

Markings
Acts 2:40-47
February 17, 2008
FBC Waynesboro

How serious are we about being the kind of church that the Bible describes? Our elders and deacons are taking this issue seriously. We are reading and studying together a marvelous book written by Mark Dever who serves as the pastor of the Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. Dever is serious about the church being what the Bible declares it to be. He went to this church in D.C. when it was close to closing its doors. Sitting in the shadow of our nation's capitol with little room for parking cars or building buildings, there seemed to be no hope. But this man came to this church with a mission. He asked only one thing of the people who called him: the blessing of the church to begin to restructure from the ground up based solely upon what the Bible says a church should be. Tough times, yes. Loss of people, you bet. But a decade later, Dever leads a thriving church with over 500 members and nearly a thousand in weekly attendance in a place where the church growth pundits said that it was impossible to grow a church. And the only manual he has ever used is the Word of God and particularly what is proclaimed in the early chapters of the Book of Acts.

We have come today to a passage in Acts toward which everything from chapter one verse one has been pointing. The scholars call this passage a summary sentence. It is the first of several that are found in the opening chapters of the Book of Acts. They serve the purpose of gathering the various threads of the narrative to give focus to what has been building to this point. So in this first summary sentence we have set before us chief characteristics of a biblically based church and the inevitable outcomes when such a church is in place. There are three characteristics and three outcomes.

First, a biblically based, Word of God grounded church consists of born again blood bought believers who have been saved by the grace of God and are clearly being sanctified or made holy by the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, He came in mighty fullness then. And the result of His coming was the birth of the church: believers born again by the Spirit of God who are now baptized in that same Spirit. They are saved and the evidence of their salvation is expressed in the work of the Holy Spirit in and through their lives so that as the people of God they gather and scatter. They gather to give glory to God in worship and they scatter to give the Gospel to the world in witness.

If you were to trace the history of Baptists in their movement from England to America you would find that Baptists in those early days were identified by three primary characteristics. They believed firmly in religious liberty: the government existed in part to protect the church so that the church could proclaim the Gospel in the world; the government in no form of fashion should interfere with the affairs of the church in any way. They believed firmly in reaching the world with the Gospel. They wanted to see the world come under the Word of God. But the foundation upon which everything else was based was their belief in a regenerate church membership which required that membership being taken seriously and that discipline be exercised biblically. They understood that the power of the Spirit of God for the work of God through the church of God demanded that membership in the body of Christ not be mocked by making and keeping as members those who by choice were not actively involved in the body in the worship of God or through the body in witness to the world.

This reality is not just true of early Baptists. Follow the flow of the Book of Acts and you will see that the purity of the church as consisting of those who are truly born again and baptized in the Spirit was taken seriously. Ask Ananias and Sapphira. So, the first characteristic of the church is that the church consists only of those who have been born again through the blood of Jesus and baptized in the Holy Spirit whose lives and lifestyles bear witness to this very fundamental and foundational truth.

The second characteristic of the church is that she honors the Word of God for what it is and makes the preaching and teaching of the Word of God the foundation for life in the church. Life in the church revolves around the Word of God. The Spirit of God came at Pentecost and the Word of God was read and preached. There is a church. The Spirit does not operate apart from the Word nor does the Word operate apart from the Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us understanding of the Word of God and the Word of God interprets for us the speech of the Holy Spirit to us. The church consists of those who are born of God through Jesus who have been baptized in the Spirit which produces a people whose lives are lived under the authority of the Word of God as it is read and released in the church.

Paul reminds us that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus being the keystone. That phrase that may be perplexing to us was plain to Paul: the church is built upon the Bible and Jesus is the key to the Bible. Over in Corinth where they had all kinds of problems, Paul would say at the beginning of chapter fourteen: pursue love, desire the spiritual gifts, but what is

most important is the preaching. It is the foundation upon which the church is built.

The third characteristic of the church is that a true church takes what is received in worship and then releases it to the world. We gather for worship; we scatter for witness. One without the other is empty and meaningless. Worship without witness becomes a religious ritual. Witness without worship becomes a prideful pursuit for personal gain. But worship that leads to witness causes us to lay our lives before Him in worship and to live our lives for Him in witness and both all and only for Him. Look at verse 40. The “other” words means the word of the gospel spoken in ways other than preaching. And that way is made plain: it is witnessing. Now the idea here is that either while Peter was preaching or after he was done the others were sharing the Gospel with those who had gathered and the result was the baptism of 3,000 people. Here is the first church, 3,120 people with no place to meet except the large courtyard at the Temple and in each others homes. What follows are the results of a church that is conducting itself according to the above characteristics?

It is the kind of church that gives itself to a deliberate discipleship, 42-44. The word for “devoted” here means to fasten yourself to something completely and continually. This is the reality that was consuming them. So what was it that was consuming them? What was it that so fascinated them that they were fastened to it? Well, the text says that they were fastened to the study of the Word of God and the faithful and focused worship of God. They wanted to learn the teaching of the apostles. Jesus had taught the apostles over three years and brought it all to crystallization during the forty days He was with them after the resurrection. They were hungry for the Word of God. But they also were seeking God in worship the center of which was prayer, praise, and participation in the Lord’s Supper. They were devoted to God to learn His Word. They were desiring God to worship His Name. Such is the result wherever a church exists. It brings people together under the Word of God to learn and before the throne of God to worship. The chief measure of genuine worship in a church that belongs to God is not what we think of ourselves when we leave, but what we think of God. The measure is not how good we are but how great God is. Genuine worship ought cause us to leave thinking about God and genuine study ought to leave us hungering for more of His Word, 43.

Secondly, it is the kind of church in which God develops a devoted fellowship, 44-45. I want to settle down here for a few minutes. I want you to see with me that what is described here is the center of three and the result of the first.

It is not first. It is second. It will not come to be until and unless the first exists. Genuine fellowship only exists where the church consists of people who are committed to the worship of God and the serious study of His Word. Corruption of community always come from those who are not in the Word which leads to a worship that is empty at best and idolatrous at the worst. Notice also that this kind of fellowship is not created by us, it comes from God. It is His doing. It is at the center. It comes out of worship and study. It is caused by God.

Now walk through this passage with me. ALL THE BELIEVERS. What he is describing can happen only among believers. Those who have clearly committed their lives to the Lordship of Jesus. Surrendered and submitted. Saved as seen in being sanctified. WERE. It is a verb that describes what has been and is a characteristic of this kind of people who are believers. TOGETHER ARE UPON THE SAME. This enigmatic phrase is found throughout Acts 2 and it always has to do with purpose. What binds a church together is the purpose that has called us together. We are not bound together by personality; the church has all kinds of personalities. We are not bound together by preferences; some of us have strong opinions about various subjects related to the church. We are not bound together by peculiarities; if you don't think you are perceived to be peculiar by someone else then ask someone who will be honest with you. What binds together is the purpose that has called us together and the center of that purpose is the person of Jesus.

When Jesus prayed what could well have been His last prayer on earth, He prayed for the unity of His church. Not the church, but His church. And he rested his request upon the unity that He had with His Father. And that unity was a unity of person and purpose: He was one with the Father who was sent from the Father to fulfill the will of the Father. Here is where our unity rests. We are different people from different perspectives with different personalities who have been called together by the person and power of Jesus to fulfill His purpose in and through this place. We forget this to our peril. People can be cruel to people. People can be callous to people. People and hurt people. BUT OUR RELATIONSHIP IS NOT BASED FUNDAMENTALLY ON WHAT WE DO OR DO NOT DO TO ONE ANOTHER BUT ON WHAT GOD HAS CALLED US TO DO TOGETHER FOR HIS GLORY IN GIVING THE GOSPEL TO THE WORLD.

Let me give you three “g’s” that the devil uses to destroy people and to disrupt witness: grudge, gossip, and grumbling. These are not three kinds of people but one kind of person who carries these characteristics. I promise you that

if you are one, you are the other two as well. People do hurt us and we can hold on to that and the outcome is that we gossip about them and grumble and complain when things don't go our way and the center of each of these is stubborn, stinking sin of pride. If I hold on to a grudge, then I am assuming about myself that I don't hurt others the way I have been hurt. When I gossip, I am assuming that I am right and others are wrong. And when I grumble I am saying that my way is the way and the only way. And God is extending His grace to anyone with the dreadful disease of the three "g's" with three words: GET OVER IT.

The New Testament is full of "one another" passages but the essence of them all are three: love one another, forgive one another, put up with one another. Because what holds us together in this devoted fellowship is our devotion to the person and the purpose of our Lord Jesus Christ.

One final thing here. The church that is deliberate in discipleship and devoted in fellowship is also a church that delightful in diligence, 46-47. It is the kind of church that is daily doing what the church is called to do. Every day this text teaches the people were in the Temple courts. Why? Because that is where the people were. They were sharing the Gospel. They were talking about Jesus. And from there they would go to each other's homes to share what God was doing and to pray for one another and to encourage one another. And notice the smiley words that saturate this passage. The word for "glad" radiates with joy. The word for "sincere" expresses the absence of anxiety. The word for "praise" speaks of exuberant gladness. The word for "favor" points to the passion with which they were giving the Gospel to the people around them every day. And the people did not run from them because their presence and posture was a presentation of the joy of the Lord that was in them and evidenced through them. And the Lord added to the church those who were being saved.

The Lord wants to add to His church today. He is calling you today. Convicting you today. Asking you today to acknowledge that you are a sinner. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Confess your sin and commit your life to Jesus. He will deliver you from your sin and deliver into you His presence and power and being to make you what He wants you to be. He will save you and He will save you today.