

What Are You Devoted To?

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[0 : 0 0] Stephen and Bill said, it's great to be here. And if it has been difficult for you to be here, or if you're visiting or anything, it's really great to have you.

And it's so good to see you. And, you know, if you don't know, she had a bit of a situation. But she assures us, as she has spent times in places like the Amazon River, or she has had worse and crazier situations that she's been through.

So it's good to have you here this morning, and we continue to pray for you. It's good to have Favour here. He's with us this morning.

Another person doing work in Bells Hill for the glory of Christ with Cream International Chapel of His Glory, trying to reach out to those who are internationals, seeking asylum or over from other countries, helping to attend to poverty, and all really with the end of Christ, with the end to reach out to the lost in Christ.

Likewise, Kevin, great to have you here, someone who's been dedicated to Christ, a mad South African, dedicated to Christ, and serving this town in Bells Hill in Jesus' name.

[1 : 2 4] Yeah, and Bill, you know, retired pastor, spent many years serving this town and these people. Thank you. And it's great to have Janice back, who has a bridge into Israel, a wonderful, wonderful bridge that many of us don't have the privilege of having, and serving the people of Israel, really, to see their Messiah and to support them when the world is rejecting them.

So, wonderful to have you back, Janice. And if you want an opportunity to hear some of that, then July at the Ladies' Fellowship, we've been thinking about trying to crack that open and allow the men to come as well.

But there's an opportunity for you to hear from Janice in July, the 15th, I believe. Is it the 15th? Yeah. But we all have bridges into different areas of life, different people groups, different situations, different needs.

And they're all wonderful things that we're attending to, but the end is Christ. He's the main thing. And like Jesus said to His own religious leaders, you search the Scriptures because you think in them you'll find eternal life, but you don't know they talk about me.

Eternal life is in the Son. This morning we're going to look at Acts chapter 2. If you've got a Bible, please open to Acts chapter 2. A couple of weeks ago, you might remember that we looked at this time in Pentecost when hundreds of thousands of Jews were in Jerusalem for this feast.

[3 : 0 0] And their need to repent. Their need to turn around from their rejection of Jesus, their Messiah. And 3,000 of them did.

Much more would have heard Peter's Spirit-filled message showing from the prophets and the Psalms that Jesus is the Lord and Christ. Many more would have heard that.

And many of them were both convicted and convinced. And around 3,000 of them responded by repenting and being baptized in Jesus' name.

But repenting and being baptized in Jesus' name wasn't the end of it. What did they do after that? And so I'm going to read from verse 32 to verse 42.

Luke records this moment in Pentecost when Peter spoke to his fellow Jews.

[4 : 05] And this is what we read. Peter's words. This Jesus, God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses, being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself said, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus, whom you crucified.

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? 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, for the promises for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

And with many other words, he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation. Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls, and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Amen. Lord, we pray as we open your word and hear from your word that you would teach us by your Spirit, that you would impress on us what your Spirit is saying, and that we would look to you and devote ourselves to you, Christ, for in you is life and forgiveness.

[6 : 06] We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, what is the link between a boat, a soldier, a tax collector, three thousand new Christians, and an ex-magician?

Sounds like the start of a joke. What is the link between all these groups of people? Well, it is a Greek word. Proskarterecho.

This is the word that we're going to look at this morning. Proskarterecho. The word devotion. They devoted themselves to these things.

This word for devotion is used in a few different places in the New Testament, and seeing the examples of those will help us understand what it is that these new disciples are doing in Acts.

chapter 2. What are they doing? So, for instance, in Mark chapter 3, Mark chapter 3, Jesus asks his disciples to have a boat devoted to him.

[7 : 15] Now, he's not asking his disciples to get a boat ready to do morning devotions and prayers. This boat, proskarterecho. What is this boat to do?

What is Jesus asking his disciples to do with this boat? Similarly, in Acts chapter 10, Cornelius has soldiers devoted to him. These soldiers who are devoted to him.

What does that mean? In Acts chapter 8, Simon, the magician, after he believes, he devotes himself to Philip.

What does it mean that he's devoted to Philip? And in Romans chapter 13, Paul says that tax officials are devoted to the work of governing. What does he mean by that?

And so, in our passage this morning, 3,000 new disciples devote themselves to these particular things, the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

[8 : 21] Well, there's three things really I want to say about this to understand what it means to be a disciple. Number one, devotion is not just for the devout. Devotion is not just for the devout.

It's not just about being religious or pious. And so, for instance, in Acts chapter 10, when it talks about these soldiers devoted to Cornelius, listen to this.

And if you've got a Bible, you can turn to Acts chapter 10, verse 7. And I don't know how it's worded in your translation, but it says this. It says, When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attend him.

So, if you've got Acts chapter 10, verse 7, I wonder if you look at it, what the wording is. It says, He called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him.

They all have the same kind of wording, a devout soldier from those who attend him. Well, that word that these converts devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and so on and so forth, proskartireto.

[9 : 38] Where do you think that word is in Acts 10, verse 7? You might think it's that word, devout soldiers, but it's not. It's not, because that word, devout soldier, is a Greek word, eusebes.

It's not proskartireto. Actually, the word, proskartireto, is at the end of that verse when it says, those who attended him.

Attending. That's the sense of this word, proskartireto. Attending. And so, being devoted isn't necessarily about being devout or leveling up your morning devotions until you reach to the level of a monk.

That's not what it's about. It's actually about being continually ready and available for a certain thing. So, the boat, the boat in Mark chapter 3, Jesus asked his disciples, make that boat ready for me.

Continually ready so that whenever I need it, it's there and ready to serve me. Continually ready. An almost exclusive priority to a certain thing.

[10 : 49] And so, the soldier for Cornelius was continually ready to attend to him. Exclusive priority to Cornelius. Whenever you call, I will attend to you.

That's the word. That's what it means. You see, these 3,000 new converts made themselves continually ready to attend to particular things.

What are you always ready to attend to? In your life, wherever you come from, whatever your situation, what do you find yourself always ready to attend to?

You hear that on Father's Day, we hear the term he was a devoted father. That means he was always ready to attend to his kids. It doesn't mean that he was doing morning devotions all the time or devout.

Not that there's anything wrong with being devout. Being devout is a good thing, but that's not what it's talking about. These 3,000 new disciples were making themselves continually ready to attend to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, to the prayers.

[11 : 56] They were always standing ready to attend to these things, like the boat for Jesus or the soldiers for Cornelius. You will always find them nearby the thing that they're devoted to, always ready to serve that thing.

So these 3,000 new believers are devoted to these particular things. Let's notice a couple of things that Luke highlights in the way that he says this. Why does Luke say it in this way, that these devoted themselves to these things?

Well, number one, I think Luke is telling us that wherever these things were, wherever the apostles' teaching were, wherever the fellowship, wherever that was, wherever the breaking of the bread was, and wherever the prayers were, you would find these new believers always nearby these things.

I think that's what Luke implies. Wherever you found the apostles' teaching, you would find these new believers, 3,000 of them, always following the apostles' teaching, always following wherever the fellowship was, wherever the breaking of bread was, wherever the prayers were.

So wherever these things were, these new believers were always nearby. So can we say that? Whatever we are devoted to, we're always nearby those things.

[13 : 19] What does it mean to be devoted to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, to the prayers? Secondly, wherever these things were, the believers were always ready to be personal attendants of these things, always ready to serve these things.

Think about this, 3,000 people who at one point, the day before, or even the morning of that day, 3,000 Jewish people who at the start of that day were devoted to going to Jerusalem for these feasts because their Old Testament told them three times a year you must go to Jerusalem for these three feasts.

And they were devoted to that. They were devoted to the temple. They were devoted to the things of their religion. They were devoted to whatever they were devoted to.

But by the end of the day, suddenly, they were devoted to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, this group of ragtag disciples from Galilee.

And they were always making themselves ready to serve these things, controversial things in their day. the things that they were devoting themselves to were controversial in that city, in that town, in that day.

[14 : 43] And they were against the flow of the world. You see, being devoted to these things, even today, being devoted to these things will get you into trouble. Yeah?

You know it, brother. Get you into trouble. Are you devoted to the Word of God? Because if you are, Jesus says, the world will hate you.

You will get into trouble for these things in the world, and sadly, in some churches, you will get into trouble for being devoted to the apostles' teaching. And one of the reasons the trouble, the churches start to go astray, is they stop being devoted to the Word of God, to the apostles' teaching, to these things.

And if you are devoted to them, then you are standing by these things, standing by God's Word, even when it goes against the grain of society. So, these 3,000 new believers, they were devoted to something that was going against the flow of their national leaders.

The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the chief priests, they were devoting themselves to something that went against the grain of them. Why were they doing that?

[16 : 01] Why on earth would they do that when they saw what these people did to Jesus? Well, firstly, because Peter corrected their view, this Jesus, whom you crucified, he's not dead anymore.

God raised him and made him both Lord and Christ. The chief priests got it wrong about Jesus. Don't you get it wrong as well? For them personally, they realized that this group of people, these disciples with a Galilean accent, ragtag group of Jesus followers, they actually represented true Judaism.

You've got to remember in Acts chapter 2, in Acts chapter 2, the church had no Gentiles in it yet. The church was a disagreement between Jews as to what true Judaism was.

The chief priests, the Pharisees, the Sadducees said it was one thing. Jesus and his apostles said, no, this is true Judaism. And now, these 3,000 new converts decided, they realized through the Spirit convicting them through Peter's sermon, that this is actually what they were supposed to be doing.

this is why Paul says, the apostle Paul who persecuted the church because he was a zealous Jew, he said in Acts chapter 24, when he was accused by his fellow unbelieving Jews, he said, they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me.

[17 : 39] However, this is a charge that I will admit. I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the way. He used to persecute the way, and now he sees, no, wait a minute.

The way is the true way to worship God. True worship of God is through Jesus the Son. And so Paul says, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the way, which they call a sect.

I believe everything that's in accordance with the law and what is written in the prophets. So to be devoted to these things, the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread, the prayers, is to be continually ready in the service of Christ along with the people of Jesus.

To not devote yourself to these things is to the detriment of your faith. It's not meant to be an extra thing. It's not like level two of discipleship.

It is simply discipleship. It's what it means to be a disciple and a follower of Jesus. Paul says, a follower of the way. To devote yourself to the apostles' teaching.

[18 : 56] Why the apostles' teaching? Why does it say it? Why does Luke say the apostles' teaching and not the Word of God? Certainly, he means the Word of God. But I think in a pointed way he is saying the apostles are the ones who hold the true interpretation of the Word of God because they preach Jesus to which the Word of God points to.

Their interpretation of the Bible is the true interpretation of the Bible because they are the witnesses who are filled with the Spirit. When Jesus says, there are many more things that I need to say to you, but you can't bear them.

But when the Spirit of truth comes, He will lead you into all truth. Now, who did the Spirit come to? It wasn't the chief priests and Sadducees and Pharisees. It was the apostles.

The Spirit came to the apostles to speak the truth of Jesus to which we now have right here. And I think that's why Luke says they were devoted to the apostles' teaching.

Because the apostles' teaching is the teaching of Jesus. to devote yourself to these things. The teaching of Jesus, the truth. Because this was always the truth about God, the truth about Jesus, the truth about humanity and about sin, about death and forgiveness and life, about salvation, to which all of redemptive history was pointing towards and a shadow of.

[20 : 29] It's not just about being devoted, it's about what we are devoted to that's important. There are many Christians who are turned off at the word doctrine as if doctrine is just for preachers and teachers and professors.

But if only we knew how much we were being indoctrinated every day, indoctrinated by the world. I mean, me and Jen are very aware, along with many friends, where we send our kids to school will in one way or another indoctrinate them in one way or another.

We need to be careful about that. People might say it's not about doctrine, it's about Jesus. Yes, but how would he even know anything about Jesus without any doctrine to tell us who he is?

Now, where do we get all this information and truth about Jesus except through the apostles' teaching? Even Paul himself, who wrote the New Testament, most of the New Testament said in Philippians chapter 3, I want to know Christ.

I want to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship and have share in his sufferings. Not that I've already obtained this or I'm perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

[21 : 45] Being devoted to these things is not about becoming more spiritual, but it's to know more the one who made you his own. If you want to know more about the one who is the way in a world when many people are telling you to go a different way, then you need this.

If you want to know truth in a world full of lies and deception, then why wouldn't you want to devote yourself to the truth? If you want to know life in a world that doesn't control or supply life, then you're going to go after Jesus just like Peter did when he said, to whom else would we go?

He has the words of eternal life. Here's the thing. If only we knew how much we were being preached to every single day in the world with messages that are neither true nor do they lead to life, then we would sit through any length of unpacking of the apostles' teaching.

We would gather with any fellowship of true believers. How will we know it to be true unless we devote ourselves?

We are accountable for who we sit under. And I say that of myself as well. Each one of us are accountable to the teaching that we sit under. What are we devoted to?

[23 : 05] How often are we picking up the Word of God while we have it? Praise God we have the freedom for this just now, but may it never be that we would not take advantage of that while the days are growing darker.

Devotion is not unique. There are many ways that people can be devoted. Before I was a Christian I was absolutely devoted to being a DJ. I spent my time and energy and money on it.

You wouldn't spend long with me without hearing about it. The question is what are we devoted to? And that's not to say we can't have interests and things like that.

But if we're not clinging to Christ what are we devoted to? To what are we making ourselves continually ready?

This is a real challenge. I found this challenging. What am I always ready to do? Am I always ready to fly off the handle when something goes wrong? Am I so impatient that I'm always ready to act out in anger?

[24 : 09] Are we always ready to criticize someone? Are we always ready to find fault in the person next to us? I was grateful for the example at the Bible study Jeff, a guy visiting told us of the angry man in the car behind him and his reaction to that anger and then the prompt from the Lord maybe maybe you should pray for him.

I've seen people who are continually ready to fight continually ready to sin just always waiting for an opportunity.

I've also seen people who are continually ready to encourage continually ready to help people. Are we ready to attend to the things that bring life or death?

To what are we devoted and does it bring life or death? Finally, three, devotion is not something that someone else does for you. It says in Acts 2.42 they devoted themselves.

That's not to say that you won't be fed like a newborn on milk until it's old enough for meat but our health and growth and joy as Christians is not going to happen by someone else doing something for us but rather by us giving ourselves to certain things.

[25 : 28] What do we give ourselves to? We're either deliberately or not. We're either going to give our time and priority to one thing or another. What is it and what does that do for you?

Does it benefit you? Does it benefit your soul? Does the fact that it takes your priority then benefit the relationships you have? Some people misunderstand for instance the whole love God first thing.

What does it mean to love God? What even more than my wife and child? I remember talking to someone who was asked this by their child do you love God more than me? Difficult question to answer but it's misunderstood and so one of the things that I said I think that we need to remember in these things is your love for God will set the tone of your love both for others and yourself.

although it's true that we are utterly marred by sin God has made us in his own image God has given us his own son that we might be redeemed God loves us so much that he died to rescue us that we are important to him but that no one else in all creation has demonstrated more love for us than God but not just for you God has not just demonstrated that love for you he's also demonstrated that love for the people that we don't like very much and so more than we love the more we love God the more we will love others and so even when the child asks their parent do you love me more than God or do you love God more than me I think it would be appropriate to simply say the more I love God the more I love you that's the way it goes it's not that God is some egotistical maniac desperate for our attention he knows how we are made because he made us and the more we love him the more we are able to love others what are we giving our time to and our priority to what's the thing that we are never far away from whether deliberate or not what are we devoted to that our friends could point out and say they're devoted to that they're always about that and so these disciples 3,000 of them they devoted themselves they made a choice and that word particularly means that they made a choice to continue it's not a one-time thing *proskartirete* means continually continually ready continual attendance it's not a one-time deal it's not a once and done it's a daily thing continually ready to attend and so is that not true do we not all here know that it's not a one-time thing

I'll give you a question to demonstrate that because of the decision if you've well whoever you are but if you've given your life to Christ think of when that was right if you know the moment think back to then for me it was 2005 round about springtime for you when was it now because of that decision way back then did that make you automatically appear in your seat this morning no it was your choice this morning praise God and so it's true isn't it it's not an automatic thing we devote ourselves it's not a one-time thing how did you get here your choice years ago to believe in Jesus didn't put you in your seat this morning it was your choice today to continue in that which brought you here today and it might not have been too difficult it wasn't too difficult for me to get here for some of you it would have been difficult to get here some of you are fighting things to get here this morning but you got here you made a choice to get here that choice reflects what you are devoted to praise

[29 : 41] God there are people in other countries where it is a difficult thing think about the covenants years ago if you've ever been to one of those monuments you think I don't know if I would have went there that time in the morning in a wee hideout in the woods you yourselves know there are other things in life when you know that choice is today and not a one time thing years ago it's like in Exodus when God gave them bread they had to make a choice to go out and gather it and that choice was a daily choice they didn't gather enough bread in one day to last them a lifetime and so you cannot live off of yesterday's grace we need to know that as Christians you can't live off of yesterday's grace just like they couldn't live off of yesterday's manner thank

God his mercies are new every morning great is his faithfulness Jesus says don't worry about tomorrow tomorrow will worry about itself every day has enough trouble of its own Paul says don't lose heart though outwardly we're wasting away yet inwardly we are being renewed not once and for all but day by day day by day yesterday's gone it disappears quickly tomorrow will come sooner than we think and it will have its own troubles troubles that our grace today won't be able to solve and probably troubles that your worries today will never anticipate so where is the truth today where is the manner today for us to devote ourselves to go out and gather for you've come here today for manna you've come because you're devoted to the word of life what are you devoting yourselves to so let me finish just with two more things firstly an encouragement and secondly something to do the encouragement is this the fact that you are here this morning is way more significant than you realize the fact that you are here this morning is a greater victory against darkness than you realize there is an enemy that is scheming against every one of you whether you're a

Christian or not scheming against every one of you to keep you in darkness and drag you to hell the fact that you are here this morning is more significant than you realize if you are anything like me that you drag yourself out of bed every Sunday for years I counted it's something I think for you it'll be way more right but for me I think it's about 990 Sundays that I could have been in my bed that you drag yourself out of bed and out of your house to be around people who love Jesus to hear the word of God to pray in faith with others to speak and sing truth to one another to praise together to remember Jesus sacrifice and break and bread and how he has made us his own to proclaim good news together and look towards his appearing together to stir one another up to love and good works the fact that you give yourself to this you give your time to this is way more significant than we realize it's a greater victory today this morning than you realize that does you way more good than you know imagine if you gave much less time to these things just imagine imagine you gave yourself less time to hearing the truth or to hearing the good news or to being with people who know the mercy of God to being with people who have faith and hope to remember God's sacrifice and love for us to remind one another of his promises imagine we gave ourselves much less to this what would that do it would be a shipwreck what would it do to us and our relationships if we gave much less time to this so be encouraged if you are already given your time to this be encouraged this is not a message to beat us up on how little we do and how little our devotions are it's not about being devout it's being ready to give ourselves to these things and the fact that you are here today shows that you are ready to give yourself to these things look at what you're giving yourself to it's not just an old dusty wooden building that you're giving yourselves to you're not here because you love the coffee you're here because you love the

Lord and his word you're here because you love his people as frustrating as we are to one another you love sharing this forgiveness and mercy with others who know the Lord isn't it good it's good to be here it's so good to be here we should build a tent like Peter said be encouraged to be continually ready for glorifying God increasing your joy and giving you life through the word of God Jesus has spoken to us through his witnesses he's given us these words the three thousand chose to make their ears and hearts continually ready to receive and attend to these truths continually ready it's good it's good that we are here I'm going to finish with something to do you think oh no more on top of my already busy life he gives me one more thing to do it's just simply to say no one else is going to do this for us but we can do this so give your time to attend to things that will help you to know

Jesus more because the end of these things is not our religiosity it's not us being pious it's not us ticking the box in our attendance it is to know Jesus more the end of these things for the disciples these three thousand people who devoted themselves the end for them wasn't attending these things in and of themselves the end was Jesus it's not about having attendance or religious service or even a clear conscience though we want that the reason for devotion is Christ they were devoted to the way he was their goal because in him is life he's the origin and source of every living thing because he himself is the living God he is absolutely buzzing with life and gives it to whoever he wills and so let us get excited each day in little ways to attend to the things of life that will help us to know Jesus more because he will never ever disappoint us the fact that you're here today more significant than you realize let me pray

[36 : 51] Lord we thank you so much that you have come to us before we ever came to you indeed we could never come to you unless you drew us to yourself no one can come to the father except through the son and no one can come to the son unless he is drawn by the father and so we thank you please let us know that there is a battle going a battle for the truth a battle for souls it is not insignificant that Luke said that about three thousand souls were added that day and Lord if you have added us to your people and your number to know and love Jesus to be forgiven and redeemed by him then please give us the strength to continually be ready to attend to him to look to him to be with his people to devote ourselves to his word to know that life is in no other no other word and no other name and no other person than Jesus

Christ our Lord and let us glorify him together forever