

# A picture of the early church

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Preacher: Daniel Chapallaz

[0:00] We're going to turn to Acts chapter 2, that reading that we had from God's Word there. Before we look at it, though, let's ask for God's help. Let's ask Him to speak to us through His living word this morning.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you so much that we can very freely open your word together this morning.

And Father, we believe as a church that when we open your word, we are hearing you speak. And so we pray that we would hear you again speaking to us.

As we hear from this passage, as we hear it explained. Speak to all of our hearts, we pray. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. If you were to look through someone's social media pages, you might work out what the people that you're looking at are devoted to.

[1:11] What are they interested in? Who are they following? What are they posting about? I think if you were to look at my own Instagram page, I think you'd discover that I'm devoted to a few things.

First of all, food. There'll be various brownies that I've baked or cheesecakes that I've made or food that I've eaten.

Cornish pasties, cream teas, things like that. So food would be the first thing. I think another thing would be running. There'll be a couple of posts about running.

I've done a few half marathons. Love going out for runs. So that might be another thing you might learn. Another thing, and probably most importantly, is Becky.

My wife, pictures of us dating, getting married, etc. What are you devoted to? If we were to scroll through your social media, if you have such a thing, what would it show you're devoted to or interested in?

[2:18] Family, children, grandchildren, your work, your football team, your music, gaming. What are you devoted to?

In this passage in Acts chapter 2 that we're looking at, we see what the very early church were devoted to as they met together.

And thinking of photos and Instagram and social media, etc. I think it's helpful for us to think of this passage as a snapshot of the early church or a picture of the early church.

So we're going to look at Calvary Church Jerusalem's completely made up Instagram page this morning and see what they devoted to.

I guess many of us, when it comes to church, we like to think we know how church should be done. Maybe we think church should be how it was 30 years ago, how Calvary Church was 30 years ago.

[3:24] We look on those of the good old days. If only we could go back there. Or maybe we look back at another church that we've been part of elsewhere and we think, if only church was like that.

You can even go to the back corner of this room and see the history of our church. And it's important that we're reminded of the history. And you can gaze back on what the Lord has done in the past.

But actually what we really need to do is look at the Bible. And look and see how church was for people then. And here in Acts 2, 42 to 47, we get this really helpful picture of church life.

Let me just say it is an extraordinary picture. It was extraordinary times. The day of Pentecost, the Spirit had just come upon God's people. It was a unique time.

God was establishing His church. But also, I think we'll see that the things they were devoted to are very ordinary things. Things that a church today should be devoted to.

[4:45] Just very ordinary things. And we'll see that in a moment. We'll see three big things from this passage. The first one, a lot longer because there's several things to see.

And then two briefer points towards the end. So, firstly, devoted. What are they devoted to? Four things. Verse 40t. The first one is this.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. So, if you're going to go on their social media page and their Instagram page, you would see pictures of people listening to the Word of God. They were devoted to sitting together and listening to the Word of God. This word, devoted, I should have said, literally means they steadfastly continued it.

I mean, they kept going with intense effort. Maybe it was hard to be together at times. But they kept going. They knew this was important.

[5:54] They were going to go. And why were they going to? Because they've had their lives transformed by the Lord Jesus. They've heard a sermon from Peter, which we heard last week. It was all about Jesus.

And at the end, they said, what shall we do? And Peter said, repent. Which means turn around. Completely turn around. From your ways of living and turn to follow Jesus.

They've got a new purpose. A new reason for living. And that's the Lord Jesus. And so that's why they're devoted to these things. And the first one is hearing of him in his words.

Listening to the teaching of the apostles. The apostles who'd spent time with the Lord Jesus. Who were the best people for them to learn from when it comes to Jesus.

You could imagine them saying, tell us more about Jesus, Peter. Tell us more about the things you saw him do.

[6:56] Tell us more about the things you heard him teach. Tell us more. More. More about Jesus. What was Jesus like for you, John?

How was it following him? Tell us more. More about Jesus. They had precious, precious times.

Listening to the apostles teach about Jesus. And as they listened, they were filled with awe.

We see that in verse 43. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. The apostles taught.

But there was also these wonders and signs they were doing. What's that about? Well, just like we saw when Peter was talking to them about Jesus last week.

[7:56] About him doing miracles, signs, wonders. Jesus, which showed to the people this was God working amongst you.

Listen to him. So God was showing to these early believers, these apostles, that they are my sent ones. That they are, they have the authority to tell you about Jesus.

To communicate about him. Listen to them. Listen to them. And these wonders and signs are amazing. And maybe we think, if only wonders and signs could be done in our meetings on Sundays.

And they could be. We don't want to limit God. But that's not the normal pattern of things. God was saying to the people, as the apostles were teaching, you can listen to them.

You can trust them. And to show it, I'm going to do these wonderful things through them. And that's not, notice that the wonders and signs, that's not what the church were devoted to.

[9:06] They weren't devoted to looking at the wonders and signs.

Sometimes they were in awe of them, but they were devoted to listening to the apostles' teaching. And so we need to ask ourselves, are we devoted to listening to God's word?

Are we devoted to the apostles' teaching? How could we benefit from the apostles' teaching? Well, the New Testament is full of it. Many of the apostles have written God's word.

And the apostles' teaching is built on the prophets. And we have that in the Bible, too. Last week we saw Peter quoting a sermon from David and from Joel.

So we have God's word, God's living word in front of us in the Bible. We can listen to the apostles' teaching. We can listen to Jesus in the word of God.

So are we devoted to listening to God's word? There's lots of voices we could listen to in our world. Literally, there's lots of voices.

[10:24] It seems everyone has a podcast these days. There's over 5 million podcasts in the world, apparently. And over 70 million episodes

at the beginning of 2024.

That's a lot of things you can listen to. You can plug your headphones in and listen to voices on politics, on entertainment, on TV shows, movies, games, quizzes.

You can even listen to sermons. You can listen to God's word explained. You can listen to people talk about theology. So many voices we can listen to, but the highest voice is God speaking through his words.

Are we devoted to listening to it? Are we devoted to being together and listening to God's words? I guess if we're here this morning, it's a sense in which we are.

It's great to gather here together and listen together to God speaking to us. Are we devoted to being here to do that?

[11:29] And Sunday morning isn't the only opportunity we have to do that. We can come again at the end of the Lord's day and hear God's word in the evening.

Are we devoted to being there? If we can. I know many of us have good reasons for not being able to be there. But if we're devoted to listening to God's word, could you be that?

God speaks to us through his word. Are we listening to it? Are we devoted? Are we making efforts? It might be hard.

Maybe we need to wake up earlier in the morning. I think I do. To be able to listen to God's voice properly in the morning. Each day. Do we need to fight a bit more to get to church week by week? Are we devoted to the word of God? The next thing on the Calvary Church Jerusalem Instagram page that we might see is pictures of people being together.

[12:40] Because they were devoted to fellowship. Pictures of people eating together, sitting together, chatting together, praying together.

That's all you'd see, I think, if this early church had an Instagram page. They're devoted to fellowship. And we had a sermon all about fellowship back in September last year.

So if you want a half an hour sermon on fellowship to listen to, do go back and listen to that from September. And what we said on that day was fellowship is sharing together in the life of God.

Sharing together in the life of God. Each of us shares fellowship with God. We've been brought into the life of God. If we're Christians here this morning, we are united together in Him.

And so fellowship is far deeper than just having tea and coffee after a church service. It is that. But it runs so much deeper.

[13:48] We're united together in the life that we've found in God. And this church family, back in Acts chapter 2, they knew that it was important for them then to be together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

They devoted themselves to being together. That's why church days away are good things for us to help one another be together. We don't want to limit it to that because that's just one day of the year.

But do you think about coming next year? Should we get the opportunity? It's important for us to note that fellowship was something they're devoted to.

It's particularly important for us because this might be hard for us in our sort of individualistic society. I'm struggling to say it.

We kind of need to get over the idea that we're coming to church for ourselves. We are. We benefit from being here.

[15:06] It's going to do us good. But that's not primarily why we should come together. We should come to be together in Christ to encourage one another as we're living for Jesus in what is a hard world to live for him in.

We're not just here for ourselves. We're here for one another. Because we've been joined together. And we share together in the life of God. And so are we devoted?

Are we devoted to fellowship? Are we devoted to being together? Are we devoted to getting involved in one another's lives? As you look around the room, do you know who everyone is?

Do you know what people are going through? Do you know what they may need some help in? Do you know what you could pray for them? Are we devoted to being together?

To fellowship? To enjoying and helping one another as we share together in the life of God? An expression of their fellowship here is seen in verse 44 and 45.

[16:37] I think we can learn from. Verse 44. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

They sold property and possessions. Now this wasn't everybody was selling up their homes. Otherwise, where would they live and sleep? And actually verse 46 said they broke bread in their homes.

They had homes to be in. But what they were doing, they were being very generous with their possessions. They weren't holding on to them and saying, this is mine. Don't touch. I'm not sharing it with you. Rather, they were willing to give things away as people had need. Someone needs a saucepan? I've got five saucepan.

Here's one for you. I remember being amazed by an old housemate of mine. He was a Christian guy and he was in a position to buy a new car, which he bought.

[17:44] And he gave his old car away for free to someone who was in need of a car. That's amazing. And that's the sort of thing that would have been going on here if they had cars.

These people, they were learning how to follow Jesus. They were hearing of him in the apostles' teaching.

And Jesus himself, he said, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me in the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age.

Homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields along with persecutions. And in the age to come, eternal life. If we're following the Lord Jesus, we're not lacking anything.

We have so many blessings. And we have eternal life to look forward to. So we don't need to hold on tightly to our things. We can if there's need in the church family.

[18:51] Pass things on. We can be generous. The Lord Jesus has been so generous to us. He laid down his life for us to give us eternal life.

In the back hall, pretty sure it's still there. By where we have tea and coffee, there's like a needs and offers board. Someone is in need of something. You can put on there that you have need of something.

And maybe we should pay a bit more attention to that and think, oh, could I help this person who's in need? There's also an offers board.

Maybe you have something to offer, something to give away. A reason to be generous. Maybe you could put that on there as well. It doesn't just have to be physical things.

Perhaps we've got a bit of time in the week where we could help someone in some way. How could we use our time? Be generous to one another as we share together in the life of God.

[20:00] Next, on the Instagram page of Calvary Church Jerusalem, they were devoted to the breaking of bread. I don't think we need to spend long on this because we've had several sermons about communion just recently.

I don't need to remind you that as we take the Lord's Supper, as we take the bread and wine, as we break that bread, there are symbols reminding us of his body and blood.

And as we take them, it is like we are feeding upon Christ in our hearts by faith. Are we devoted to being here on the first Sunday of the month when we share communion?

Are we devoted to being here this evening, the third Sunday of the month, when we have an evening communion service? Are we devoted to that? So there would be pictures of them sharing bread and wine together.

A final thing they're devoted to, they're devoted to prayer. So there would be pictures of their prayer meetings maybe. See, all their life together was done in dependence upon the Lord in prayer.

[21:26] Spurgeon, the Baptist minister, once said this of prayer meetings. He said, keep up the prayer meeting. Whatever else flags, it is the great business meeting of the church.

The best service between the Sabbaths. Be sure to make it so. He saw the importance of prayer together as believers.

The prayer life of the church is important. Every Wednesday evening there is an opportunity to be together and pray to the living God.

If you could spend an hour every Wednesday with the prime minister of our country, would you take up that opportunity?

Speaking to the one who is in power, who may be able to do something about all your problems. I think we have something even better as Christians, don't we?

[22:40] It's by meeting together in that back hall on a Wednesday evening, we can meet together with God and speak to Him in prayer. What an amazing privilege. It's not just then that prayer happens.

Prayer isn't limited to an hour in the week. 9.30 on a Sunday morning, we gather to pray on Zoom for what we're doing now.

We pray in our services. We express our dependence upon God in prayer. That's important.

But it doesn't have to just be for the formal times together. We can pray together in other ways. The tea and coffee time. As you're sharing fellowship with one another then, and someone says, I'm struggling with this.

Why not say, well, let's pray about that. We could do that informally. And I know that happens. And thank you to those particularly who do that.

[23:46] It's something for us all to be learning and growing in. Prayer. We need to be in dependence upon the Lord for what we're doing together as a church, as we're living the Christian life.

Prayer. Prayer. There's two more things, two more shorter points from this passage. Secondly, I think we see that they're united together.

They're united together. Three times we see the word together in this passage.

So verse 44, all the believers were together. And verse 46, every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

They were together. They were a united community. United because they found life from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[24:52] He has turned their lives around. They're united together. And unity in the Bible is an important thing. Just a couple of examples.

Firstly, from Psalm 133 in the Old Testament. How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity.

For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. The unity of God's people is important. But in the New Testament, Jesus talks about it as well.

So John 20. In fact, he doesn't just talk about it, but he prays about it. John 20. Sorry, John 17, 20. Verse 20 even.

John 17, verse 20. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.

[25:57] That all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us. So that the world may believe that you have sent me.

I have given them the glory you gave me. That they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me. So that they may be brought to complete unity.

Then the world will know that you sent me. And have loved them. Even as you have loved me.

Being united together as God's people is important.

Jesus prays about it. That's how important it is. And being united together is a kind of visual aid for the world to show who our God is.

He himself is united as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And so as he is united.

[27:08] Three in one. So his people ought to be united together. And it's also I think a visual aid of his grace. As he has welcomed us in.

As sinful people who don't deserve his kindness in any way. But nonetheless he's welcomed us in. So we should welcome and share fellowship.

With all sorts of people. Here in this place. As a visual aid. To the world of God's great grace.

So that as people passing by this church building on a Sunday morning. A Sunday evening. People on Viadup Road and London Road.

As they see random people. Flocking into this place. It should be a visual aid to them. Of the gospel.

[28:11] It should strike them. What's going on there? Why are those people going in there? Do you ever think to pray for people passing by our church on a Sunday? I think we're shit.

So as this church was devoted to following Jesus. And as they were united together. We find that they were really blessed. The first blessing we see. I think three. In verse 47. They were praising God together. They were a people full of praise. For God had changed their lives. Turned their lives around through Jesus the son of God. Who Peter said you helped him to die. But he died there for you. And they repented. Their lives were turned around.

[29:18] And so their meetings involved praising God. Just as our meeting should involve that tea. That's why we began. Praise my soul. The king of heaven.

Why do we praise him? Because we've been ransomed. We've been healed. We've been restored. And we've been forgiven. And so we sing. Together as God's people.

Who like me. His praise should sing. Praise him. Praise him. Praise him. Praise him. Praise the everlasting king.

It was a great blessing. As we praise God together. Secondly. They had the blessing of the favor of all the people.

Verse 47. They were praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. People in their community. Seeing this extraordinary community of believers together.

[30:18] They were going wow. Look what's going on there. We love what they're doing. It's amazing what God's doing there. It was extraordinary.

But also as I said earlier. It's also quite ordinary. What they're doing is really rather ordinary. They were doing things that we're doing today.

They were sitting there. And they were listening to the teaching of the Bible. They were sitting there. And they were having fellowship with one another. They were being together as God's people.

We're doing that now. We'll continue to do that. After the service is finished. They were breaking bread. They were sharing communion. We're going to do that this evening.

And they were praying. Which we've done this morning. Just very ordinary things. And people are going wow. Look at what they're doing. We'll see very shortly.

[31:22] That persecution comes. To God's people. Not everyone. Will look upon them and go wow. I want to be part of this.

I love what they're doing. Not all of them. But God was showing. Among this community.

The truth. In Jesus' words. Jesus who said. By this shall all men know. That you are my disciples. If you love one another. And it may be that as we seek to be devoted to Jesus.

To the teaching of the words. To fellowship. To the breaking of bread. To prayer. It may be that some people will look upon what we're doing and go wow.

This is great what you're doing as a church. and maybe people will be brought in to the life of the church as part of this because that's what happens next. Verse 47, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

[32:36] They were growing in numbers. The Lord was remarkably blessing the church as it was being established.

But notice who was doing the adding because it wasn't the 3,000 people who were adding to their number. It was the Lord, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. It's a reminder to us that we can't change people's hearts. We can't make people repent. We can preach the gospel, and we must.

We can live faithfully for the Lord Jesus as his witnesses, and we must. Acts shows us that. But we're not the ones who are going to save people.

That's something the Lord will do. And we pray. We must pray. Pray for conversions. Pray for people who we know. Pray for this city, that people will come to know the Lord.

[33:42] Pray that the Lord will add to his church. Here at Calvary, here in the other churches in the city. It was a great joy to have Barnaby from Lansing Tab Church join us yesterday at our church day away.

And he was saying, when we were asking him, what can we pray for? He was saying, pray for conversions. That's what we should want.

We should be interested in our church growing because we should be interested in souls being saved from hell.

So let's pray for it. And let's ask for God's help. Let's ask that God might use our witness to this neighborhood, to this city, to bring people to him.

The work of God is done here through the gathered local church that is devoted to him, to the teaching of the Bible, to fellowship, to breaking of bread, to prayer.

[34:55] And there are people who are united together and who are so blessed by the Lord. Let's pray. That God would do this work in us.

Let's pray. Father God, we're encouraged but also challenged by this passage. Father, we pray that you'd help each one of us to be devoted to listening to your voice, to reading your words, to sitting under the preaching of your words.

Help us to be devoted to fellowship with one another. Father, thank you that we share together in the life of God. Thank you for your work in us, joining us together.

We have deep bonds of fellowship that bring us together. Help us to be devoted to that. Help us to be devoted to the breaking of bread, to coming around the Lord's table, to be reminded of what Jesus has done for us as he's transformed our lives.

And Father, help us to continually be devoted to prayer, to depending on you. we so need to be. So help us and grow us in these things as a church.

[36:21] Grow us in unity together, Lord, we pray. And Lord, bless us.

Lord, would we see many men, women, boys and girls in this city added to our number.

Save souls, we pray. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.