

AM Acts 2:36-47

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[0 : 0 0] Book of Acts, chapter 2, verse, we're going to read from verse 36 to 47. So that's on page 1097 of the Church Bible.

So just to sort of set the scene, the Book of Acts really begins in the time between the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and his ascension when he was taken up into heaven.

That was a 40-day period. So the Book of Acts begins with that. It follows on from Luke, the Book of Luke, which details the life of the Lord Jesus from his birth through to his resurrection and ascension.

And Acts follows on. And it's the next sort of 30 or so years after that, after Jesus' resurrection and being taken into heaven. In chapter 2, just about 10 days after Jesus was taken up into heaven, we have the events of the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit is poured out on the disciples, on the believers.

And one of the things that accompanies that is just a miraculous ability to speak other languages, the other languages that were actually present there in Jerusalem for that festival of Pentecost.

[1 : 3 4] And so the people from different parts of the world, they were Jews from different parts of the world, they could hear the disciples addressing them in their own languages from the different places that they come from.

And they ask, what does this mean? What's happening? What's going on? And Peter stands up and says that this is to fulfill what the prophet Joel foretold. And how he quotes from the prophet Joel about in the last days God would pour out his spirit on all people.

And then he speaks about how the sort of lead up to that event, which is all about Jesus. So in verse 22 of Acts chapter 2, he says, men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.

And then he goes on to speak about Jesus' death at their hands, the hands of the Jews and the Romans. And then his resurrection from the dead, how God raised him from the dead, and how that fulfilled scripture, the Jewish scriptures, the Old Testament.

And then how Jesus was taken up into heaven from where he poured out the Holy Spirit, which was the event that they had seen, they had witnessed.

[2 : 5 6] So we're going to take up the reading in verse 36, which is just really the end of Peter's message on that occasion.

So Peter says, let all the house of Israel know, therefore know for certain, that God has made him, that's Jesus, 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 promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off. Everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

[4 : 02] And with many other words, he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, save yourselves from this crooked generation. So those who received his word were baptized and were added that day about 3,000 souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. May God bless to us that reading of his word.

And to turn back to the passage that we read, 2 Acts chapter 2. And we're looking especially at verses 41 to 47.

[5 : 31] So that's just the last few verses of the chapter. A major characteristic of Western culture is that it is individualistic.

Now that might be noticed by people from a different cultural background more than by those who are sort of brought up and raised in this culture.

But Western culture, it's a feature that it's very individualistic. So that means that in the West, the freedom of the individual is highly valued. The freedom of the individual to make choices.

The rights of the individual to decide about their own lives. Now, I don't know what you think about that. I think there's probably many positive aspects and also many negative aspects to that aspect of Western culture.

I was just seeing this morning about a recent survey that found that 7% of the population of the United Kingdom say that they are very often or always lonely.

[6 : 45] And loneliness is an epidemic in our society. And it seems to be on the increase. But even in Western society, there is a desire for community.

A desire to belong. A desire to be part of something bigger than the individual self. And that might be expressed in all sorts of ways. Might be a sports club or some community event or activity.

Or a pub or a coffee shop that facilitates bringing people together. And many people value or want neighbourhoods where there is a sense of community.

And we may wonder, why is this? Well, I think it's to do with the way we are made. See, at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis chapter 1, we read there of God creating everything.

And God speaks everything into existence. And then he says, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.

[7 : 52] And you might notice there the plurals. God speaks, there's only one God. But God there speaks in the plural. Let us make mankind in our image.

And we see there just, it's kind of like a hint, a suggestion, but it's there of the fact that God is one. And yet the Bible also reveals that the one God exists as three.

Who live in community, in fellowship, in relationship with each other from eternity. And we as human beings are made in the image and likeness of this God.

So God, we're told in the Bible, and we see it all the way through, God is a social being. A relational being. And we see that that's the case from all eternity.

There never was a time, if we can use that term, when God was not in relationship, in community, within what we call the Trinity.

[8 : 56] And we are made in the image of this God. We, as human creatures, bear the image of God. And so he has made us as relational beings, as social beings.

And that is so important, so fundamental for who we are as humans. And that's also kind of borne out in another feature of the creation account in Genesis.

So Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we have the kind of two parallel accounts of creation. And in Genesis chapter 1, we read again and again that God declares his creation good.

And then at the end of chapter 1, God is like an artist standing back from his work of art. And just being satisfied with it, and pleased with it.

And God declares it all. Everything that he had made, very good. It's whole. It's beautiful. It's wonderful. It's good. The whole of creation.

[10 : 05] And yet, in God's good creation, God sees one thing that is not good. And that is, in Genesis 2 verse 18, we read that God says that it's not good for the man to be alone.

Now, remember this is the man Adam created. It's before he had sinned. He has a perfect relationship with God, his maker. And yet, God sees that it's not good for him to be alone.

And the solution to that is that God creates a woman. Creates Eve. And God institutes marriage. And by extension, family and society.

So, God has created human beings as social, communal beings. We have a need for community.

And God provides that in marriage, in family, in communities, and in society. Now, sadly, we live in a world that has gone wrong.

[11 : 13] A world that is broken. As a result of human rebellion against God, our maker. And sin affects every relationship. It affects our relationship with God, our maker.

But also, our relationships with other human beings. But God's great mission, which we read about through the whole sweep of the Bible's narrative.

God's great mission, in and through Jesus, the Messiah, is to heal and restore this broken creation. God's mission is to save it. And so, when we come to believe in and know Jesus Christ, he brings us into a new restored relationship with God.

And also, with other people. Broken relationships begin to be restored. He saves us not just to be individuals with a relationship with God.

But to be part of a community with other believers. Together in relationship with God. And the final vision in the Bible is of a new heaven and a new earth.

[12 : 25] Of a renewed creation. And it's pictured as a vast, multicultural, multi-ethnic city. With a countless number of people.

A community of God's people from every nation and people. And tribe and language. But God's redeemed community is not just something for the future.

It is also here and now in our world today. And in Acts 2, we have a window into the earliest New Testament community of God's people.

Church. And we see, in this window, we see how they lived. What they did. How they functioned. And it begins in verse 41 with the addition of 3,000 new disciples, new believers into the church.

And they enter it through faith in Jesus Christ. In the message about Jesus Christ. And by receiving baptism. And today, we're going to have a baptism.

[13 : 38] The baptism of Parsa and Aras. It's... Baptism is a ritual washing. It symbolizes the washing away of sins. And of God's spirit entering us.

But also, it's the initiation. It's kind of the rite, the symbol of entrance into the church. Into the community of God's people.

And so, today we see what that community looked like. And in verse 42, which will kind of take as the kind of main text.

Verse 42, it says that they, that's the disciples, devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. And the fellowship. To the breaking of bread. And the prayers.

So, I want us to look at those four activities today. First of all, then, the apostles' teaching. And the apostles' teaching, we can basically say that it's teaching about Jesus Christ.

[14 : 44] And the teaching of Jesus Christ. So, it's the teaching of Jesus Christ. We see that right at the beginning of Acts. Because, right at the beginning, Luke, the writer, says that in the first book, that's the first book that Luke wrote.

Which is what we call the Gospel of Luke. I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach. Until the day when he was taken up. After he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

And that implies that Acts is about what Jesus continued to do and to teach. After his ascension into heaven. So, Jesus continues to teach through his apostles.

The apostles he had chosen. But it's also teaching about Jesus Christ. Particularly his life, his teaching, his death, his resurrection, his ascension.

In John chapter 14. This is on the evening before Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things.

[15 : 57] And will remind you of everything I have said to you. So, the disciples, these apostles, they are reminded by the Holy Spirit of Jesus' own teaching. And that's what they teach.

Now, in Acts chapter 1. In the sort of second part of that chapter. We have the account of the choosing of a 12th apostle. To replace Judas, who had betrayed the Lord Jesus.

And the qualification for an apostle was someone who had witnessed the entire career or ministry of Jesus. And especially his resurrection from the dead.

And that tells us that the apostles' teaching is their eyewitness testimony. That was crucial to being an apostle. To have actually seen with their own eyes.

The ministry and particularly the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Acts chapter 2 we have a message that the apostle Peter preached.

[16 : 59] That's just immediately previous to the passage that we read. And it's a message to Jews. Jews who, at the time of Peter preaching, didn't yet believe in Jesus.

And Peter repeatedly appeals to the Old Testament scriptures. And claims that Jesus fulfills those scriptures. And he interprets those scriptures in the light of Jesus.

And so Peter is saying that, and of course Jesus himself said that, All those scriptures, all those books of the Old Testament revealed over many centuries. They are all about Jesus Christ.

They are all pointing the way, pointing forward. Now in verse 43 of Acts 2 it says that Many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And these wonders and signs, miracles, they confirm the message. They cause wonder in those who saw them. And they were signs or signposts that pointed to the truth.

[18 : 07] The truthfulness of their message. In 2 Corinthians 12 verse 12, Paul mentions signs and wonders and miracles. As things that mark an apostle.

Now, we might think that's fine. We understand that for them. For those days, 2,000 years ago. But how does this relate to us today? In 2025?

Here in Dumfries. Well the apostles are all dead. We can't invite Peter or John or James or any of the others to come and preach to us in Dumfries today.

But today we have the apostles' teaching contained in the New Testament. Over the following decades of the first century, these men, the apostles, put their teaching into written form.

Into the books of the New Testament. And so the New Testament was written either by the apostles themselves or by those who were close to the apostles and recognized by the apostles.

[19 : 15] And of course the apostles already accepted and believed the Old Testament. And they, I mean, you see in Peter's sermon, appealing to the Old Testament, preaching from the Old Testament, that this is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

And so this all emphasizes for us that it's the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, that is to be our rule, our guide, our supreme authority, our nourishment, that guides us and directs us in our faith in following the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we read that, in verse 42, that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. And we should devote ourselves to the Bible to be our rule, our guide, our supreme authority.

That's why our public gatherings, our public worship here, is centered around the reading and preaching of the Word of God, of the Bible. And also there are other formats too.

It's good to read the Bible ourselves, as individuals, but also together, to read and study the Bible together, to discuss it, to encourage each other to live our lives by and according to the Scriptures.

[20 : 41] So the second characteristic or activity is fellowship, in verse 42. Now, in our wider culture, I think the word fellowship is perhaps best known through J.R.R. Tolkien's The Fellowship of the Ring, the first part of the trilogy of the Lord of the Rings.

And in The Fellowship of the Ring, there are nine very, very different characters who are thrown together by a common quest, a common purpose.

And they go on an epic journey together, and they travel together, they share experiences, and indeed they share life together. And that's what fellowship is, it's sharing life together.

It's just going on the journey of life together with other believers. In verse 44, it says, All who believed were together, and had all things in common.

And they were selling their possessions and belongings, and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. So these early believers, first of all, they just spent time together.

[21 : 55] They were together. And they also shared their resources with each other. So their fellowship was regular, frequent, continuous. And also we see that there are different settings for this fellowship.

In verse 46, it says that day by day, they attended the temple together, and broke bread in their homes. And that seems to be two sort of, well, there's two venues there.

The temple was a huge place. You know, many hundreds of people could join together in the courts of the temple, because it was a huge building. So that speaks of big, big gatherings.

But also, smaller gatherings in people's homes. No one home could accommodate 3,000 people. So it seems that they divided up into groups that met in one another's homes.

Smaller units, smaller fellowships, smaller groups of people. But it's, it's important to stress that the way of Jesus Christ is a communal way.

[23 : 10] Now that challenges the individualism of, certainly, of Western culture. And that can manifest itself in a number of ways. You know, we can have an arrogant view that, well, I don't need other people.

All I need is my relationship with God. That's all that matters. I don't need other believers. And that's, that's an arrogant, proud view. But then there's the opposite, which would say something like, well, I'm no use to anyone.

If I don't, if I withdraw from the fellowship, nobody will miss me because I'm, I'm useless. And that also is, is, is a wrong view. Because if you are saved by Christ, then you are valuable.

And you are valuable to the fellowship of his people, the local fellowship of his people. Another way that sort of individualism can manifest itself is in a consumer attitude to church.

Coming with the idea of what do I get out of it? And I think we see in this passage and throughout the rest of the New Testament that fellowship is a matter of both giving and receiving.

[24 : 26] And all believers are included that. We, yeah, hopefully we do get something out of it. But also we contribute and we are committed to that fellowship. Well, we also read that they had all things in, in common.

So there was a fellowship even in their possessions. Wealthier people sold property and possessions and distributed the proceeds to the poor as different needs arose.

Now there was no compulsion in this. It wasn't that people had to do this. It was entirely voluntary. Later on in Acts chapter 5 we read of Ananias and Sapphira and they are condemned not because they kept some of the money from the sale of their property back but because they lied about it.

So this is not some rule that all believers have to sell all their possessions. the Bible is not opposed to people having personal property.

But with these qualifications I don't want to blunt the challenge of these verses the challenge to me as much as anyone. How do we regard our goods and possessions our money our property our goods?

[25 : 55] I once heard a story of an elderly lady who went to a supermarket and she came out with some heavy bags of shopping to the car park and she went to the car and she found to her shock and dismay that there were four men sitting in it.

So the woman opened her handbag and pulled out a gun and she pointed at the men and said I've got a gun and I know how to use it. Get out of my car. And they got out of the car as soon as they could and ran for it.

Well she then went to the boot to put her bags of shopping in and she found that the key wouldn't work. And then she looked at the number plate and found it wasn't her car at all.

Her car was parked two rows away in a different part of the car park. So she went to her own car, put her shopping in and drove straight to the police station.

And she went to the counter and confessed to an armed hijacking of a car. The policeman on duty started laughing at this little old lady who was confessing to an armed carjacking.

[27 : 10] And at the other end of the counter there were four astonished men. And they were just astonished at what had happened. No charges were made against her but this was a case of mistaken ownership.

And we can make that mistake with our own possessions. We can have a mistaken view of our belongings. Because our ownership is not absolute.

Everything that we have is a gift from God. And we have no absolute rights to anything. Stewardship is a key biblical principle.

We are stewards of all our possessions. All our belongings. And we are accountable to our master, to our Lord, for how we use them. And Jesus said that to whom much is given, much more will be required.

And there are many commands in the Bible about supporting the work of the gospel and sharing with those in need. And our world today is characterized both by material abundance and by appalling need.

[28 : 26] And those of us who have received much have a great responsibility to use that to share with those who do not have. So fellowship was one of the characteristics of this early church.

And today many things work against fellowship, especially in modern life. We may be separated by distances. There may be work pressures, things like shift work that get in the way of regular times of meeting.

And many other things that just hinder fellowship. And so fellowship is something that we may need to work hard at. Now we also see that in Acts 2 that fellowship didn't just happen.

We read that they devoted themselves to fellowship. And that suggests that they worked at it. They gave effort to it. It didn't just happen.

They devoted themselves to the fellowship. The third activity or characteristic is the breaking of bread. seems to refer to two things that maybe often went together.

[29 : 48] The first is just eating together in communal meals. In many cultures, both then and now, eating together is a symbol of being at peace, of brotherhood, hospitality, of sharing life together.

Sometimes in this congregation you have a fellowship lunch. And that's a really good practice, just to eat together sometimes. But the second thing that I think it refers to is the communion, which is the, and this will take place, God willing, next Sunday morning here in the church.

Communion, eating the bread and drinking the wine to remember the death of the Lord Jesus. And when we take communion, it reminds us that the death of Jesus Christ is an absolutely central and essential part of the apostles' teaching.

Because salvation, eternal life, came to them and comes to us only because the Lord Jesus has died for us.

And in the communion, they in that time and we today, we symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood and the wine to remind ourselves that through faith we are partakers of his death.

[31 : 22] That his death is for us. That his death is essential, is as essential for life as real food and real drink.

And when we take the bread and the wine of communion, we join with these early disciples and indeed with God's people throughout the centuries, throughout the ages, in thanksgiving that we live because Jesus Christ died.

And again, just to emphasize this, this breaking of bread, the communion, was a communal activity. community. We take communion together. It reminds us that we are part of a redeemed community, a redeemed fellowship of God's people.

The fourth characteristic is the prayers. Again, from verse 42. In the Bible, there are many examples of prayers.

We have the words of how different people, of God's people, prayed on different occasions. Some of these are individual prayers, some of them are corporate prayers, prayers together as a group of people, people praying together.

[32 : 42] And both of these are vitally important. We should pray as individuals, but also together as God's people. But here, the emphasis is on communal prayer.

And notice it's the prayers. And that probably refers to the set times of prayer in the temple in Jerusalem. There was a morning and an evening prayer or worship.

So it relates to the set times of public worship. That reminds us that the early church was not some new religion that just appeared out of nowhere. It was very much in many ways in continuity with Jewish faith, with Old Testament faith.

And at least up until AD 70 when the temple was destroyed by the Romans, Jewish believers in Christ took part in the temple worship.

But for Jews who were a long way from Jerusalem and for non-Jewish believers in Christ, and of course for us today, the temple is not here.

[33 : 50] The temple worship is no longer with us, it's no longer relevant. But I think we can apply this in terms of public worship, communal worship, the kind of thing we're doing now on a Sunday morning or Sunday evening.

And verse 47 also speaks of praising God. That is a vital part, a central part of communal worship.

We meet together, among other things, to praise God, to worship God. Lastly, I just want to notice the impact of this.

In verse 43, we read that awe came upon everyone. And in verse 47, that they were praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number, day by day, those who were being saved. So this church had a great impact.

[35 : 03] People were filled with awe in the presence of this church. It also enjoyed the favor of all the people. This church was highly esteemed and respected, although a little later opposition and persecution develop.

But also in verse 47, the church grows. Every day, the Lord added to this community those who were being saved. Now we see here that it's the Lord Jesus who is the one who saves us.

When it says the Lord, it means the Lord Jesus. He is the one who saves us. And he saves us not to be solitary disciples on our own, but he saves us to be part of the community of his people.

We also see that the growth of the church comes from the Lord. He is the one who saves people, and he is the one who adds people to the church.

That's not something that we can do. It's not to do with our methods, our techniques, personalities, persuasive powers. It's the Lord who gives growth to the church.

[36 : 18] But equally important, the Lord doesn't usually add to the church when his people do nothing. The Lord uses means, and that's the kind of things that we see here, devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.

May the Lord help us as we devote ourselves to these things. Amen. May God bless his word to us. Let's sing.