

An Acts 2 Church

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[0:00] And the place where they gathered was shaken. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

! Please be seated. Another neat thing about this congregation, did you notice the air conditioning unit just magically stopped when it was time for the sermon?

It's amazing what happens around here. Well, this is the last sermon in a series on the subject, Are We in Acts Chapter 2 Perish?

Which is a very important question for us to answer. Especially in light of the fact that we are going to have a new rector join us in two weeks. Exciting times.

Who are we? What do we stand for? So that's what we're talking about today. So far, as we've gone through Acts, we have gotten some evidence that we are indeed in Acts Chapter 2 Perish.

[1:09] So let's investigate that further. We need to look at the backstory first. About a month ago, we had Pentecost Sunday. And we remembered that with a rushing, mighty wind, the Holy Spirit entered a room full of about 120 believers, lit up each one with what looked like tongues as a fire.

And he fired up their mouths. They were thrust out into the streets, preached the gospel, and 3,000 people were baptized that day.

And I've joked with us. What would we do if we had 3,000 new believers today? We'd have a problem dealing with that. And the apostles had a problem.

Okay, we've got 3,000 new believers. What do we do with them? They did what all leaders do. They organized for combat.

They broke them into groups. And in 2, 42, Chapter 2, Verse 42, Luke tells us what they did with those groups.

[2:18] They had a four-fold mission. They were to listen to the apostles' teaching. That's what we call the Bible today. They were to have fellowship, a koinonia, deep care for one another.

They were to break the bread, have communion. In those early days, they had communion every week. And fourth, they were to pray.

That's what happened in that early church. And those were heady days of success. Soon, they had not 3,000, but 4,000 members.

And Luke says a number of the Jewish priests were becoming believers. Well, as always, when there's success, there's pushback.

The Sanhedrin, which was the leading body of rulers in the Jewish faith back then, were not happy with the success.

[3:23] Because where were these people coming from? They're congregations. And so they looked for a way to shut this operation down.

And they found it in Peter and John, right? Peter and John went to pray. They found a young man, by the way. He was paralyzed. In the name of Jesus, get up and walk.

And he walked. Just like what you read in the gospel today. Jesus does amazing things. And they were not afraid to say, this man is healed because of Jesus.

Jesus. The next thing they knew, they were hauled into court. And the ruling body of elders said, Shut up! Stop preaching in the name of Jesus.

We don't want to hear it. Nobody wants to hear it. We are canceling you. And what did Peter and John say? Oh, okay. Oh, no.

[4:19] They said, look. God says. You say. We're choosing God. And they were thrust out of the court. Okay. So now we take up today's epistle lesson.

And what's that page? Is it 1089? What is that page? 1084? Okay.

So if you would take a pew Bible, or if you've got a little device that has the Bible in it, if you would turn to that page, Acts 4, verses 23 through 31, we're going to go through that verse by verse to see just what happened as a result of them getting hauled into court.

All right. So, verse 23. When they, that would be Peter and John, when they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them.

We've already said, politically speaking, the Sanhedrin had to shut these guys up. I'm thinking of last week in Loudoun County, Virginia.

[5 : 29] The teacher stood before the Board of Education, and he said, I can't teach all these genders. My religion says they're male and female sex. That's what I'm going to teach.

And guess what? He's not teaching. He's been canceled. He's been fired. Now it's up to the courts to deal with that problem.

When it gets tough, the establishment tries to shut down the opposition. And then it says in verse 24, and when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, Sovereign Lord, who made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in them.

Okay, we got to stop for a minute. When they heard it, who's they? Is it 3,000 followers? Is it the 120 first believers?

No, it was a congregation. The congregation that Peter and John belonged to. Us. It was a congregation like us.

[6 : 39] And what was the first thing they did? Did they run and hide? They prayed humbly. Their first words, Sovereign God.

They were acknowledging to God that he's got it. You've got this, Lord. You made the heavens, the earth, the seas, and everything in them. Do you think God was surprised when the Sanhedrin threw Peter and John out?

Do you think he said, Oh no, look what they're doing. I can't believe it. He knew what was going. The congregation knew that God had control.

And so verse 25 and 26. This gets a little dicey to try to keep track. And Luke's writing makes it a little hard for us to figure out what's going on.

They're continuing their prayer. Who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit. Now, they're going to quote a psalm. They're going to quote Psalm 2, which we believe was written by David.

[7 : 47] And they start, Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed.

As they prayed, this congregation realized this has happened before. This is not the first time the religious establishment tried to shut down people.

They realized that this kind of oppression is inevitable. And so today, you know, have you noticed it's a little rocky trying to live our biblical values?

Have you noticed that? Stand by. It's going to get worse. Let me read from a scholar. He says, The world has always been against the church.

And there have been times when the world has been partially converted. And when the church has lived with it in some measure of peace. But there have been other times when the world was openly hostile, seeking to convert the church.

[9 : 03] We live, as it is evident, in a time of hostility. When the church is imperiled, not only by an external worldliness, but by one that has established itself within the Christian camp itself.

Our position is inside a church which has been on retreat, which has been making compromises with the enemy.

Only a new withdrawal, followed by a new aggression, can save the church and restore it to the salt with which to savor society.

That was written by Richard Niebuhr in 1935. This happens. This is part of living the faith.

And so, they prayed, they acknowledged what was going on, and then finally, they asked for help.

[10 : 05] My tablet just went crazy. Did you ever have that happen? But I digress. Okay. Verses 27 and 28.

They finished their prayer. Once again, they acknowledge that God has it in control.

He's not surprised. He's going to move against what's happening to them. Notice they saw that it was what we would call church and state combining to bring oppression.

Okay. Herod represented the temple. Pontius Pilate represented the Roman government. And for one time in their lives, they joined together in a common pursuit.

Crucify Jesus. And so, they acknowledged it. And we look at today. We're trying to live biblical values in a world where even church leaders oppose biblical values.

[11:34] And the state definitely doesn't care about spiritual values. I bring you one example. Same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriage, unless you've been under a rock, you realize it is legal in the state of New York.

And the denomination from which I come passed a rule a couple of years ago saying, in any Episcopal parish, if a same-sex couple wants to get married in that parish and they're members of the parish, the rector must allow for that to happen.

That is collusion between church and state. And it squelches our biblical values. And we're left twisting in the wind.

And more and more, we're twisting. Sometimes it makes me want to get some bib overhauls, a straw cap, a buggy with a horse in front with a big triangle on the back, and live my own culture and say, this culture's gone.

It's just, it's something we desire. Because we don't know how to handle the squelching of our biblical values. Is that what the early church did?

[12:48] No. We continue on. And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant, Jesus.

Instead of asking for protection and hiding, they asked for more boldness. Isn't that crazy? Hold that thought.

And finally, verse 31 finishes up this passage. And when they had prayed, the place in which they had gathered was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

The Holy Spirit gave a direct answer to their plea. They asked for boldness. He gave them boldness. It was an earthquake.

It was an earthquake. Someone said in our thirsty lunch bunch, it was a spiritual earthquake that took place in that community. And the immediate result was an assurance by this congregation that the Holy Spirit had heard their prayer.

[14:07] And instead of hiding, they could speak with boldness, no matter what happened. So that's the story. Now what does it have to do with us?

Today's faithful. What does it say to us as we live in a nation that's more and more hostile to our belief system? Well, just like those early days, we're still called to be an Acts chapter 2 congregation.

We're called to be bold. You see, once we join such a congregation, or form such a congregation, God has serious work for us to do.

Most congregations don't get that. They don't realize the seriousness of it. Some congregations think they're just here to work on spiritual life, or just to work on social life, or work on changing laws.

Some people come to church out of habit, or guilt, or whatever motivates them to get up on a Sunday morning. Most congregations are like that.

[15:19] Have you noticed? It's a group of individuals, of varying commitments to God, and very little commitment to each other.

The typical parish. But that's not an Acts chapter 2 parish. An Acts chapter 2 parish is one where people have a deep thirst for Jesus, and a deep love for one another.

That's the parish. That's what God designed it to be. Serious business ensues as this community of Jesus takes up its prayer life.

What does it look like for us? How do we pray for new people to fill the pews? How do we live in such a way that people are attracted to our church?

How do we verbally share our faith in the church and out? How do we show ourselves obedient by regular church attendance, by small group participation, by a forgiving attitude toward others?

[16:28] Is there a hint of Acts chapter 2 in us? There is. There is.

Do you know this simple little thing, the prayer chain that the Fullers maintain? The second somebody gets in trouble, we all know about it. And we pray seriously about it.

That's an Acts chapter 2 parish. I mention the lunch bunch. Every Thursday at noon, a group of about 10 come together to have lunch and to pray.

There's room for more people. They pray intensely. Not just for Aunt Mabel's foot, but for renewal, revival, righteousness, help for people in political positions, gathering of our church.

And how about the prayers of the people on Sunday? That is not just something to take place between the creed and the confession, which is where it takes place.

[17 : 38] But it's the congregation at prayer where we lift up needs together as a body. And then finally, daily personal devotions.

I'm amazed at the high percentage of people in this congregation that actually take out the Bible in the morning, read through it, offer prayers for one another.

This congregation believes deeply in addressing God together in prayer and actually believing God's causing an earthquake, a spiritual earthquake.

Let it rain down on us, Lord. Let us be the congregation you've called us to be. Let us pray.

Lord God, there's so much we don't know. There's so much we would like to know. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, Lord, that we can speak with boldness all that you give us to speak.

[18 : 44] We pray this in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.