

Acts 2:42-47

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[0 : 0 0] Acts chapter 2. We're finishing our series this morning in daily things.! You might remember we've seen that the Lord daily bears our burdens.

! He bears us up.! And so we are to be daily renewed and we are being daily renewed by God. Outwardly decaying but inwardly being renewed. And part of the Christian life is daily repenting. Daily we take up our cross forgiven and yet repenting.

And then we are to daily encourage one another to keep on going. And so today is the last daily unless you can find some more for me. But I think the last daily we're going to see is actually about the church.

And it is daily growth. So just look in verse 47. That as the early church of Acts chapter 2 lived out being the church.

[1 : 1 8] When the church was the church. The Lord added to their number day by day. Those who are being saved. Look at the start of the paragraph.

Verse 42. You can see that that early group of Christians. They devoted themselves. They devoted themselves to certain things. And as a result of that.

They're devoting themselves to certain things. They grew every day. Living organisms grow don't they? So plants grow.

Children. Children. You grow. Children. You grow. If they don't grow there's something wrong isn't there? They're not receiving proper food or proper exercise.

They're subject to disease or the plant is in a poor environment. And so living organisms grow. And the church is a living organism. And so the church will grow.

[2 : 1 7] Now there are different types of growth. All growth is not numerical growth. That's not the only way that growth can be measured. We are to grow as Christians in grace and in Christ likeness.

In maturity. In knowledge. And so it would be a mistake to think of growth just as in numbers. But it would be an equal mistake.

And one to which I think we're more subject. To ignore the question of numbers. I think it's really too comfortable for you and I to say. Well numerical growth isn't the only thing.

There are other growth. Other kinds of growth. And that is true. But growth does include growth in numbers. Look at verse 47 again. They praised God.

They had favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day. Those who are being saved. So there's clearly numerical growth. The church was getting bigger.

[3 : 1 6] In the number of people who were coming. And that phrase should strike our hearts. There should be a longing. But the Lord added to their number day by day.

Those who were being saved. And I wonder what do we know of such numerical growth. It's the first of several summaries in the life of the church in the book of Acts.

There's another one in Acts 4, 32 to 37. There's a third one in Acts 5, 12 to 16. And Luke seems to have just a number of purposes in giving us these summaries of what church life was like.

One of them is to commend the faith. He's writing to a man called Theophilus. To whom the book is addressed. And he wants to show Theophilus what the church is like.

He wants to defend the church against the critics in Roman society. And he's writing to show. He's writing these summaries to show that these Christians, they are peaceful.

[4 : 1 6] They are a positive influence and unit in society. These people, they're not rebels. They're not revolutionaries. They're not disturbers of the peace. Luke is saying to us that the church is the community that the world is looking for.

But more than that, what Luke is doing is he's giving a blueprint to the church of God ever since. This is what a vibrant, lively church should be like.

Now I think we don't want to follow this passage slavishly and naively. It is speaking, isn't it, of a time of revival. There is an unusualness here.

They're meeting together every day. There's an excitement and an exceptional quality to this. I don't think Luke is saying this is how church life has to be in every detail from now on.

We need to remember it's not a complete picture. It's a summary. We're going to see, well we won't see, but as you go on in Acts, you'll see Ananias and Sapphira. You'll see within this early church, they were hypocrites.

[5 : 24] It wasn't perfect. In chapter 6, you go and there are two groups that are grumbling about each other and they're jealous of each other. And one feels they're being aggrieved and the other feels they're being overlooked.

So it's not a perfect church. But nonetheless, Luke is laying down for us marks of a healthy, growing church. And there's four things that we'll see that the people of God, verse 42, devoted themselves to.

It's a really interesting word, that word. That means they constantly focused on something. That means the early church, they were absolutely committed to something.

They were enthusiastic. And I think that's in itself a mark of a church. There are churches, aren't there, where nobody's very enthusiastic about anything.

And they just turn up. And they are lukewarm and they are half-hearted. But in a church where there is life and there is health, there will be enthusiasm.

[6 : 27] And there will be costly commitment. And there will be devotion. So four elements that we can see. First of all, they were devoted to the word. Luke puts it there.

He says they were devoted, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. This is immediately after Pentecost. It's immediately after when the Holy Spirit was sent upon the church.

The astounding work of the Holy Spirit. They spoke in tongues. They spoke in different languages. And others could understand them. There was ecstasy.

There were these amazing experiences. And we might think, well, the Christians in those days, those experiences were so remarkable. They would be far too enthusiastic just to get down to Bible study.

Who needs the word when we've got the spirit? But that's not what we have, is it? The spirit is the spirit of truth.

[7 : 27] We're told in verse 41 that those who received the word, his word, were baptized. They entered the Christian life through hearing the word, and understanding the word, and responding to and obeying the word of God.

And so they continue their Christian life. Just as they began it. It was word-based. The people were hungry.

They couldn't get enough of this teaching. This wonderful message of the restoration of the world in Jesus Christ. There's so much, they said.

We want to learn. We want to grow. We want to develop. And so this early church was marked by a passionate desire for the teaching of the apostles. They couldn't get enough of it.

I wonder whether the apostle Peter has got this in mind when he writes in his first epistle. Maybe he's remembering those days in Jerusalem.

[8 : 28] He says, like newborn infants, long crave pure spiritual milk. Speaking of the word of God.

So that by it you may grow up in salvation. And so at the heart of every healthy, growing church I know, there is an emphasis on the centrality of the word.

And at the heart of growth is strong preaching of the word. And it costs, doesn't it? Verse 42, they devoted themselves. That same word comes in chapter 6 and verse 4, where the apostles make a responsible commitment.

They say, as apostles we are going to devote ourselves to preaching and to prayer. And so it's when preachers devote themselves to preaching and when people devote themselves to hearing that both grow.

The word builds up believers. And God will send unbelievers to where they will hear the truth. What's my job?

[9 : 40] My job is to grow the grass. To grow the grass. To keep the grass. Your job as the sheep is to come and eat the grass. And if you grow good grass, other sheep will come and eat it.

But it's not only preaching, is it? They are to have a mutual ministry. But the word is central. We have so many opportunities today to feed on the word. There are so many good books. Probably too many. So many recordings, aren't there? Endless opportunities. Do we have a real hunger for the word of God?

To be in love with the Bible. An appetite for it. To delight in God's word. To get into it and to feed on it. To come expectantly to hear the word of God. Here's a mark of the healthy church.

Secondly, they firstly devote themselves to the word. And then secondly, they devote themselves to worship. Here's in verse 42. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

[10 : 48] It could refer simply to eating together. There's been a lot of talk about that the last kind of 10 years. If you look at kind of churches in the UK. That this is speaking about a kind of eating together.

And the importance of eating together. And there's some truth in that. But I don't think that's what it's talking about here. So can you just look at the way the ESV, I think, rightly has said.

To the breaking of bread. There's a definite article. And the prayers. So I think it's unlikely to have been a meal. I think it's far more likely to have been the Lord's Supper.

Which is referred to, isn't it, as the breaking of bread. And the prayers. That is the public praying. And so we find here they are devoted to sacrament.

And prayer in worship. It seems there was a healthy mix of formal and informal worship. If you like it. If you like public and society meeting. Look at verse 46. And day by day, attending the temple together.

[11 : 55] And breaking bread in their homes. They received their food with glad and generous hearts. And Luke is going to tell us in chapter 3 and chapter 5.

That the Christians meet in Solomon's Portico. You think of the temple. They met the Christians in a kind of outer court. And so they seem to have gathered there publicly every day to hear the preaching of the apostles.

Together with this public gathering, they also met in homes. The details are unclear. We can't get a fully orb'd doctrine of the life of the church from this passage.

But what we do see is that the institution of the church already has a role. So look at verse 41. Those who received his word were baptized.

And there were added that day about 3,000 souls. We can miss that.

[12 : 53] Verse 41. There's an element of formality there, isn't there? There's an element of people being added to the church. There were those who were not added. And there were those who were added.

There's an element of formality. There is structure. There is a kind of embryonic organization. They didn't just join themselves. They met with the apostles or the leaders.

They received the sacrament of baptism. And then they were counted as belonging to the church. And there were those who belonged and those who didn't belong. And the leaders knew who belonged and knew who didn't.

And the apostles' teaching is the authoritative standard. And so we have to understand them as committed to formal public worship together. And we need to emphasize that because there's a kind of strain of thinking in lots of British churches which says something like this.

Worship is just all of life. So they take Romans 12, which is a true statement. They present your bodies as living sacrifices, as worship in all of life.

[13 : 59] And I want to fully agree with that. Whether you work, eat, or play, you do it all to the glory of God. But what often happens is it's said, well, Christian gatherings or assemblies, they can take place anywhere, in any place, with any person.

It doesn't really matter. Any time of day. And so church is really just a group of Christians meeting together. There's no essential rituals. The entire time we're together as the assembly, larger groups, smaller food, smaller groups over food, informally, one-to-one.

Everything is worship. Everything that Christians do together, that is worship. And I want to say to you, that blurs a distinctive of public worship, which is a key function and mark of the Holy Church, of a healthy church, the public worship of God.

They devoted themselves to this worship. And so there are many churches today that have lost that sense of awe and reverence and majesty.

Where the focus is on ourselves and our needs. And there's no sense of the greatness of God.

There's no sense of being overwhelmed. No sense of the fear of God.

[15:16] No sense of God is in this place and he's speaking to us. How dreadful. This is the gate of God. The gate of heaven.

And the vertical aspect between the people of God and God has been lost. It's all horizontal. Or it can more likely happen in churches like ours. Where the sermon is exalted to a place where it doesn't belong.

Where the sermon or the talk becomes the be-all and the end-all. And everything else is described as, well, the preliminaries. Those are the things we go through.

But the real reason we come is we want to get to the sermon. And the sermon then becomes, well, me transferring my notes to your notes. And it becomes an informative lecture.

And we come to receive information. And so our minds are fed. And it helps in our lives. But where is the worship?

[16:20] Where is the bowing down? What is the reason this church exists? The primary reason for this church is to exalt and to glorify and worship the great God.

And in verse 7, it is in praising God. And having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who are being saved.

That is to be the heart of our corporate and individual lives. To be a people who are in love with God. To be a people who are entranced with God.

Who delight in Him. And desire to exalt and glorify Him. And we particularly need to be very careful.

We try to worship after the biblical form. We talk about the regular principle. We don't actually talk about it lots. But that's what we're striving to do on a Sunday.

[17:19] That is important. What does it mean? It means that we worship God as He commands. If I can put it this way. That is the form.

That is the container. Of what we're trying to do. We're trying to worship God in the way that God requires. It's the form.

It's the container. It's the husk. But it's not the reality. The reality is what? It is the worship of God. It is the experience of God. And the terrible danger for churches like ours.

Is that we just rely on the form. And the container. But actually at the heart of our worship. There can be a coldness and an emptiness.

I get really quite depressed. Kind of some of the contemporary modern worship movement. And you may know I'm not great fans of. My charismatic friends. No I am fans of my charismatic friends.

[18:22] I'm not fans of. Of what they're trying to teach us about worship. But I do have to say.

Don't I. I think they've got lots to teach us in other ways. There is a vibrancy.

There is a vibrancy. And a heartfelt. Nature to what they do. And it's meaningful to them. We can't sing at the moment. It's driving me crazy isn't it. But when we can.

Do we throw ourselves into singing? We can be in church. The form can be correct. Where is the life and the passion? The sense that we are.

Adoring this great God. And humbling ourselves. It is a demanding thing to come to worship. We need to pray on Saturday night. And on the Lord's Day morning.

Lord prepare us as we come in here. As we give of ourselves. As we participate. You don't just stand up and sing the words. You don't just stand there.

[19:23] And watch someone sing at the front. But with our whole heart and soul. That is worship. And so no matter how bad the sermon is. We've worshipped God.

The third W. We have they devoted themselves to the word. They devoted themselves to worship. And thirdly. They devoted themselves to welcome. That's not the best word. Alright. But I didn't feel like.

The better word would be oneness. But it doesn't work with alliteration. It does in a way. But not. And so word. Worship. Welcome. Or oneness. Can you see it?

They devoted themselves to the fellowship. And that's much more isn't it? Than our common superficial understanding. We have kind of a genial niceness of a cup of tea. Chatting together.

Luke puts it this way. He says that all who believe.

Verse 44. Were together and had all things in common. There's a deep and observable unity. They stuck together. They clung together. They belong together. It was natural.

[20 : 21] They delighted in it. It was instinctive. They were together. They've got this incredibly attractive oneness. Welcoming to the world. It's a costly thing. And Luke says verse 45.

And they were selling their possessions and belongings. And distributing the proceeds to all. As any had need. Yes.

He translates it well. Luke is telling us something reasonable. And sensible. Sometimes you hear this passage preached. And it's as if the Christians had this gigantic fire sale of all their possessions.

The great boot sale of all time. And they got rid of everything. And they went around just distributing all the money to those who are in need. That isn't what Luke is saying. Luke is saying that from time to time when somebody was in need.

Another person would sell something. Sell part of their property. They'd sell a piece of land. They'd sell an animal. And they'd give the proceeds to them.

[21 : 27] Or another month somebody would be in need. And somebody else with property would sell it. And give the proceeds to them. It wasn't a silly thing. The Bible is not naive.

There's not a negativity about possessions here. It's not voluntary communism. No. Luke is telling us. The writer of Acts. That it was simply a way to help the needy.

And as a result of this. He is able to say. Chapter 4 and verse 34. There was not a needy person among them. And the quality of their fellowship.

And of their oneness. Is a huge challenge. Isn't it? And so too often in churches. You will have heard. As I have heard. Of behavior that is toxic.

People who treat one another. Unbelievably badly. A backbiting. And sarcastic. And gossip. And fault finding. And cruelty.

[22 : 28] Or there can be a degree of indifference. Of non-involvement. But Luke says. They devoted themselves to the fellowship. And so Christian life. Is life in community. And every single one of us here this morning.

Has something in us. Which fights against community. And we've got to give it up. My individualism. My autonomy. My independence. I don't want to be vulnerable.

I don't want to be obliged. I don't want to have to open up. I don't want to be responsible. I want to be free of all those things. And so people say. I'm happy to come. I'm happy to participate. But here are the magic words.

I don't want to get involved. And you can't be a Christian in isolation. You can't develop Christian graces in isolation.

You cannot sit in a room by yourself. And become more loving. And more patient. And more meek. And you need to get out into the church. And have people slap you hard across the face.

[23 : 30] That helps you to be meek. Helps you learn patience. If you want to be more loving. You need to get into contact with. The most obnoxious person in your congregation.

And learn to love them. And that will help you to be more loving. You want to be more patient. How do you learn patience? You have to wait.

And wait. And wait. And wait for things to happen. We pray for these things. Don't we? But do you recognize how they come? How does God make us like this?

It would not be good for you and I. If we were a church of perfect people. We wouldn't grow. We wouldn't develop. It's as we rub together.

That we develop these graces. And we grow these graces. You cannot fulfill the one another's of scripture. By yourself. You can't serve God by yourself.

[24 : 27] So we need to protect. And deepen. And nurture body life. And you need to go deep into your own heart. And pay the price of giving yourself.

It's a little bit like marriage isn't it? I say to grooms getting married. On your wedding day. I want you to be very excited. And quite a bit scared. There should be an aspect of fear on the wedding day. Because the commitment that you're making. Is so so great isn't it? But that is the path to fruitfulness. And so in church life. You need.

To become. To be able to be hurt. Badly. To be willing for that. To let down the shield. And so many churches fellowship.

Is really shallow. Because of the reluctance. Word. Worship. Welcome. We live in a very lonely city.

[25 : 26] The Bible says. It is not good for people to be alone. And the church is to welcome one another warmly. Those from outside.

And if I said to you. Are we a welcoming church? I don't know what you'd say. I suspect we'd have a range of opinion here. And most of us think we're more welcoming than we are. And it is something isn't it?

That needs to be worked on all the time. And it's something we can never take for granted.

Welcoming. Lastly. Witness. Witness. It's not mentioned.

Witness. In the passage. And people use this passage. To talk about kind of taking the gospel to all the world. And that's a good thing. But I don't think it's exactly what this passage is teaching.

Can you see what happens? The Lord added to their number. Those who are being saved. What was it that made their witness so effective? To unbelievers. It was everything wasn't it? It was the church being the church.

[26 : 27] It was the preaching. It was the worship. It was the welcome. It was the impact on the community as a whole. So awe came on every soul. They looked at these Christians. And they said these Christians are different.

We've never seen people like this before. The way they behave. The way they treat each other. The way they love each other. The way they open up their homes. The way that they love us. And it impacted the community.

Because the church being the church. Wins the world. People praised God with glad and generous hearts. And they were praising God. And having favor with all the people. And when the church is as she should be.

People will come. People will come. When we are people as we should be. People will ask us about our faith. You won't have to go hunting.

And dig them up. They will come. It's an effective, powerful, fruitful witness. So what am I saying? Am I saying this is the way you put the pennies in the slot.

[27 : 26] And out will come great numerical growth. Am I saying numerical growth in church life is always guaranteed if you just get it right? I don't think we can say that. But I think we can say this.

It is normal. It usually is. But this is God's plan and purpose for his church. And I am a little bit too ready.

I'm a little bit too ready to hide behind the sovereignty of God. And sometimes churches are unwilling to look critically at themselves and say how are we falling down and where are we falling down?

John Stott said we need to recover this expectation of steady, uninterrupted church growth. Steady, uninterrupted church growth.

Daily those being saved. And if not, why not? Where is our weakness? Where are we failing as a church? Four simple words. Word, worship, welcome, witness.

[28 : 27] That's what we give ourselves to. That's what we concentrate on. That all our church activities come into one of those four spheres.

What are the areas of weakness? What do we need to strengthen? Do you believe this can happen? Or are you sitting there well thinking it's good in theory but I don't know.

Do you believe that God can bring people in and convert them? That we may not just see one person converted but many. Will you let it grip your heart?

Will you pray for it? Will you pray for it like you've never prayed before? Will we as leaders give ourselves to the strengthening of these aspects of our church? What is your church about?

They ask you. Well you've got four W's. What do you do in your church? Well what do we do? We hear the word of God. And we worship God as our maker.

[29 : 30] And if you come you'll be welcomed. Welcomed like you've never been welcomed before. And you will see that you'll go out into the community and world and witness. May God grant us grace to think about these things.

To pray about them. And to change. Amen.