

ACTS

Part 6 – “An Ordinary Church”

Acts 2:42-47

Central Theme: Through the Holy Spirit the risen Jesus births a new community fulfilling all that was promised in Israel: a people devoted to God’s Word, God’s worship, and God’s people.

- In verse 41 Luke writes that on Pentecost, in response to Peter’s sermon, there were some 3,000 people who repented and believed in Jesus. This would have presented tremendous logistical challenges as many of those numbered among the converts were not inhabitants of Jerusalem but visiting from foreign lands. The description of the church which follows is not meant to present a scrubbed version of reality. Rather it is an accurate, albeit brief portrait of the extraordinary work of the Spirit to create God’s multi-national people: what Paul would call “the Israel of God” or the church (Galatians; Romans 9).
- Luke presents us with a brief portrait of the first church in rather idyllic terms. However Luke is not whitewashing the truth. In short order we will see that this church is just as flawed as any other. What we read in 2:42-47 is the portrait of a church in its infancy being extraordinarily blessed by God. What is more the practices of this blessed and healthy church are remarkable for their ordinariness. Certainly the apostles were performing miraculous signs as further evidence that what was happening was a significant turning point in redemptive history. But everything else is ordinary.

1. The Devotion of the Ordinary Church

A) They were devoted to God’s Word.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...”

- The apostle’s teaching (*didache*) was their instruction from the Scriptures. We have the apostle’s teaching in what we know as the New Testament. This devotion to God’s Word is essential to the very existence of the church. Therefore preaching and teaching was central to the role of the apostles as it is for pastors in our day.

B) They were devoted to God’s worship.

“...to the breaking of bread and the prayers”

- The clause “to the breaking of bread” is most likely a reference to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. In verse 46 “breaking bread” is mentioned in reference to table fellowship in homes. The use of the definite article in verse 42 and its connection with “the prayers” is evidence that Luke is referring to the church’s worship. In his first epistle, Peter writes that Christians ought to desire the “pure milk of the Word” so that they may “grow up to salvation” (1 Pet 2:2).
- As we trace the apostolic preaching throughout the book of Acts we learn that they focus on the person and work of Jesus. This same emphasis is seen in the epistles. The emphasis is not on Jesus as good teacher or moral exemplar but as the Christ, crucified, risen, and reigning.
- Paul’s moving farewell to the Ephesian elders following two years of ministry reminded them that he did not shrink back from teaching to them the whole counsel of God’s Word.

“And day by day, attending the temple together...” (V. 46)

- These first Christians were Jews. Just as with Jesus, it was their custom to gather in the temple.

C) They were devoted to God's people.

There are two expressions of the devotion these early Christians had for one another: 1) Their fellowship and 2) Their sacrifice.

i. Their fellowship

"...and the fellowship"

- Fellowship (*koinonia*) has a broad application. It captures those things that we typically associate with close relationships.

"And all who believed were together and had all things in common" (V. 44).

- Notice that their fellowship is predicated upon their common belief. This suggests that the sort of fellowship experienced in this first church was grounded in a commonly held doctrine.
- Their fellowship was characterized by being "together" and having "all things in common." This sort of unity is not easily won.

"...and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts..." (V. 46).

- How does such a large church experience fellowship? Regularly gathering in homes is essential for genuine fellowship. To this day a healthy church will make a priority of this practice to gather in smaller groups.

ii. Their sacrifice

"And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need" (V. 45).

- The extraordinary circumstances of at least 3,000 people now making up a new community called for a common willingness to give sacrificially. And while our circumstances differ greatly, the responsibility to give freely and sacrificially to one another through the church still remains.

2. The Fruit of the Ordinary Church

"...and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (V. 47).

A) A good reputation

There were times when Jesus enjoyed the favor of the crowds. Certainly this was not always the case. In the same way the church in Jerusalem in the early days following Pentecost was experiencing "favor with all the people." Of course the church will not always enjoy the favor of those outside of Christ. Ultimately this is under the sovereign hand of God. Throughout its history Israel enjoyed times of favor from the surrounding nations and times of persecution. The same is true for the church. However, the broader principle is that of reputation. The church should never legitimately be accused of wrong.

B) The gospel goes forth in power

In this first church it pleased the Lord, for a time, to add to their number daily those who were being saved. Clearly this is not a promise for all churches throughout all time. The point is that the gospel was, by God's grace, being heard through this church. Sometimes the gospel is received with gratitude. Other times it is rejected as a fragrance of death (2 Cor 2:14-17). Either way, God is at work through mercy or judgment. Whenever a church has the privilege of seeing sinners come to faith in Christ it is due to God's grace.