

The Commencement of the Church ~ Part III

The Church Begins

(Acts 2:41-47)

Introduction:

1. On the heels of one of the most compelling sermons ever preached we witness the fruit of that labor for we are told that 3000 people believed that day, were baptized and added to the church!
 - We need to remember that a key purpose of preaching Truth is to persuade unbelievers to face the reality of their spiritual condition.
 - 1) A life without faith in Christ is void of any hope of spending eternity with God.
 - 2) Thus a life without faith in Christ is a life without the indwelling Holy Spirit and results in a life with no real purpose.
 - For those of us who are believers should always be seeking to persuade those who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and tell them: “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”
2. Peter in all his boldness declared the Truth in his sermon that day and because he did 3000 lives were changed and now headed in a new direction.
3. In the following verses we will see what took place in the days following Peter’s sermon.

How They Functioned as a Church

1. The first and most important thing to note is that in this text they were called **“believers”**; identified as; **“those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added some three thousand souls”**.
 - They were “confessors” of Christ, and were baptized which provided a common bond between them.
 - All of this shows that their faith was genuine because they continued in the same manner.
 - 1) This would have been consistent with the teaching of Jesus for He said; “If you abide in My word then you are truly disciples of mine...” (John 15:1-4)
 - 2) We need to remember that this was the church at its inception and perhaps most purest form. Not too far into the future there will be a “falling away” of those who were not committed for the Apostle John will later write these words; **“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us”** (I John 2:19)
 - Should the church be made up of saved individuals? (II Corinthians 6:14-15, I Thessalonians 1:1-10, Revelation 2:14-16)
 - 1) I think if we stay in the text and follow this early model; the conclusions are self evident that “believers” made up the fellowship (the church – called out ones) mentioned here in Acts 2:41-47.
 - 2) There is a clear action of “devoting themselves” which indicates unity in one common bond and purpose.

2. A second thing to note is they were committed to the _____
_____ which shows a purpose for their gathering together.

- “Teaching is foundational to the growth and health of every church” (John MacArthur; Commentary on Acts, page 83)
- Throughout the early days of the church we see countless passages that support that one of the primary functions of the church was preaching and teaching. (I Timothy 4:6, 11, 13, 16, II Timothy 4:1-2)
 - 1) Another great quote from John MacArthur; The church cannot operate on truth it is not taught, believers cannot function on principles they have not learned” (John MacArthur’s Commentary on Acts, page 83)
 - 2) A good warning to heed is what is recorded in Hosea 4:6; “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”.

4. Another function that the early church followed was they _____ together.

- What does fellowship mean (no it’s not eating donuts together)? Check out these verses to see if it helps – Romans 12:10, 16, 13:8, 14:19, 15:5, 7, 14, 16:16, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 4:2, 25, 32, 5:21, Philippians 2:3, Colossians 3:9, 13, 16, I Thessalonians 4:9, 18, 5:11, 13, Hebrews 3:13, I Peter 1:22, 4:9, 10, 5:5)
- Gathering together is really not optional for it is the means by which we grow together. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

5. Another function of the church was that their focus was on _____ in that they broke bread together in the same manner that Jesus taught them at the Lord's Supper. (Matthew 26:26-30)
- Is this an optional practice for the church? (I Corinthians 11:24-29)
 - What is the intended purpose of communion? (I Corinthians 10:16-17, Ephesians 1:1-5, I Corinthians 11:24-29)
6. Another function of the church is they were committed to _____
- The early disciples relentlessly pursued this method of communication with God for they no longer had the luxury of seeing Jesus face to face....thus Jesus' words; "whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it" were extremely comforting to them. (John 14:13-14)
 - In my estimation they took their call to prayer very serious and modeled that for those who would come after them. (Luke 18:1, Ephesians 6:11, Romans 12:12, Colossians 4:12)
 - Is prayer a neglected practice in the church today?

How They Lived as Christians (Acts 2:43-47a)

1. They lived a life of “awe” or reverence toward the Lord
 - How would you define the phrase; “Everyone kept feeling a sense of “awe” (*phobos*)? (Check out these passages and see if it helps in defining this phrase – Acts 5:5, 11, 19:17)
 - When people live like this (in awe of the Lord); what are the probable results as far as their spiritual lives are concerned?
 - When we live like this (in awe of the Lord); what kind of impact can this have on an unbeliever? (I Corinthians 14:24,25)
2. They recognized that the miracles, wonders, and signs to be from God and those things solidified in their minds that what was transpiring before their eyes was ordained by God.....thus they continued to be obedient to what was being taught.
 - What was the purpose in the apostles doing miracles, wonders, and signs?
 - Are miracles, wonders, and signs still going on today?

3. All of this “spiritual activity” produced some very important attributes or lifestyles that became a model that many believers within the church throughout history would follow.....even today we still see these attributes modeled:

- They were _____ which was evidenced by the fact that those who believed were together.
 - 1) The practice of “oneness” within the church is so vital to its health and well being.
 - 2) Having unity is best accomplished by the absence of strife and division.
 - 3) The absence of strife and division is best accomplished when we have “**all things in common**”. When there is purpose and direction then strife and division (among believers) are non existent.
- They shared their possessions with one another
 - 1) This act of “selling their possessions” may have been based on their expectation of the soon return of Christ for the practice was not continued or duplicated in the same fashion as the church continued to grow.
 - 2) Because it was a voluntary practice and therefore not required makes the situation all the more interesting and noteworthy.
 - 3) What usually transpires when we as individuals or a corporate church body give of our possessions to others in need?

- They maintained their active witness within their unbelieving community
 - 1) One of the best places in their day to reach lost people was in the temple (this being the Jewish temple) for that was often the gathering point of the Jews for prayer. Even today Orthodox Jews continue to go to the Western Wall (referred by many as the “Wailing Wall”) and offer their prayers to God. They had every right to go there and it was a natural place to find those who were seeking God!
 - 2) What are some of the places that we have access to in which we can share the Word of God with lost people who might be searching for God?
- They used their homes as a source or means of doing the Lord’s work:
 - 1) They broke bread together which followed the model displayed by Jesus at the Lord’s Supper and is the same practice of “communion” that we partake in today.
 - 2) All indications seem to point to their homes (they went from house to house) being the place where they accomplished their spiritual disciplines and duties (i.e. teaching, praying, giving, fellowshiping, communion etc.).
 - 3) The Apostle Peter will later write these words; “Be hospitable to one another without complaint” (I Peter 4:9) and the Apostle John will claim; “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whosoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children let us not love with word or with tongue but in deed or truth. (I John 3:16-18)

- They experienced and displayed true joy (Acts 2:46-47a)
 - 1) My personal feeling is that when our focus is on God first, then others and lastly on ourselves (**J**esus first, **O**thers second, **Y**ou last) then the result is a healthy church! Notice the acronym **JOY**.....it's kind of an old saying and has probably been forgotten but it works!
 - 2) When we are sincere in our worship (living as devoted followers of Christ) then the most natural result is that God is praised! When God is praised we experience **JOY!** (Philippians 2:1-2)
 - 3) Questions/Comments:

How They Impacted the World

1. They moved about the community in which they lived (one of which was going to the temple) and other people (unbelievers) were able to witness their testimony of a changed or transformed life.
 - By living out a life of love for one another, other people were able to recognize they were disciples of Jesus (John 13:35). Their outward actions were lived out in such a way that others recognized the change in their life.
 - Their desire to live in unity provided a different model than that of the Pharisees and Sadducees who were always at odds with one another. This is a good lesson for us to always strive toward unity for the world has enough strife of its own. (John 17:21)

2. We will come to understand that as the church develops they will impact their world by modeling several key disciplines (Summary taken from the Second Century Apologist called Aristides; *The Apology of Aristides*, translated by Rendel Harris [London, Cambridge 1893]):
- They _____ what they _____
 - Their _____ standards will equal or exceed the requirements of the Law.
 - Their _____ for one another is exemplified by the term they called themselves – brethren.
 - They refused to _____ and will not worship strange gods.
 - They were willing to _____ and _____ with one another even if it costs them personally.
 - “If they find poverty in their midst, and they do not have spare food, they fast two or three days in order that the needy might be supplied with the necessities”.
 - “They observe scrupulously the commandments of their Messiah, living honestly and soberly as the Lord their God ordered them.”
 - “Every morning and every hour they praise and thank God for His goodness to them, and for their food and drink they offer thanksgiving.”
 - “If any righteous person of their number passes away from the world, they rejoice and thank God, and escort his body as if it were setting out from one place to another nearby. When a child is born to one of them, they praise God. If he dies in infancy, they thank God the more, as for one who has passed through this world without sins. But if one of them dies in his iniquities or his sins, they grieve bitterly and sorrow over one who is about to meet his doom.”

3. All of this “living out of a disciplined life” resulted in many coming to faith in Christ and those people were added to the church.
- This is how they impacted the world and turned it upside down for Christ!
 - “This brief glimpse of the first fellowship gives valuable insight into what makes a healthy, growing church worthy of the name. The proper devotion to the duties of the Spirit produces the proper character, which in turn produces a powerful and saving impact on sinners” (John MacArthur; Commentary on Acts, page 92)

Questions/Comments: