



Gospel Encounters in Acts

The Church's Powerful Witness

Acts 2:42-47

Context: The Establishment of the Church in Jerusalem

- Christ promises to send the Holy Spirit to empower the church to be His witnesses in the world.
 - **Acts 1:8** ⁸*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*
- Jesus ascends immediately after this commission; angelic beings note that Jesus will return when the commission is complete (Acts 1:9-11; Matthew 24:14)
- In Acts 2, we see Peter's bold proclamation of the gospel to those assembled at Pentecost.
- In response to Peter's preaching, the people respond:
 - **Acts 2:37-41** ³⁷*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"* ³⁸*And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."* ⁴⁰*And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."* ⁴¹***So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.***
- Those who trusted in Jesus were baptized and brought into an assembly – a church, the church at Jerusalem.
- Starting in verse 42, we're given a descriptor of this first church; in many ways, it serves as the "model church."
- Typically when we think of gospel encounters, we think of individuals – and it's true that most of the accounts we'll consider involve people like Paul, Peter, Stephen, etc.
- However, in verse 47 we see a powerful truth: God uses faithful churches as emblems of his saving grace, and uses their collective witness to magnify the gospel.
- What characterized the church such that it exploded in evangelistic power?

The Foundation of the Church: God's Word

- **Acts 2:42** ⁴² *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*
- **They Devoted Themselves to the Apostles' Teaching**
 - The word for “devote” there means a “*steadfast, single-minded fidelity to a course of action.*”
 - What was the content of the Apostles' teaching? Let's take a look at what immediately came before in Peter's sermon.
 - Things Peter mentions:
 - Peter uses the prophet Joel and Psalms of David to show how Christ was the promised Messiah, the true resurrected heir to the throne.
 - He focuses on how Jesus fulfills all of God's promises, connecting them to the life and ministry of Jesus.
 - He also describes the death of Jesus for atonement of sin, and His glorious resurrection.
 - Peter is sharing the Gospel, the good news of how men can be saved from their sins, revealed by God in His holy Word.
 - **Acts 2:40 - And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”**
- **God's Word is the Foundation of His Church**
 - We see the truth of Paul's statement in **Romans 1:16** on full display here: **For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**
 - This message – the good news that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the savior of men is what God uses to save souls.
 - And what a power!
 - **2 Corinthians 4:6** *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*
 - Look at the results:
 - *Acts 2:37 – They were “cut to the heart”*
 - *Act 2:37 – saying “what shall we do?”*
 - Peter makes a crystal-clear appeal to repent from sin, and to trust in Christ. He tells them, based on God's Word and God's promises, that they can be forgiven of their sins if they just turn to their savior, and receive the Holy Spirit....to be born again.

- God's Word, the message of the Gospel, is not just the entry point of the faith. It's the base upon which the entirety of our faith rests.
- **An On-Going Commitment**
 - A continual mark of that early group of believers was devotion to the apostles teaching.
 - There was a posture of passing on what was received and a continuity in growing in depth of knowledge of God:
 - **1 Corinthians 15:3-5** *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*
 - **1 Peter 2:2** *Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.*
 - There's an ongoing sustenance we draw from the Word of God being taught and preached. As we hear it, we grow and mature.
 - **Matthew 4:4** *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Quoting Deuteronomy 8:3.*
 - John 6 – Jesus says “I am the bread of life”.
 - The source of their beginning and continued flourishing was sure testimony of God's Word and Jesus Christ.

The Commitment of the Church: Radical Fellowship

- **Acts 2:42** ⁴² *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*
- **Acts 2:44-46** ⁴⁴ *And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts...*
- **Fellowship Defined**
 - The word for fellowship here goes deeper than just “being in the same room”.
 - The word used here refers to a joint participation, a common partnership, a mutual dedication, with the binding commonality being allegiance to Christ.
 - **1 Corinthians 1:9** *God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*
 - **Philippians 1:3-5** *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in*

every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

- When we place our faith in Christ, when we identify with him, we also identify with his body, the church. We get *each other*.
 - **1 Corinthians 12:27** *Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*
 - **Romans 12:1-5** *For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*
- The fellowship is pointing to a deep commitment rooted in our deep connectedness as brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - **Titus 2:13-14** *...Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*
 - Jesus' great prize is the church that he has bought with his blood (Acts 20).
- **Duties of the Fellowship**
 - God in His infinite wisdom has designed our great salvation such that we're brought into a larger community where we can be challenged in our sanctification and exhorted in our gospel proclamation.
 - One way we know this is the "one another" passages where God commands us to do things to and for each other...that can't happen apart from community!
 - **Romans 12:10** *Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.*
 - **Ephesians 4:2** *...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, [bear] with one another in love...*
 - **Philippians 2:3** *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*
 - **Positively:**
 - **Hebrews 10:25** *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*
 - **Negatively:**
 - **Hebrews 3:13** *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*
 - God gives each member of his church gifts to use for edification and building up of his church.
 - **1 Peter 4:10-11** *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as*

good stewards of God's varied grace.

- ***Ephesians 4:11-16*** *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

- **Manifestations of Their Commitment**

- ***Acts 2:44*** - ***And all who believed were together and had all things in common.***
 - They were separate, distinct. They were gathered for a purpose. It was obvious to the watching world that they were set apart.
- ***Acts 2:45*** - ***And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.***
 - They were marked by a radical generosity, ensuring that no one had need. They were so motivated by their understanding of how much Jesus had done for them, they held nothing back in devotion to the fellowship.
 - Later in Acts 2:34 it tells us that they were selling their houses and land and laying the proceeds at the Apostle's feet.
- ***Acts 2:46 - 46*** - ***And day by day, attending the temple together... L***
 - Look at the frequency: they were in each others' lives *daily*.

- This is a fulfillment of Jesus's words in John 13:34-35:

- ***John 13:34-35*** - ***34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."***

- **ARISTIDES' APOLOGY** – In AD 125 there was an Athenian philosopher named Aristides who wrote an apology of the Christian faith, delivered to the emperor Hadrian in 125 AD. Listen to what he wrote about the Christians he observed.
 - “If one or other of them have bondmen and bondwomen or children, through love towards them they persuade them to become Christians, and when they have done so, they call them brethren without distinction. They do not worship strange gods, and they go their way in all modesty and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them; and they love one another, and from widows they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother; for they do not call them brethren after the flesh, but brethren after the spirit and in God. And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible, to redeem him they set him free.”

The Witness of the Church: Worship & Evangelism

- **Acts 2:42** ⁴² *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*
- **Acts 2:46-47** ⁴⁶ *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*
- **Formal Practices that Marked the Church: Lord's Supper**
 - The church was committed to the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
 - We already saw the initiating ordinance of baptism in the preceding verses, but an indicator of their commitment was the “breaking of bread”, likely a reference to the Lord's Supper.
 - The Lord's Supper would remind the church of Jesus's sacrifice and the unity they had in Him – both needed reminders in the face of spiritual attack and persecution.
 - The Lord's Supper was a means of grace for participants, a humbling reminder of the cost of our salvation and an opportunity for self-reflection and examination.
 - 1 Corinthians 11 notes that as often as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes, meaning this ordinance was in part intended to picture the gospel evangelistically.

- **Formal Practices that Marked the Church: Prayer**
 - The text notes that the church was devoted to “the prayers; this indicates formal times for gathering for prayer.
 - This pattern is seen again in Acts 3 – people gathered at particular times in the temple to pray.
 - **Colossians 4:2** *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.*
 - The people of God were corporately dependent upon God in prayer.
- **Formal Practices that Marked the Church: Praise & Worship**
 - Large Group Gatherings – Attended the Temple
 - Large enough venue to hold them all
 - Presented opportunity to share Christ with other Jews present.
 - Small Group Gatherings – Breaking Bread in their Homes
 - More intimate setting of knowing and being known
 - Dispersed into the community, bearing witness there
 - Characteristics of these gatherings:
 - Both times filled with praising God (vs. 46 & 47)
 - Filled with gladness
 - All the benefits of the fellowship discussed earlier in view

The Impact of the Church: God-Empowered Growth

- **Acts 2:43 - 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.**
- Worship wasn’t something divorced from their witness. In many ways, worship and witness were synonymous.
- This was an “awe-inspiring” church.
- The word for “awe” there is *phobos*, same root we get the word “phobia”.
 - *A fear or holy terror related to sense of divine presence.*
 - *Reverent, worshipful demeanor*
 - *Same word used when Ananias and Sapphira were struck down for lying to the Spirit in Acts 5.*
 - *Also same word used in Matthew 28 where it says that the women, upon encountering the risen Christ, left to tell the disciples with “fear” and “great joy”.*
- They had “favor with all the people.” This church’s fellowship, worship, and gatherings all testified to the truth of the message they believed. And the world took notice.

- **1 Corinthians 14:24-25** *But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, 25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.*
- David Platt said, “The gladness of the church testifies to the glory of the Father.”
- A Gospel-centered church is the centerpiece to God’s redemptive plan!
 - **1 Timothy 3:14-15** ¹⁴ *I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*
- **Acts 2:47** *...And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

IV. Applications for Our Evangelism

- The catalyst for the believer’s ongoing maturity and the gospel’s ongoing spread is the local church.
- Lean into the church’s ministries and patterns for gospel engagement:
 - Steps of Faith class – for seeking friends
 - Sunday Service
 - Community groups
 - Kids’ ministry and youth
 - ESL
 - ...and more!
- See the importance of the church’s collective times together for developing a sense of partnership and community.
 - Equip classes & worship – implemented based on these verses.
 - Sunday evening prayer gatherings – concept directly from these verses.
 - Corporate prayer “at the temple”
 - Discipleship groups & community groups – principles directly from these verses.
 - In community & homes
- Don’t separate the internal and external focuses of the church; as you’re able, be involved serving each other *in the church* and serving the community *through the church*; there’s power in the collective witness of the church that goes beyond our individual gifts and abilities.