



Temple Baptist Church
Wilmington, North Carolina
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The Lord's Day, April 22, 2018

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Easter People
Acts 4:32-35

Happy Easter!

“But that was three weeks ago,” you say.

But in the Christian Year, Easter *begins* with Easter Sunday. It's not one day and then we're done with Easter until next year. Not at all! Easter is *a seven-week season* that continues until Pentecost—a great fifty-day period (as the Jews counted days) during which we remember that Jesus kept appearing to His people over a period of forty days following His resurrection, then ascended to the Father after giving His followers instructions to wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. That power from on high comes, of course, from the Holy Spirit, as God poured out His Spirit in a new way on the church on that first Pentecost following Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. And what were His people doing during those ten days between His ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost? According to Acts 1, they were praying and getting things in order!

All that being said, in our worship during this Eastertide, as we did last year, we're exploring some of what the resurrection of Jesus means for us in our life together as His people, the church.

The church in Jerusalem

This morning I want us to focus on Acts 4:32-35, as we think together about what it means to be *Easter People*. That's who we are as Christians, isn't it? That's how we're to live as the church of Jesus Christ, isn't it?

Now the book of Acts is the second volume of Luke's two-part work that included his Gospel account. Luke has done what ancient biographers sometimes did—write one volume about the subject of the biography to show what kind of person he was and what he did, and a second about the subject's followers to show how they became like their leader and did the same kinds of things he did.

In Acts 3, Peter and John had healed a man who was lame from birth and was begging at the temple gate as they were going to the temple at the hour of prayer. This healing, of course, amazed the people and drew a crowd. So Peter took advantage of the opportunity and preached to them about Jesus and His resurrection. This led to Peter and John's arrest by the temple authorities and an appearance before the Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin—the same group that had condemned Jesus to death just a few months earlier. Their defense was to preach Jesus and His resurrection to the Sanhedrin as well! It was obvious by the presence of the man that his healing was a miracle, so they threatened Peter and John, and ordered them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus anymore. Peter and John responded by saying, “. . . **we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard**” (Acts 4:20).¹

After their release, Peter and John returned to the church and told what had happened. The

church entered into a fervent prayer for boldness to bear witness and for God to confirm that witness through signs and wonders performed in Jesus' name (Acts 4:23-30). Luke says that

. . . when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness (4:31).

Then we read in our text . . .

³² Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

This is one of several summary statements that Luke gives throughout the book of Acts. These statements summarized what God was doing and how His people were responding at that point in the story. This summary focuses on the characteristics of the church in Jerusalem.

What should a church be like?

Now it's important for us to get a sense of what the early church was like. And here in Acts, we have a description of the Jerusalem congregation very early in its life. Beginning in chapter 5, Luke will show us some of the internal difficulties and problems that the church in Jerusalem faced, but with this summary, he's giving us the strengths it demonstrated.

That being the case, this text gives us a sense of what a healthy local congregation of Easter people looks like. And we need that precisely because there are so many distorted views of the church around us today.

In a sermon, a minister named Colin Smith talked about four distorted images of the church.

He said that some view "the church as a *gas station*. For some people today, the church is a place where you fill up your spiritual gas tank when you're running low. Get a good sermon, and it will keep you going for the week."

He then pointed out how some see "the church as a *movie theater*. For many people, the church is a place that offers entertainment. Go for an hour of escape, hopefully in comfortable seats. Leave your problems at the door and come out smiling and feeling better than when you went in."

Then others view "the church as a *drug store*." For them, "church is the place where you can fill the prescription that will deal with your pain. For many the church is therapeutic."

And still others see "the church as a *big box retailer*." They think of "the church as the place that offers the best products in a clean and safe environment for you and your family. The church offers great service at a low price—all in one stop. For many people, the church is a producer of programs for children and young people."²

The point is that none of these understandings of the church line up with what we see in the New Testament!

Look at what the text says. **“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul . . .”** Their unity was a unity of the heart and soul, a unity that comes from a common belief in the risen Lord Jesus and a real participation in His resurrection life in anticipation of their own resurrection at the last day and the re-creation of the heavens and the earth. This unity of fellowship was so deep that they were willing to share whatever they had so that no one in the church would be in need. They were participating in the new creation that had begun with Christ’s resurrection, living in a very different way than the world around them. Rather than greedily guarding their possessions, they were willing to sell some of them to meet the needs of their fellow-disciples of Jesus.

Luke’s summary statement emphasizes this amazing unity and fellowship among this particular community of Jesus’ disciples. It reflected both Jewish and Greco-Roman ideals of friendship,³ but this was a depth of friendship that can only be found in the fellowship of the church, a fellowship that’s rooted in and participates in the life of the resurrected Lord Jesus—a way of life that is *counter-cultural*. In the text, the bold, powerful witness to Jesus’ resurrection is surrounded by this account of incredible fellowship—a fellowship in which because they shared their lives in Christ, they were willing to share their possessions with one another. They were living as people for whom Easter made a difference!

So Luke tells us in this passage that *living in light of Jesus’ resurrection, the Jerusalem church demonstrated unity, a powerful witness, and care for those in need.*

Living as Easter people

So what is the significance of this text for us here at Temple Baptist Church nearly 2000 years after Jesus rose from the dead? As followers of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, we are *Easter people*. And *as Easter people, we must live our life together in light of Jesus’ resurrection!*

So what does that look like?

Well, *as Easter people we’re to be united in our faith in Christ*. We may not agree on every point or detail, but we’re to be united in our faith in Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord. Because we are in Him, we belong to one another, and are to be **of one heart and one soul!**

It follows, then, that *Easter people are committed to the community of faith*. We’re to be committed to our life together in Christ, to our common call to be on mission with Christ in the world, and to share our life together in Christ. We’re to stick with each other through thick and thin as we **bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ** (Galatians 6:2). We will **rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep** (Romans 12:15). We must understand that the Spirit places the members in the body according to God’s will, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 12:18, and that though He sometimes moves members to other local expressions of the body of Christ, His intention is that such moves be in obedience to His will and done in peace and with integrity.

Apparently the problem of people leaving one church for another because of some kind of problem isn’t new. One fourth century Christian leader wrote:

If a trial [with other people] comes upon you in the place where you live, do not leave that place when the trial comes. Wherever you go, you will find that what you are running from is ahead of you. So stay until the trial is over, so that if you end up leaving, no offense will be caused, and you will not bring distress to others who live in the same neighborhood.⁴

When it comes to the church's witness to the world, *Easter people must proclaim the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power and great grace.* The power the Jerusalem church experienced in their witness and their incredible fellowship was in answer to their prayer for the Spirit's power in the preceding passage. When we are genuine and fervent in our prayers, we'll be powerful and grace-filled in our witness as we share the good news that in Jesus, God has come to earth and has conquered Satan, sin, and death. He has made Jesus **both Lord and Christ** (Acts 2:36), giving Him all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). In Him dwells all the fullness of God (Colossians 1:19). Because He is Lord, people of all nations are summoned to surrender their lives to Him, seek His forgiveness, trust Him to forgive their sins and make them new just as He will one day make all things new, and bow to and serve Him as *Lord* of all creation! We tell this good news that Jesus died and has risen, and call people to follow Him and live under His reign.

Finally, *Easter people care for those among them who are in need.* It is indeed a beautiful picture that Luke gives here—and one that makes us uncomfortable in our American culture. Easter people take care of their own. Possessions are not as important as brothers and sisters in Christ, and can be sacrificed to be sure that their needs are met. Because we share our life in Christ, we share our possessions with our fellow-disciples.

Unity, commitment, powerful witness, generous care for one another—these are what we're to do as we live together in light of Jesus' resurrection as *Easter people!*
How are we doing?

†MEG

¹ Scripture taken from the New King James Version.

² Colin Smith, from the sermon "[The Church: Sharing the Passion of Jesus.](http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/november/6112811.html)" cited at <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/november/6112811.html>, accessed 4/9/2015.

³ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 62-64.

⁴ Jonathon Wilson-Hartgrove, [The Wisdom of Stability](http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/august/5082911.html) (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), 82-83, 149; cited at <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/august/5082911.html>, accessed 4/9/2015.