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The Spirit-filled Church

Acts 2:41-47

Intro: Last time we looked at Peter's Pentecost sermon, the first Christian sermon ever preached. We noticed how it was a model sermon in its construction in that it was grounded in Scripture and centered on Jesus Christ. This model sermon is not just helpful for preachers but for anyone who desires to deliver the gospel effectively and powerfully. Of course, the power didn't come from the structure of the sermon – it came from the fact that the Holy Spirit had come upon Peter and all the other disciples and it was His presence and working that produced such great results.

And what great results they were! When Peter brought home his main point – that this Jesus they had crucified was not only their Messiah but could also be their savior – Luke tells us the crowd was cut to the heart. This is a great description of the conviction of the Holy Spirit. These highly religious and, most likely, self-righteous men now knew that they and others just like them were responsible for the death of Jesus (as we all are) and they felt like they had to do something in response to this responsibility. We live in a culture today where no one is ever responsible for anything. Even when they do atrocious things, it's always someone else's fault: my parents abused / neglected me ...I'm out of work...I have a hard life. This is nothing other than self-righteousness taken to an absurd extreme and it still takes the power of the Holy Spirit to break through that hard shell and bring conviction to sin-stained hearts.

Now, Peter had some previous experience with cutting. On the night Jesus was arrested in the Garden, Peter cut off the right ear of Malchus, the High Priest's servant. You've got to hand it to Peter – he's a man of action but this did nothing to remedy the situation. In fact, it was just another embarrassing mess that Jesus had to clean up. This scene shows Peter in the flesh, doing the best he could with a literal sword of human power. When the resurrected Lord changed Peter's life and when the Holy Spirit had come upon him in power, Peter was able to do some much more effective cutting: cutting into hard hearts, opening them up to Jesus. This is what Peter could do in the power of the Spirit, doing God's best with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Which sword was more powerful?

The Holy Spirit's conviction prompted these listeners to ask, "What must we do?" Salvation is completely a work of the Triune God: The Father sent the Son to earth to die for the sins of the world and the Spirit now draws men and women to that truth. But, there is one thing the sinner can and must do. Yes, they must accept this offer of salvation but before they can truly accept salvation, they must repent!

There's a lot of confusion concerning what repentance actually is. Repentance is more than just changing your mind – it is that but it's more than that. Repentance is a change of mind that leads to action. Repentance is also not something you must do before you can come back to God. Repentance describes what coming to God really is. You cannot properly turn towards God without effectively turning away from the things that God is against. It speaks of the total transformation from the old man and his fallen nature to the new man with a divine nature. Repentance isn't part of the gospel, but it, along with faith, are the only proper responses to the presentation of the gospel message.

41 – The response of the crowd helps us put the events of the Day of Pentecost into proper perspective. The Holy Spirit had descended upon the assembled disciples with a sound as of a rushing, mighty wind and appeared upon each as a tongue of fire and they began to speak in other, foreign tongues about the wonderful works of God. But the speaking in tongues, as miraculous as it was, produced nothing in the listeners except astonishment and mocking. It wasn't until the Gospel message was preached with power that conviction from the Holy Spirit came into their hearts. Clearly, this was the work God wanted to accomplish that day – bringing 3000 souls into His kingdom.

Wow! 3000 in one fell swoop – that's incredible! But, even as incredible as that sounds, we must also realize that this wasn't the end goal of God's work. What was Jesus' commission to His disciples before He ascended back to His Father? Did He tell them to "Go into all the world and make converts?" No, [Mt 28:19](#) clearly states the disciples were to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." The Holy Spirit worked through Peter and the others to effect this great revival but it wasn't the ultimate goal – it was merely a means to the ultimate goal: establish the church!

I don't mean to discount these 3000 conversions in any way, because you must have converts before you can have disciples but we must remember that acquiring both is the ultimate goal; it takes both to fulfill the Great Commission.

That's why it takes a living, working Body to obey and fulfill our Commission. One may be a dynamic evangelist who brings many people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ but it takes the gifts of many others to help encourage these converts along in their discipleship. This is what Paul writes about in Eph 4:11-13. The various gifts of the Spirit are for equipping and edifying the Body of believers so that they might come to a unity of faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ – “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” That is the ultimate goal. That is what God intends for all who accept Christ as their savior. Peter’s sermon wasn’t the end of the Spirit’s work; it was merely the beginning of a much more important work of taking the converts and making them into dedicated disciples of Jesus.

42-47- Luke is describing the early church and it is presented to us as a model – the church in its earliest and purest form. But, even though is a model church, it doesn’t mean it was a perfect church. As we’ll see in later chapters, they had hypocrites in the church, as we do today. They had doctrinal errors and sinful people of all types, just as we do today. The early church was far from perfect but it is still a model for us in many important respects. Our text shows us what functions developed in the church and how it operated in those heady days after Pentecost. Clearly, this description was intended to be an example for believers and for our churches today.

The early church was an inner-city church and it was a large church. It had a multiple staff ministry and needed this because of the 3,000 who were added at Pentecost. Church attendance went from 120 to 3120 in 1 day! The work initially fell to the 12 apostles but when they realized there still wasn’t enough people to do the work, they asked the church to appoint 7 deacons. So they had 19 officers at that time. But, the true success of the church was that all of the believers (not just the 19) were doing the work of the ministry as Paul mentioned in Eph 4:11-13. Today, we’re going to focus on the characteristics that made this such a vibrant and growing congregation.

The 1st thing we’re told is that this was a studying and learning church: they

were devoted to the apostle's doctrine (teachings). There were plenty of other things that Luke could have said about this church. We'll see that this was a joyful church, a powerful, vibrant, expanding church; these aspects are important but Luke doesn't mention any of them here. The first thing he mentions is the teaching. He stresses that in these early days, in spite of the great spiritual experience they had on Pentecost, the disciples devoted themselves first to teaching. Instead of pining for another Pentecost-style move of the Spirit, instead of reveling in past experiences, they were reveling in God's Word.

This is the first mark of a Spirit-filled church: it faithfully studies the apostolic teachings. A Spirit-filled church bases its experiences in and tests those experiences by the Word of God. God's Word is the standard, not the experience.

Why does Luke specify the "apostle's doctrine?" The apostles were specifically chosen by Jesus to remember, teach about and authentically record the events of His ministry. How do we know these men spoke with Christ's authority? The proof was the miraculous wonders and signs that were done *through* them. The miracles authenticated them as messengers of Jesus and bearers of true Spirit-given teaching. When the apostles spoke about what Jesus did and taught, the early believers could receive their words as the authentic record and interpretation of Jesus' life and could rightly devote themselves to studying it. They studied the apostle's teaching and tested it against the OT.

These were the men that gave us the NT: the complete collection of their teachings. The books of the NT came directly from the apostles or carried the apostolic blessing. If we're to emulate the early church, we must also study the books these men have left us. The authentic teachings and doctrines of Jesus are only to be found in the pages of the NT. Thus, a Spirit-filled church is always going to be a Bible-studying church. Those two things go together.

There've been times in history when the Bible has been neglected by God's people. Those were dry ages for the church. There've been times when the Bible was not always readily available, whether political pressures or even church interference. The times when the church has been greatly blessed, where the Spirit of God has come upon God's people and the gospel has gone out powerfully and with great response, these were always times when

the Bible has been studied carefully. The closer Christians come to God the closer they want to get to where He speaks to their hearts, and that communication is found in the pages of God's Word.

2nd, we notice that this church was also devoted to fellowship, on multiple levels. "Fellowship" is translated from the Greek word koinonia which means holding something in common. But Christian fellowship relates to our common participation in God; this is what drew these early Christians together ([I John 1:3](#)). The early church enjoyed a common fellowship because of the great spiritual realities they shared in together. They had all participated in God the Father and in Jesus Christ. They were one in God. So because they were one in Christ and in the Father, they naturally participated in a common life and shared everything with one another.

Fellowship with God and true fellowship with others go together. The stronger your vertical fellowship is, the stronger your horizontal fellowship will be. If you find yourself out of fellowship with God, you'll begin to find yourself out of fellowship with other Christians. You will begin to drift off. But if you come close to God, you will inevitably find yourself being drawn close to other Christians. It works the other way, too. If you spend time with other believers, if you share a great deal with them, that fellowship will help to draw you closer to the Lord.

This fellowship they enjoyed was more than just an ethereal feeling; it was also very practical. Koinonia refers to more than just having things in common; it also means participating in something together or sharing. There's another Greek word closely related to it – koinonikos, which means generous. Those who share together in God inevitably share together in God's nature, which includes generosity, and they are generous with those around them.

Thus, these believers, who enjoyed their close fellowship, inevitably shared what they had with one another.

Some misguided individuals have tried to use [44-45](#) as proof text that the early church practiced communism, or at least a healthy dose of socialism. This is an unfortunate (or intentional) misuse of the text. What's happening here is **not** communism – It's the exact opposite of it. Communism is the forced sharing of goods. It is compulsory and has nothing to do with generosity. This isn't socialism either. The early Christians shared their

possessions, not because they were forced to share their things—but because they were generous, and they were generous because they had learned generosity from God. God had been generous with them. So because God had been generous with them, they were determined to be generous with one another.

Sometimes we reason that because the early Christians were not forced to share their goods we are therefore justified in keeping what we have for ourselves. But we can't get off the hook quite that easily. It is true that we are not forced to be generous. But if we are followers of Jesus Christ, if we have learned from him, then we know that “one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” ([Lk 12:15](#)). The standard we have is the standard of serving. Our obligation is to use what we have for others, which is what the early church did. It is one measure of a Christian’s sanctification and maturity.

The 3rd characteristic of the early church was worship. There is a reference to a formal style of worship in vs42 where the entire church came together for the breaking of bread (communion) and in prayers. This describes a time of formal worship when the congregation came together to praise God. This is also referred to in vs46a, most likely implying a meeting in the temple courts, the only place large enough to hold the whole congregation of believers. But, not only did they meet formally, they also met informally – from house to house. This would be more of a home meeting that was largely centered on the communion service but included times of Bible study, prayer and praise.

Christian worship should include both formal and informal worship. Yes, it's important that we regularly get together as the whole Body but this only meets part of our needs. We also need to find and invest ourselves in regular times of informal worship in more relaxed settings that accommodate a greater degree of involvement and participation. Christian worship should be both.

The last characteristic of a Spirit-filled church mentioned in our text: it will be a witnessing, evangelizing church ([47](#)).

Now, it doesn't explicitly say the church was out witnessing but we know that the way God reaches people is through the witnessing and that when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, those who received the Spirit immediately

began to speak about Jesus. If the Lord was adding to their number daily, it must've been because they were out witnessing.

How could they not be? They had experienced the wonderful ministry of Jesus. They were there when Jesus was sheepishly arrested, illegally tried, falsely convicted and horrifically executed. Some were present at the cross while most all were witnesses of the resurrection. These were wonderful truths and theirs was a life-transforming message. They had to share it with other people. They knew perfectly well that they were only channels for what God was doing, only means to the end that God Himself had determined

There's a sense in which God and we both do the work. God works through us, which means we must work. If we don't work at witnessing, nothing happens. If we don't pray, little happens. But when we do and when it does, it's because God Himself is working. This isn't a contradiction. It's good biblical theology. It's the way God operates. Paul says as much in [Phil 2:12b-13](#), "work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure".

Not only was God saving people, He was also adding them to the church and He was doing it daily! Wouldn't that be an exciting problem to have? When God saves, He doesn't save a group, He saves individuals. The lost enter the kingdom of God one soul at a time. But, when they are saved individually, they are then added into the fellowship of God's people. We share the same Lord, same Spirit, same love for the Father, the same desire to worship Him. We also share the same struggles and victories and we share the same task of living for Him and the same joy of sharing the gospel. You might come in alone but you won't stay alone, we're all in the same boat together.

What is true of the Spirit-filled church is also true of the believer. We should be drawn to study and know God's Word. We should desire to be in fellowship with our Savior and His people, to share in His presence and to share with one another. We should make ourselves available to worship Jesus on a regular basis: formally and informally. We should be witnessing of Him and for Him – we all have something to share with others about the gospel: what it has accomplished in our lives.

If we are not drawn to these things, we should first question our salvation. Are we really born again? If you are sure you are, then the next thing we should question is: are we filled with the Holy Spirit? The Spirit inevitably draws the people of God to Jesus through the Scriptures. He draws us into fellowship with God and each other, He draws us into regular, consistent worship and He draws us into sharing the gospel. Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? ☺