ's church! God had called about three thousand souls into His kingdom, who

(1) were baptized into His church! Indeed, a glorious harvest had come; a glorious harvest had been raised up from spiritual death, to be added to the first fruits of Christ! And this three thousand is representative of the gathering in of all the elect, from all future generations, right up to our own day, and until Christ should return, to put the sickle in, unto the reaping of His full and completed harvest!

III. A Holy Spirit Directed, Thriving Church

And brethren, as we continue on, for the remainder of this chapter, I want you to take special notice of all that happens here. For, here we have "life in the church," when the church was at its best. Here, we have the great pattern of church life, laid down for us, in the most simple and general of terms. Here, we have the pattern for a "Holy Spirit Directed, Thriving Church," laid out for us, right at the birth and foundation of the church, and we ought to take special note of it, especially as we consider our own, present life *in* and commitment *to* Christ's church.

There are three main things that I want you to see here: The life and ministry of the church, the heart of the church, and the growth of the church.

1) The life and ministry of the church

“They continued *steadfastly* in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” The church placed the greatest value on these four God-ordained aspects of Christian ministry. They continued steadfastly in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God (the Apostle’s doctrine). Their hearts were eager to hear, absorb, honor and obey the truth of God taught from His Word. They were anxious to understand and keep whatsoever the Lord Jesus Christ has commanded His church, taught by the apostles and later penned in the Holy Scriptures (anticipating the passing away of the apostolic ministry).

They continued steadfastly in fellowship. Their sweet times of mutual edification and fellowship with their brethren filled a good portion of their lives. In such a state of genuine religious excitement and zeal, it was not only not a burden to be with the people of God more than once on a Sunday, but they further continued to meet *daily* with one accord in the temple and from house to house. They wanted to be with each other because they loved Christ and therefore they loved His people, those who shared that common interest in Christ. (2)

They continued steadfastly in their celebration of the Lord's Supper, proclaiming the death of Christ together, until His return, and anticipating the glorious Day of feasting that will take place in heaven at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

And they continued steadfastly in prayers. There was a genuine, fervent commitment for the people to regularly (probably even daily in their case) meet together to pray about those things that were related to the interests of God. Upon these four pillars, rested the primary ministry and life of the church. Such an awesome display of unified, religious commitment (with many being added to the church daily) combined with the miraculous signs and wonders of the apostles (used to confirm their doctrine and establish the early church in its infant stage) brought fear to those who beheld the glory of all that was happening. Something evidently divine was taking place and this unsettled people.

2) The heart of the church

“All who believed were together and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (v. 44&45). The people were together not only in body, but also in soul, heart and purpose. The Gospel of Christ did something to the souls of these people, which could never be attained or even comprehended by the unregenerate. Their whole life focus had changed. There was a great diversion; a great shift of attention and focus away from the things of the world and toward the Kingdom of God and His Christ! They found the Pearl of Great price and went and sold everything else they had to obtain it! Through the power of the Gospel, their minds, which were once trapped within the sphere of the world (materialism, wealth, power, prestige, selfishness, entertainment, leisure...etc) had now broken free, entering the new world of Christ's glory!

Their land, which was once the pride and joy of the Jewish nation was now being sold, anticipating the coming judgment upon the nation and looking forward to the glorious city whose Maker and Builder is God...and the proceeds were used to help supply the immediate needs of the needy. Their values had changed. This world was now a temporary rest stop ushering them toward glory. There was no sense digging their heels in and remaining settled here; something far more glorious was in view! They greatly anticipated glory, leading them to freely part with any and all possessions according to the common need of the people. Taking their eyes off of themselves and fixing their eyes on Christ, they could now shift their focus toward

(3) loving, serving, edifying and supporting one another...a miraculous testimony of grace and divine intervention, and a key element of any true revival.

They continued “daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all people” (v. 46&47a). Spiritual things; the interests of Christ, were not simply *a part* of their lives; they were the very substance and foundation of their lives. The new birth was not simply a theological term for them. It defined their experience in truth. Radical, dramatic change had taken place; the life of God was in the soul of the church, evidenced by the way in which they conducted themselves *daily*.

They were together with one accord; the same heart, mind, soul, focus and priorities, driven for the glory of their blessed Savior. Their place of meeting, at this point, was in the temple. There they stood out as followers of Christ, gathering together to worship God *daily*. And it wasn't a matter of obligation; it wasn't a matter of church covenants and forced commitments...this was what they wanted to do! And they ate together from house to house; brethren gathered with brethren, and over a meal, they celebrated their common union in Christ, fellowshiping together, working their way toward glory, edifying and building each other up in their most holy faith. They didn't have a lot of money. What possessions they had, they gladly dispersed according to the needs of others. They were not popular in the world's eyes. The road to success in this world was very dismal from every outward standpoint. But yet, they were full of gladness and joy! Why? Because whatever the case might be in this world, their paths, through Christ, all merged to glory! They were content to know that heaven was theirs and the reality of eternity overshadowed the reality of this world. They ate together with gladness and simplicity of heart! They were just thrilled to be forgiven for all of their sins, to have a genuine relationship with their Creator and to know that they were in union with Christ! It wasn't church in the midst of a busy life. It was life in the midst of a glorious, thriving church!

And they praised God together! They gave thanks to God in prayer. They expressed gratefulness to God in their conversation with one another and with anyone else who crossed their paths. Christianity was real to them! It was authentic! They really believed that they were the objects of divine love and that a God-Man; a glorious Savior actually came and died for them, granting them eternal forgiveness (4)

and everlasting life! The truth invaded their lives and swept them off of their feet and they could not help but praise God together *daily*. [Note additional signs & wonders]

3) The growth of the church

Their lives were so changed by these realities, that people on the outside saw a difference in them. Holiness, godliness, integrity, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control began to spill out of them toward each other and toward mankind in general. And they gained “favor with all the people” (v. 47b) because of this. Christ was in their hearts, on their lips, affecting their actions and governing their thoughts, such that people on the outside could look at them and see a divine imprint upon their lives that was supernatural. They stood out as lights in the world!

Consider Matthew Henry’s comments on some of these verses, especially with respect to the “togetherness” of the people:

“They kept up the *communion of saints*. They continued *in fellowship* (v. 42), and *continued daily with one accord in the temple*, v. 46. They not only had a mutual affection to each other, but a great deal of mutual conversation with each other; they were much together. When they withdrew from *the untoward* generation, they did not turn hermits, but were very intimate with one another, and took all occasions to meet; wherever you saw one disciple, you would see more, like *birds of a feather*. See how these Christians love one another. They were concerned for one another, sympathized with one another, and heartily espoused one another’s interests. They had fellowship with one another in religious worship. They met *in the temple*: there was their rendezvous; for joint-fellowship with God is the best fellowship we can have with one another, 1 Jn. 1:3. Observe, (1.) They were daily in the temple, not only on the days of the sabbaths and solemn feasts, but on other days, every day. Worshipping God is to be our daily work, and, where there is opportunity, the oftener it is done publicly the better. God loves the gates of Zion, and so must we.”

And consider his further comments regarding their focus:

“But it was a very commendable instance of their raisedness above the world, their contempt of it, their assurance of another world, their love to their brethren, their compassion to the poor, and their great zeal for the encouraging of Christianity, and the nursing of it in its infancy.”

And it is within this setting; it is through the example and context of this church life, that we are told, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” As the church was evidently consumed with Christ and excited about spiritual things, evidenced in their turning away from the world and their love for one another, God continued to add to their number. God used the witness of a stirred up church, a church consumed with Christ, to lure other lost, dead, immortal, hell-bound souls into His Kingdom. The thriving, vibrant life of the church on fire for Christ, making worldly issues at best secondary, is a cauldron of divine power used to lure

(5) blind, lost, dead souls into the love of Christ. When such an excitement exists, brethren, the view of worship changes, the conversation changes, the actions change, and people see the life of God; people lost in a life of frivolous nothingness and a vat of emptiness see living hope and fulfillment magnified in a living church. And they want what we have! They want the type of hope and fulfillment that brings people through economic break downs, through trying times and to the place where the reality of death is not feared...and that is only found in the Gospel of Christ!

Conclusive Thoughts- A Note on *True Revival*

Sadly, many pray for revival with the hope that God would miraculously bring about mass conversions as if “mass conversions” define the true nature of revival. Certainly, conversions take place during a time of revival (and often times many), but something far greater takes place, patterned in the life of the early church, which defines the true nature of revival as to its entirety. There is a starting point to revival, which in turn leads to an evangelical explosion that often times brings about the conversion of many souls. What is that starting point?

Brethren, revival, rather than beginning with the conversion of the lost, actually begins when God takes the divine defibrillators of His grace and shocks the stagnate, sleeping, complacent church into a state of lively excitement and joy for the things of God! Revival begins when Christ is the center of the church’s interests, desires, affections and joys, and when the world takes the back seat. Revival begins when the modern church reverts back to the biblical pattern given in the early church, when God was adding great numbers to the church daily. Revival begins when the simplicity of rejoicing in our salvation overshadows and flushes out the pull of the world and all of its trinkets, bringing everything into proper perspective. Revival begins when the holiness of God is genuinely adored from the heart, and sin, rather than being considered a light matter, is seen for what it truly is, a great enemy of the blessed, holy Savior whom we love in truth, and who has given His life to free us not only from the penalty of sin but also from its corruption and power. Revival begins in the church! Less the miracles, brethren, if we, as a church, don’t look like the early church; if the heart of that which is written here in our text is not at the core of this church, then we have no reason to anticipate great scores of souls being converted and added to this church. Generally, when God brings about mass conversions; when great numbers are rescued from the grasp of hell and brought into the Kingdom of (6)

Christ, God prepares a lively, thriving church within which He can deposit these converted souls.

AMEN!!!

(7)