

God's Community

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[0:00] Now people would know we're at King James Bible Church here, but I'm going to break from tradition and read from the TICV. It's the tongue-in-cheek version. The tongue-in-cheek version of Acts 2.

The TICV, a modern version. It says this. It's Acts 2 verse 44. And all those who had believed were apart and had nothing in common. And they began hoarding their possessions and property and neglecting anyone who might have need.

And once a week the religious met for Sunday morning worship. And twice a week the spiritual met for Sunday morning worship plus Sunday evening worship plus Wednesday night Bible study.

And all assembled with a divided mind in their own churches, on their own corners. And afterwards they all retreated to their houses in suburbia to live the rest of their week apart from each other.

And in a lifestyle acceptable to their pagan neighbours. And they ate alone in sadness and insecurity, blaming God for their troubles. And they were laughed at by their neighbours and God withheld from their midst any power or blessing.

[1:11] And their number decreased day by day. That's how someone put it. So it's a good little laugh really. But it's true, isn't it? We're going to go to the real version now. Acts 2 verse 44.

Acts 2 verse 44. And all that believed were together and had all things common. And sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need.

And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house. Did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

So that's more like it, isn't it? So we know that the church of God really, it's God's plan, isn't it? It's God's perfect plan. God's community really.

And no man is an island. And really it's the same with Christianity. We're meant to be a community. And our Christianity is meant to be contagious. It says, Gallup poll figures suggest, and these are old figures, but there's 10 to 12 million born again stay at home believers in the USA.

[2:25] 10 to 12 million. They say they're born again, but they stay at home. They don't go to church. They don't fellowship. 76% of Americans believe that a person can be a good Christian without belonging to a church.

So there's this problem of a churchless Christian. And when we're doing door knocking and reaching out, you often get people, oh, I believe, I'm a believer, but I haven't gone to church for, you know, donkeys years.

In theory, that's possible. A Christian without a church is like a soldier without an army. A citizen who won't vote. A sailor without a ship. A child without a family.

A drummer without a band. A footy play without a team. A honeybee without a hive. A scientist who does not share his findings with his colleagues. A philosophy of many these days is, I want a church that meets my needs.

And they go shopping for one. One that will satisfy their spiritual hunger. But when you think about it, really, it's more than really satisfying our longings. It's about what is God saying.

[3:27] Are we hearing God through spiritual teaching? Are we fellowshiping, showing those opportunities to love and to serve? To some, if a church does not fulfil their expectations, their wants and preferences, they move on to another.

And another. Like almost going shopping, isn't it? Oh, this department store doesn't have what I'm looking for. It doesn't have the merchandise. I'll find one that's more appealing to my taste.

And some are like that with their church shopping, church hopping. Sadly, and probably without realising it, many congregations now think that they have to do all these things and plan all these activities to meet people's needs so that they will not leave.

Whatever happens to the attitude, I'd like to be a part of this congregation because of what I can do to meet its needs. When are we most fulfilled? When are our needs most met?

Or when we meet the needs of God's church, the assembly of God, the congregation of God, that we might serve God and do his will. So let's not demand that a church be a place where people cater to our desires or preferences.

[4:36] Let's ask for and work to make the church fellowship a place of people where we can serve and belong to, where we can practice humility, where we can sacrifice ourselves in his name, where we can help one another, where we can be a part of a congregation, of a community of God.

The early believers were a community. They were a close-knit fellowship. There was a closeness there. It was special. They were linked. They were joined together.

And God wants that for his church. It's not something that's been superseded. It's always been God's plan. Back in Acts, that unified, joined-together community was really a testimony, wasn't it? And we're going to look at some of the hallmarks of that church of God in Acts. And we see, firstly, number one, it was a caring entity.

It was a caring community. It says how they were together. They had all things common. They cared about people's needs. And when you look at the world, and there's worldly communities that sometimes are more caring than we as the church of God.

[5:44] And I was talking with someone lately. They're part of some secular concern that helps homeless people. And I thought, what a good work they're doing. He is a Christian, but I just thought, why couldn't the church be doing more in that way?

How could we be more so? If the world can do such, but what about what God's community is doing? Are we showing ourselves to be that loving, caring family, that our faith is evident, it's in action, it's caring, it's meeting needs?

And it says all that believed. They had faith. They had trust. There was faith that motivated them, that led them. The faith that lived, that served, that changed their lives and others.

So God's church is a gathering of believers. They believed, it says. It's not a club of people getting together in some kind of religious habit or ritual or tradition.

It's believers getting together. As we believe God, as we have faith in God's word and we obey it. The truth of God's word guides that which we do. And our caring includes caring enough to tell people the truth too.

[6:54] That we won't hold back from telling people the truth. Some would think that caring is not calling people to repent or not urging people to get things right.

But caring is telling the truth. To reach people for Christ. To tell the truth in love. And to do something to meet people's needs along the way.

If we could go back in time, through some time warp. You know, step through the time zone. The time warp, as it were. Not that you can. But if we could travel back, what would we see?

In Acts 2, here was a time when the Roman government were actively hurting Christians. They were persecuting the church.

Imagine if they would have come into the service. They'd sent spies into the Christians. And as it's recorded by people of the time, it says that they did come and have a look at the church.

[7:52] And they saw what the congregation, what the believers were doing. And they saw that this was strange. They did not have the idols that they fell down to, that they worshipped. But they worshipped the one, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it says that it's recorded of the early church that it was said of them, how those Christians love each other. How they have fellowship one with the other. And so that's a really good testimony, isn't it?

Of that fellowship. Of that practical care. Of that loving body that was the church. What about today?

How can we have that heart that we consider one another? That we consider meeting the needs of our brothers and sisters? It says of them that they shared their meals together.

That they shared their lives together. And yet it seems in some ways, even in a church, we can feel isolated or not cared for.

[8:51] It's interesting, the word fellowship, *koinonia*, is the word. And it's said of the Greek of the New Testament. It's called *koina* Greek.

In other words, common. It was the common language. It was the common Greek. So *koina* means it was common to everyone. And it's interesting that like word *koinonos* is partners in Luke 5 verse 10.

Where they were fishing, they were partners together. So there's a commonality. There was a common interest. There was a common task. And so we think of the word common or communion. We think of communication, like words, community.

It's all allied to this idea. The word fellowship has got all of these kind of facets to it, we could think. That there's a caring. There's a togetherness. There's a contribution.

It's like referenced Romans 15, 26. It talks about contribution. Romans 15, 26. An active participation. A contribution. So we see all of these aspects in this word fellowship.

[9:54] There's togetherness. They had all things common. *Koina*. There was a *koinonia*, a fellowship. And there was this partnering, as it were. There was a common endeavour. As partners in a fishing enterprise were labouring together, there's that sense that we're together.

There's a togetherness. A communication. A community. A mutual sharing. And so, how can we have more of that, is the question I pose. Are we this kind of caring community?

We ought to be. We ought to have that. Are we sensitive to the hurts of others, the needs of others, about loving and caring? And the early church was so marked.

It was marked by their caring. It was marked in that way. Secondly, we see the early church was marked by its uniting. Verse 46, we see, again, one accord.

They were with one accord. You wonder, how could this church survive? This is in the middle of a brutal, totalitarian, dictatorial state.

[10:54] An antichrist state. The leader of the government of the day thought himself a god and was expecting people to treat him so. You wonder, how could a church survive in such an environment?

And here was a church, again, with loads of brand new Christians from all sorts of social groups, different countries. They had no constitution, no budget, no membership, as we would think of it. No doctrinal statement. No buildings. And these different people came together as God's community. It's astounding, isn't it? Because it was the work of God.

And it still is the work of God. Verse 44, all that believed were together. They gathered together. It was regular. They were continuing daily. Not just once a week or two or three times a week.

Daily. It's a different thought, isn't it? And they devoted themselves to that apostle's teaching and to fellowship. To the breaking of prayer and to prayer.

[11:54] There was a devotion. This was no casual Christianity. They took every opportunity to meet together. And they were steadfast. They were continuing daily. They had that steadfastness to their fellowship.

Again, like it says there, they were continuing. They were single-minded. They were completely devoted to one another and to God's truth, God's word.

What about today? Do we have that same devotion? The same love of the brethren? This continuing daily? Their meeting included eating. We had a bit of that today, which was nice.

There was a constant fellowship. They had a oneness, an interaction, a gladness, a purpose. They were in one accord. In one accord. And this one accord, as we see here in verse 46, it means to be like-minded.

This one-accordness. And one accord occurs five times in Acts 4. There was a unity, a uniting. And this was not a unity at the expense of the truth, but it was a unity founded on the truth.

[13:01] Some think that unity means an unbelieving of things. So we can all join together. We'll unbelieve some things, so we're all, you know, we'll have the little threads of that which we've got in common.

A giving up of sound doctrine. But no, this is a unity of the faith. There's a one-mindedness that's based on sound Bible teaching. And when we're born again, we become part of a family.

We have brothers and sisters in Christ. So church is meant to be a family, a home, where there's a safety and security, a place of warmth and relationships, togetherness.

They gather daily, daily, to study the Scriptures. This was their heart. They wanted the Word of God. Had a hungering, an appetite for that. And they shared a common meal, eating together with glad hearts, praising God, enjoying the goodwill of the people.

There was a testimony there. There was a joy and gladness, because they knew the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. And likewise today, we think of what the church, as God would want it to be, that it should be such that we're knit together in love.

[14:07] We're joined together, because we belong with each other. So they shared a common purpose. In Acts 4.32, it says, all the believers were one in heart and mind. They were bonded together.

So the church had this togetherness. They met together, talked together. They were together. And in their uniting, there was a joy. It says they praised God. They had this gladness of heart, a singleness of heart, a gladness in their fellowship.

So think of it for yourselves, brothers and sisters, today. How can we have more of that? How can we foster that in our midst, in our togetherness, that we have that uniting, that devotion, that joy of fellowship, that love of gathering together?

So we've seen the caring. It was a caring community. We've seen they had things in common. And the uniting, the community, they were marked by this caring and this unity. And because there was a unity, the next step we see is there was a blessing.

Now in Psalm 133, it says, verse 1, Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

[15:16] There the Lord commanded the blessing. There was caring. There was unity. I put to you thirdly, there was blessing. We see the blessing. They were praising God. And the Lord blessed.

As they were blessing God, God blessed them. They were praising God. And the Lord added to the church. God was central. He was the centre. And he brought favour. He brought people to salvation.

And what a joy it is to see people trust Christ. That's our mission. That's the vital core mission of our church, is that we would see people trust him and follow him.

And when they showed this love and faithfulness in fellowship, as they were devoted and consistent, you see, the people noticed. There was favour, even from the people. Favour with all the people.

That's something, isn't it? That we would have a good testimony. That's what we want, isn't it? You see, sadly, some who profess to be believers, they don't have a good testimony. Some churches, they think, in the media, they've got a poor testimony.

[16:22] Rightly or wrongly, their name is mud. God, you know, there's a reproach. We should be above reproach. God helping us, we want to have that good, strong testimony that when people think of our fellowship, that it's not something that's unworthy of our Lord.

But there's a blessing. And even the community, the general community, would see that. Yeah, that's a real church. That's a good church. And I love to say when someone says, I go to such and such a church, I say, yeah, that's a good church.

That's a good church. I know that's a good church. Because they're founded on the word and they're standing strong. And I love to commend them and say, yeah, you're going to a good church. Keep going there. God blesses the gathering together of his people. And God brought this community together. And he adds to the church. God was glorified. Let's be that church.

Amen? A Christ-centred church. Unto him be glory in the church, in the assembly. Matthew 18, 20. For where two or three are gathered together, in my name, there am I, in the midst of them.

[17:30] Even if it's just one of our smaller meetings, which tends to be the prayer meeting. Maybe it's the most holy one, because there's only two or three gathered together. But that's a good thing. Amen?

Because they're gathered together in Jesus' name. And he's there in the midst. Wherever we meet, whenever we meet. Even if it's just a small meeting. A church that functions, because everybody has their part and participation.

That's God's plan, isn't it? As we see in Ephesians 4, verse 15, in the context, it's talking of the church as a light to a body, as likened to a body. We see a body.

It's alive. It's active. Hopefully healthy. It's functioning. It's useful. We see Ephesians 4, 15. Paul writes of the church, the body. But speaking the truth in love, this body, this congregation, this assembly, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted, it says, by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working and the measure of every part, make an increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Every part plays its part. And it's the same with our body. When we know one of the bits isn't working like it should, it affects the whole thing, doesn't it? The whole body.

[19:01] Or, you know, it could be just some insignificant part, you would think, but it affects every part, every other part. And so as Christ is the head, he's the strength of the body, he gives the direction.

As our head would give that direction, it's the source, it's our sustaining. He is that one. He's our strength. He's the one who gives the direction. He's the authority.

And it says God gives the increase. He makes the increase of the body. He gets the glory. God gets the glory. God gets all the credit. Let us strive to be such a fellowship that when we see God helping us, we'll see growth.

It'll be spiritual growth. It'll be sustained growth. It'll be true salvation growth. And the fellowship of God's people is a place where there's blessing, of praise, of grace, of salvation, of conversions. Think of the testimony in the Sunday school. Or it's giving the gospel. It's gospel-centered. Now, some churches, it's almost like the Sunday school is just child-minding or it's just telling Bible stories.

[20:07] But the Bible stories we tell are about salvation. It's about the gospel. We want to see this young one saved. We want to say likewise with our youth program and everything that we do as a church, that it's Christ-centered, it's gospel-centered, and that he would get the glory.

And as we do, I trust, prayerfully, scripturally, serve and work as a church as we function so that God will bring the blessing.

It'll be the natural result. And it says of the early church they were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. It tells us in Ephesians 5, and be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.

It reads, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord. That's the motive, isn't it?

Unto the Lord, unto the Lord. And giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

[21:14] There's so much there we could unpack really, isn't there? Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. That's why we love songs with content, with doctrine, with truth.

There's teaching in the songs we sing. Amen? Spiritual songs. That's what we want. And then we read further in Colossians 3, verse 15, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts to the which ye are also called in one body and be ye thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Do we sing with grace in our hearts? Do we sing unto the Lord? That's what we want, isn't it? That Christ, his word would dwell in us richly. He puts that song of praise on our lips, the blessing unto him.

He brings blessing as we bless him. Let's be the church in action. I put to you, as we see, as the early church of Acts, it was a church that was marked by some things. It was a community.

[22:21] It was a community that was caring. Sometimes it's hard to care. We think the world can give care and help, but we've got a role to play too.

I know we've had some practical reasons lately. One in our number had some item to give away and contacted me and we were able to bless a woman with a fridge. You stick it on the ute and take it to a front doorstep and she was blessed.

That was practical. That was caring. She had a need. Someone had a need to get rid of a fridge and she had a need to have a fridge. It's caring, isn't it? It's practical things. Just because I've got a ute, don't call me, but there's that sense where can we use what we have, that we give, that we share, that we take time to bless, to give practically.

It's a good thing to be caring, isn't it? What about uniting? Could we be more united? Can we have that more togetherness? That we know people's names at least, that we take time to shake a hand or show some love and care, show some concern, some compassion that you do care about the other brothers and sisters here, that you know their names or you try to learn their names.

I know it's harder as to get bigger, it's harder, isn't it, to know everyone's names. I need to learn, I know there are lots of the children's names, they're the ones that escape me because I don't see them so much, but I want to lock that in the grey cells that at least I know your names, kids, all right?

[23:41] Because you're important, you're very important. We love your being here and we want to care about one another. We want to have that uniting, don't we? And we want to have that blessing, that'll be God's blessing. It won't be some man-made, manufactured blessing, but it'll be God's blessing from heaven above.

So we see the church pictured here as in Colossians 2, verse 19, we read that the church is like a body. It's holding the head, the whole body is sustained, it says, by the joints and bands, having nourishment ministered.

And knit together and it increases with the increase of God. So these bands, these joints, these sinews or ligaments, it's the sense that we're all kind of, we're all kind of joined, there's a joining together, that we're not some, the big toes over here and the noses over here, we're in the one body, we're together, there's a uniting.

And we've got nourishment, there's a supply, that nourishment is ministered, God is ministering, and God is nourishing us through the precious word of God. And we're knit together, united, in such a, and Julie's got some knitting here, we're knit together just like Julie's knitting, and we're knit together, amen, that's what we want to be, knit together.

There's a closeness when we knit, isn't it? That we're like a garment knitted together, what a picture. And this increase, we're growing with the increase of God. Don't we want to grow as believers, to grow as a church, to grow individually.

[25:09] So we see this picture of a body, a living organism, not merely an organisation. And we can make it such that it's an organisation and go through what any worldly organisation does or runs so, but we're an organism, we're organic.

And so we should be that body, millions of living cells, think of it, you're a masterpiece there, tonight. I'm surrounded by masterpieces here tonight.

Countless living cells, they're cooperating together to make you the wonderful person that you are. And so too with the body, the body of Christ. There's different functions, we're interdependent, there's a dependency, and there's a harmony.

There's a harmony here. As much as, we don't always see eye to eye on every finer point, but we have that heart of love for our Saviour, that wanting to please Him.

We want the Word of God to feed us, we want to learn from one another and exalt one another, and so much the more as we see the day approaching. So there's a harmony, we knit together by the Spirit, and there's a full participation in 1 Corinthians 14, 26.

[26:16] It talks about each of you, each one of you. There's a sense where we've all got something to give, to be. There was a coach who defined a game of football as 22 men on the field in desperate need of rest, surrounded by 50,000 spectators in desperate need of exercise.

Now that's a bit like church sometimes where you've got the few and the many, but we don't want it to be such that you're feeling like you're a spectator, that you're just watching and not joining in, that you will join in, that you'll be a part, that you'll be participating.

A body can get sick, can't it? If you don't use an arm, it can lose strength, can't it? It can lose... There's a term, but I can't... It escapes me. But a body can get sick, often it's because we're not using that part and that just shrivels up or loses function.

And so we're meant to be a living, working, productive organism sustained by the life of our living head, our Lord. Sadly, with the modern church, it seems like we've gone from being a crusade to being a club.

Some it's going from being a holy, reverent, God-honouring service to a disco or a nightclub or a circus or such.

[27:29] Some... It seems in the modern church, pleasures are more of a problem than persecution because we're just surrounded by pleasures, aren't we? Our pleasure-loving world, our lucky country, it's almost like it doesn't give any honour to God, it's all about luck.

But no, we're a blessed country, what we have got, aren't we? But we think more of a problem for us is pleasure than persecution. And there's a famine in the land, there's recreation, amusement, entertainment, you know, all of these gadgets, all of these things that kind of take our time.

And yet, brothers and sisters, we're meant to be a church that is vital, that's victorious, that we're militant, not holding the fort, but storming the forts of darkness, storming the gates.

It's almost like... I suppose there's a sense where we hold the fort as the song goes, but really we should be storming the gates of hell. We should be an invading, active, advancing unit into enemy territory, storming the gates of hell.

not as if we're hunkered down in some bunker, as it were, that we would be a church that mobilises.

And the good news is, the word of God says, the church shall prevail.

[28:56] The church shall prevail because our Lord says, the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, his church. So, be encouraged today. I trust there's some measure of encouragement as we think about this truth.

We're a community of God. There's a koinonia, a fellowship, a common heart, a common love, a common doctrine, a common faith. As we follow our saviour, there's a common cause, there's a common call that there's souls to save, there's work to do, there's our master's bidding to act upon.

And I trust that each one would know what it is to be joined to the church. Now, you might be hearing all of this and think, yeah, I'd like to be a part of such a church.

Well, you've got to be saved first. You know, you can join the club, as it were, put your name on the membership roll in some churches, but they don't ask you, are you saved?

And, of course, you can't be a part of God's true church, as in whatever true church it is that's out there if you're not saved. You know, to be saved is when you enter the membership, as it were, as you enter that fellowship of God's people, is when you're saved, isn't it?

[30:11] That's the starting point, to be saved. And so I urge you today, if you've yet to trust Christ, that's the beginning. As you're saved, you become a child of God, which then means you're a brother and a sister of like-minded, those that are saved.

You join the family and that's the blessing that can come. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you that your church is prevailing, even though we see it's faltering here and there because of the erosion of truth and the white ants, as it were, that would eat away and hinder.

We see much lacking, much need. Lord, we pray we'd learn from the Acts 2 church. We know it was a transition time and some matters are not necessarily for this time, but yet we know the spiritual heart of that church is caring.

It's got that uniting and we see that your blessing came and all those things are true for us as we, I pray, follow that Bible model, that scriptural model, to be such a church, to be such a people and all to your glory, Lord, that if in some measure we're doing things right, Lord, it's only because of your grace that you would deign to lead us so, Lord, that we'd be led by your Spirit, that we'd hear your word and act upon it and help us, Lord, to be more so such a church that will bring you glory.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.