



Sermon Brief:
“God’s Church: under Blessing”

Text: Acts 2:41-47¹
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Introduction

What is the one thing you would wish for the church in 2009? I’m sure each one of you has a particular desire for what you would like to see happen in our church during this coming year. Today I want to share with you my deepest longing for our church. Last June in my first sermon to you, I preached on a Fellowship of Sinners from Matt. 16:18. In this passage Jesus promised to build His church. In Luke’s description of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, we see the beginning of the realization of that promise of the Lord. This Jewish festival of Pentecost was turned into the birthday of the Christian church by the Spirit of God. And what a birthday it became! From the small group of 120 disciples left behind at the ascension of Jesus, a huge community of several thousand believers emerged in a matter of a short time.

What can we learn from this experience that can help us experience a similar blessing today in our church?

First, a bit of context is necessary for proper understanding of this text. Verses 41-47 reflect two types of historical narrative. Verses 37-42 describe in *episodic narrative* the response to the preaching by Peter of the crowds of Hellenistic Jews at the temple celebrating Pentecost. They heard Peter’s powerful message of the Gospel and were convicted of their need of Christ. So they asked him what to do. In verses 38-40, Luke describes Peter’s answer. In essence, it was to repent and to follow repentance with baptism as a sign. According to verse 41, a large number of the crowd did exactly that, some 5,000 to be more precise! The [Pool of Siloam](#) near the temple was quite busy that day with all these people being baptized by the apostles. Over the next several days a pattern of discipleship emerged among these new converts, as verse 42 describes.

Beginning in verse 43, Luke provides us with a snapshot of the community of believers in Jerusalem for the first five years of its existence. The *summary narrative* of vv. 43-47 is the first of three such portraits in the early chapters of Acts (2:43-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16) and these are commonly thought to cover the period from about AD 30 to AD 45 in the life of the community of believers. In this first summary depiction of the life of the church in Jerusalem, three characters come center stage in the text: God, the apostolic leaders, and the believing community. Each plays a role and both the church and its leaders stand dependent upon God’s actions and blessings.



From verses 41-47 therefore, I want to stress two central points: 1. God blesses His church, and 2. a path to that blessing must be followed. If we sincerely want God to bless our church in 2009, then certain commitments must dominate our congregation.

¹⁴¹οἱ μὲν οὖν ἀποδεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθησαν καὶ προσετέθησαν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ψυχαὶ ὡσεὶ τρισχίλια.
⁴²Ἦσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς.
⁴³ἐγένετο δὲ πάσῃ ψυχῇ φόβος, πολλά τε τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα διὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἐγένετο. ⁴⁴πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύοντες ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ ⁴⁵καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσιν καθότι ἂν τις χρεῖαν εἶχεν· ⁴⁶καθ’ ἡμέραν τε προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ, κλώντες τε κατ’ οἶκον ἄρτον, μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας ⁴⁷αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεὸν καὶ ἔχοντες χάριν πρὸς ὅλον τὸν λαόν. ὁ δὲ κύριος προσετίθει τοὺς σφωζομένους καθ’ ἡμέραν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό.

⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Body

I. God blesses His church with growth, vv. 41b, 47

One central emphasis by Luke here is that God blessed the church at Jerusalem. The Day of Pentecost was the launching of the community of believers as an organized body of Christians. What was the heart of that blessing? New converts! The group of disciples of Jesus exploded from 120 individuals to over 5,000 in the space of a few days!

The growth came in two ways. **First**, there was *the explosive growth* that took place on the Day of Pentecost. In verse 41, Luke says that on “[that day about three thousand persons were added.](#)” What a massive response to the preaching of the Gospel. The Jewish festival of Pentecost brought in hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from all over the Roman empire each spring. So on this high feast day of the festival, large numbers of Jews had traveled to Jerusalem to worship God in the temple. There were largely the Hellenistic Jews, who had adopted Greek customs while maintaining their traditional Jewish religious heritage. In Acts 2:9-11, Luke listed some 15 nationalities² of Jewish pilgrims who were present that day and heard what was happened among these believers.

When the coming of the Holy Spirit took place the 120 disciples were gathered in the upper room, and the attracted quite a large number of curious on-lookers. With Peter’s sermon in mid-morning stretching up to noon, lots of people came by to see what was happening. Jewish tradition by this time had identified the festival of Pentecost with anticipation of the coming of the Spirit of God to usher in the arrival of the Messiah. So expectations of whether this would be the year of the Messiah’s arrival were already present. The unusual events happening to the disciples of Jesus that morning spread like wild-fire among the pilgrims. Was this the hoped for signal of the Messiah? Hundreds of pilgrims wanted to find out.

Peter had an unbelievable opportunity to preach the gospel to these crowds as they drifted by to see what was taking place. With his message on Jesus as the long awaited Messiah, he called them to repentance and faith commitment, as verses 37-40 indicate:

[37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” 38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” 40 And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”](#)

Over the day, and probably the next several days, some three thousand people responded positively and were baptized as expression of their repentance from sin and faith commitment to Christ. Suddenly this small group of 120 disciples exploded into over three thousand disciples!

Now that’s growing a church in a hurry! What would happen to our church if within a couple of weeks we went from 50 or so members to over two thousand members! That would strain the boundaries of our church dramatically. To be certain, the majority of these converts at Jerusalem were pilgrims whose home was elsewhere in the Roman empire. After a period of time, the vast majority of these traveled back home. But just like some of the exploding fireworks last Wednesday night, the sparks of Christian awakening spread out from Jerusalem to distant places all over the Roman empire. Very possibly the Christian community at Rome had its beginnings from converts from the city who came to Christ that day in Jerusalem.

Disciplining such a massive group of new Christians became a major challenge to the apostles and the remainder of the 120 original disciples. But Luke indicates that this task was successfully undertaken (v. 42): [“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”](#) Only a few weeks of time was available to get these new believers ready to return home and continue to spread their new faith as Christians.

When God chooses to bless us with growth, especially in large numbers, we must be prepared to immediately begin disciplining them in the Christian faith. One of the things I want us to move toward quickly in 2009 is the development of a solid program of Christian discipleship. God has blessed us with new members over the past several months, and I anticipate many more in the coming months. We will not be good stewards of that blessing unless we are prepared to help each one begin a serious path of discipleship once they come into the fellowship of our church.

Second, there was *steady growth* of the church over the next several years. Luke indicates this in verse

²NRSV: 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs...



47: “And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” This steady growth continued over the next several years as Luke’s narrative indicates: 5:14, “Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women,” and 6:7, “The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” Fairly quickly the number of converts rose to 5,000 according to 4:4, “But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.” This was consistent, rapid growth of the church in Jerusalem. And in these early chapters of Acts, Luke clearly indicates the intensive disciplining of these converts was an important part of this expansion.

Again with growth comes responsibility to the church to train and help the new Christians move into a pattern of spiritual development and faithful service. Because the church in Jerusalem concentrated on this disciplining of new converts God continued to add new people to the community of believers.

I deeply believe the pattern present in Acts reflects an obligation for any church wanting to grow and reach people. Quickie conversions without serious discipleship commitment is not only false, but can be damaging to the individual who concludes that salvation is but a mere profession of faith without ongoing commitment. Thus, I want us to prepare to grow. This means we’re going to need training ourselves, and some of you are going to need to set forward in leadership roles to get us ready to grow. I pledge to you my very best efforts to guide us into a growth pattern where increasing numbers of people can come to faith in Christ and begin a serious faith commitment to the Lord. During the coming months I hope to lay out plans in greater detail for this growth pattern.

II. A Path to Blessing must be followed

When you carefully study verses 41-47, a series of necessary commitments emerge from these verses. These constitute a path to God’s blessings, sustained blessings, for any church wanting to grow. At least four areas are touched on in our text.

1. Commitment

Several verses reflect the nature of the faith commitment exhibited by the converts and the disciples.

In verse 41, this commitment meant “welcoming the message” (ἀποδεξάμενοι τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ) that Peter preached about Christ and the demand to repent and be baptized. Christian commitment begins with the call of the Gospel to repent and believe in Christ. We must turn from our sins and sinful ways of living to a life of holy devotion to Christ and His ways. Without such commitment there is no salvation, no genuine Christianity.

In verse 43, this commitment meant “continuing fear” of God (ἐγένετο πάση ψυχῇ φόβος). The disciples generally came to realize that God was awesome and powerful in overwhelming ways. It’s one thing to sing about our God being an awesome God. It’s a very different thing to be overwhelmed by God’s power and might. God took over control of this group of people and infused into their midst an amazing Presence and power. This power continued to manifest itself over time in the Jerusalem church, as 4:31 indicates:

When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

This heavenly power was given for them to use to preach the gospel, not for their own enjoyment or personal advantage. It produced profound reverence for God and who He is.

In verse 44, this commitment meant “believing” in Christ (πάντες οἱ πιστεύοντες). Faith is not a one time expression that can be made only with the words, “I believe in Jesus.” Confession of faith in Jesus, to be sure, begins with a verbal acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord and Savior. But this is only the beginning of faith. As the old acronym goes, faith is “forsaking all I take Him,” FAITH. Faith leads to a life of obedient service. And if it doesn’t, James 2:14-26 declares that it isn’t saving faith.

What is the commitment of our church today? We are to be a group of people with genuine faith commitment! This is where we must move, if we expect God to bless us with growth!

2. Understanding of His Will

These disciples focused on understanding God’s will, as expressed in Jesus Christ. Luke’s summary statement about the disciplining pattern in verse 42 highlights this: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Ἦσαν προσκαρτεροῦντες τῇ διδαχῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων). When these Jewish pilgrims first came to Christ, they began seeking to understand everything possible about their new religious faith, centered in Jesus Christ. The apostles were there to teach them everything they needed to know. The apostles are no longer living, but they are accessible to us. Not through a preacher, but through the



pages of the New Testament. You see, the New Testament is the record left by the apostles of the teachings of Christ both while on earth, and through the Spirit's illumination of the Twelve and the Apostle Paul.

Through the pages of the New Testament we encounter the teaching of the apostles that defines our religious commitment. My dear people, I stand before you today committed to the teaching of this sacred document to the very best of my ability. This has been my commitment since entering ministry over fifty years ago, and will continue to be the foundation of all that I seek to do in service to Christ. I deeply yearn for our church to be Christ centered and Bible based. Together we will explore all that God wants to teach us through the Bible. In such commitment, He can and will bless our church with growth.

3. Worship

The third commitment of these beginning believers was to worshipping God.

In verse 46, Luke says **“Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple”** (καθ’ ἡμέραν τε προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ). These were Jews and the temple was their central place of worship. When they became Christians, they didn't abandon the temple. Rather, they continued to worship God there with all the rich traditions and heritage that the temple represented.

A part of that worship included **“praising God”** (αἰνοῦντες τὸν θεὸν) according to verse 47. Worship must be God centered, if it is acceptable to God. Hymns, choruses etc. should draw our attention away from ourselves and toward God. Worship is not a spiritual pep rally! It is to be a life changing encounter with the living God. It should cause us of bow down before a mighty God in humble surrender to Him.

Another part of that worship was **praying**. The new converts in Jerusalem devoted themselves to praying, according to verse 42: **“They devoted themselves to... prayers”** (Ἦσαν προσκαρτεροῦντες ... ταῖς προσευχαῖς). Praying was central in the pattern of temple worship. These Jewish Christian converts had grown up in Diaspora synagogue life with prayers as a major element of weekly sabbath worship back home. Quite naturally prayer would continue to occupy a major part of their worship as Christians. Later on, we catch a glimpse into the kind of praying that these early believers practiced, in Acts 4:24-30.

When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant: “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.’ For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

Wow! Now that's praying! It no wonder that Luke goes on to say, **“When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.”**

I want us to become a truly worshiping congregation. As an international church, lots of differing traditions about worship come together at once. We must find the blend of worship styles that allows us to truly worship God. Three elements of worship I want to be central to our worship style are prayer, praise, and preaching. Everything must be God focused and point to Him. And away from us. Let us say with John the Baptist, “He must increase; I must decrease.”



4. Sense of oneness

The one commitment that Luke emphasizes more than the others is the sense of oneness that typified the group of disciples.

A signal ongoing commitment of the new converts in verse 42 was devotion to **“fellowship, to the breaking of bread”** (τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου). In the chiasmic structure³ of these four traits in verse 42, these converts spent lots of time with the apostles, largely at meal time, being instructed in the things of Christ.

In verse 46, the sharing of meal time was central to the entire group's unity: **“they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts”** (κλῶντές τε κατ’ οἶκον ἄρτον, μετελάμβανον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας). This group of people enjoyed being together, as a spiritual family.

In verses 44-45, they gladly shared with those in need: **“All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need”** (⁴⁴πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύοντες ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμερίζον αὐτὰ πᾶσιν

³A. the apostles' teaching and

B. the fellowship,

B' the breaking of bread and

A. the prayers.

καθότι ἅν τις χρείαν εἶχεν). Their sense of compassion and concern for one another was deep.

Twice in the summary narrative (vv. 44, 47) Luke uses a phrase in Greek to describe the group that is difficult to translate: ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ. It is variously translated as 'the group,' 'the church,' etc. Literally, the phrase means "at the same." The terms stresses the sense of oneness felt by this exploding number of disciples at Jerusalem. Additionally, another word, ὁμοθυμαδὸν, used by Luke in v. 46, stresses this same point of oneness. The first threat to this unity came with the deception of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11), and resulted in their deaths. The second threat came in the discrimination against the Hellenistic widows in 6:1-7, and was quickly rectified by the establishment of deacons to minister more equably to the entire congregation.

The sense of unity of purpose and harmony among the members of our church is crucial to God's blessing us. I've heard testimony after testimony of the difficulty that came earlier when disunity crept into our church. We don't want that to ever find a place again among us. I pledge to you as pastor to do everything possible to promote unity in our church. I trust that you are committed to doing the same.

Conclusion

The church, it is to be God's church. We belong to Him, Him alone! The church doesn't belong to any member. It is Christ's church, committed to His service and mission on earth.

With the commitment outlined above, we can experience God's blessing. A blessing centered on growth and reaching out to the lost with the good news of salvation in Christ. Will you join me in commitment to walk with the Lord toward that blessing?

