

# The Beginning of Church Life - Part 2

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     The name Perry Noble is probably unknown to most of you. Perry Noble is the former senior pastor of the rapidly growing New Spring Church of Columbia, South Carolina.
- ! A church with some 35,000 people attending multiple locations each week.! Mr. Noble is the former senior pastor of New Spring Church because back in July this year, he was fired from the church for alcoholism and for what was described as, I quote, other unfortunate choices and decisions.
- Mr. Noble checked into a rehab center for 30 days and upon coming out of rehab back in August, expressed his expectation to return to ministry with the help of his therapist.
- However, this past Monday, Perry Noble issued an update entitled My Next Step, indicating that he was taking a different direction.
- And here's some of what he wrote, and I quote, I'm ready to take my next step in life and ministry. After much thought, prayer, and seeking godly counsel, I believe the Lord has clearly shown me I'm supposed to step into church and business consulting.
- [ 1 : 3 3 ]     While I had hoped to live out my career at New Spring Church, that option is no longer available to me, and it's been made clear that I can't live in the past, but must seek to live for a better future.
- If you are a church leader and would love to talk about bringing me in to work with you and your team, you can visit [www.IWantMyChurchToGrow.com](http://www.IWantMyChurchToGrow.com) to find out more about the services I offer, as well as how to schedule a call to see how I can best serve you and your church.
- What separates you from other consultants, you ask? Simple. I've actually planted and built a great church. I really do believe that what the Lord was gracious enough to teach me in the 16 years I was at New Spring could be used to encourage, challenge, and advance the church slash ministry you're wanting to see achieve its maximum potential.
- If you are a business leader, I would love, and for some reason love here is in capital, if you are a business leader, I would love to come alongside of you and help you create an awesome culture and grow your business.
- Some may argue the church is not a business. I would disagree. After all, at one point in serving as a senior pastor of New Spring Church, I was responsible for 425 employees and a \$63 million budget, which takes way more than a prayer meeting to manage.
- [ 3 : 2 5 ]     What Jesus taught me, I believe, can be used to help you as well. If you would like more information about the services I offer or to schedule a call, you can visit [IWantMyBusinessToGrow.com](http://IWantMyBusinessToGrow.com).
- Now, isn't it not interesting that a former pastor of a church, the very large number of people attending, can confidently say to other churches and businesses, come talk to me.
- I can show you how to get more people attending your church and more customers patronizing your business. And the reason is that Mr. Noble is obviously quite good at gathering people.

And as he said, the church is a business. And he can strategically help churches to grow in the same way that a business grows.

Well, I disagree with Mr. Noble. The church is not a business. But here's why I don't disagree with him. I have no doubt that the claims that Mr. Noble makes, that if churches were to speak with him and they were to do what he tells them to do, their attendance will increase and their tithes and offerings would also grow in the very same way that he can help businesses to attract more people through the door and to increase sales.

[ 5 : 17 ] But I have absolutely not the slightest temptation, and I say that by the grace of God, I would love to see these chairs filled.

I would love to see our church reach more people with the gospel of God and for the glory of God. But by the grace of God, there is not even a fleeting thought or a fleeting desire to want to speak to Mr. Noble or others like him who consult with churches to help them to get more people through the doors in the chairs and more money in the offering vines.

But I have no doubt that if we called him, he could do the very same things that he's boasting that he has done at his former church.

You see, the truth is gathering a crowd only requires human activity and human effort. And you can employ all kinds of strategies to do that, some of which the Apostle Paul calls crafty strategies and cunning.

however, if you're going to grow a church, you're going to build a church, it takes more than human activity.

[ 6 : 52 ] And there is a difference. There is a difference between gathering a crowd and growing a church. And this truth is clearly seen in this section of the book of Acts to which we have come this morning.

So if you have not yet done so, please turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 2. And this morning we're going to be reading verses 22 through 41. And since the passage is somewhat long, I will do as I did last week.

I will read the relevant sections as I progress through this sermon. But let's pause and let's pray. Father, we are so grateful this morning that we can gather in this place that we can be reminded that we are not our own.

We've been bought with a price. We've been bought by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. as we poured out his life for sinners on Calvary's cross. But our salvation is not a cheap salvation.

[ 8 : 16 ] And Lord, this morning as we open again the book of Acts to consider afresh the early days of the Christian community, I pray you'd speak to our hearts.

I pray that you would speak to our hearts afresh about church life. Lord, I pray that you would grant me grace to be faithful to proclaim your word this morning.

Your spirit come to grant illumination and to give unction and help us all to hear as we ought and then to obey as we should.

We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen. So the church does not grow simply by more and more people attending.

How does the church grow? Or to put it another way, how does the church truly grow? Well, I believe the answer is found in the passage that we just read and it's largely comprised of the first sermon that was preached in the church.

[ 9 : 41 ] The sermon that was preached by the apostle Paul on the day of Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on the 120 gathered in an upper room, the day the church started.

So how does the church truly grow? The church truly grows as the gospel is truly preached and sinners truly repent.

That's where the church grows. True church growth is centered on the preaching of the gospel and the repentance of sinners. Therefore, mere church attendance is not necessarily true church growth.

In our remaining time this morning, I want to consider this first sermon that was preached in the church and how those who heard it responded to it. And to help you to follow along, I've organized my thoughts under three headings and they are number one, the preaching of the gospel, number two, repenting from sin, number three, being added to the church.

So first, let's consider preaching the gospel. After explaining to the crowd what happened starting in verse 22, Peter begins his sermon and his sermon concludes in verse 36.

[ 11 : 11 ] So please follow along as I read starting in verse 22 of Acts chapter 2 and ending in verse 36.

Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know, this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.

Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced. My flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades or let your Holy One see corruption.

You have made known to me the paths of life. you will make me full of gladness with your presence. Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

[ 12 : 59 ] Being therefore a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus, whom you crucified.

I think an important question for us to ask as we consider this sermon is what is the sermon about? What is the heart of this first sermon that was preached in the church?

[ 14 : 25 ] I think a faithful reading of Peter's sermon would show that his sermon is about Jesus Christ. Christ. In other words, the first sermon that was preached in the church, Peter preached Christ crucified, buried, resurrected, and ascended to heaven.

And we see this from the very first word of the sermon. Look at what he says in verse 22. Men of Israel hear these words.

that's not the sermon. He's calling their attention to the sermon. Men of Israel hear these words.

Here's the sermon. Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth. That's where he begins, and that's where he continues throughout this sermon. He preaches Christ.

And this is why the apostle Paul told the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1.23. He said, we preach Christ crucified. That is the message of the church.

[ 15 : 39 ] That is the message that we see Peter preaching after the Spirit has come, and the Lord told them, when the Spirit has come, you're going to be my witnesses, you're going to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins, starting in Jerusalem.

He preaches Christ. Christ. And to preach Christ is to preach the gospel, and to preach the gospel is to preach Christ.

And gospel means good news. It's the good news that sinners can be saved from their sins, because a holy, loving God has sent his Son to this earth to redeem sinners by living a life they could never live, a perfect life before him, and then dying a death in their stead, a substitutionary death, taking their sins, so that God may count them righteous in the same way that he counted his Son as sin and as a sinner.

That's good news. And to preach that message is to preach the gospel. and to preach the gospel is to preach Christ crucified.

Now let's look more closely at how Peter preaches Christ. Notice in verse 22, he preaches the person of Jesus Christ. He tells the crowd how God attested him with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him.

[ 17 : 19 ] And Peter adds, and you yourselves know this, you yourselves know this. Peter was pointing to the fact that Jesus was no ordinary man.

God proved Jesus to be genuine by the miraculous works that he performed through him. He proved Jesus to be divine. Jesus healed the sick.

Jesus cast out demons. He raised the dead. He demonstrated his power over nature. When he calmed the seas, he rebuked the waves. And the wind. Peter was saying to them, Jesus performed mighty works among you, and you know it, and you know that he was no ordinary person.

God showed him to be genuine. God attested him through these miracles. He was not a fake. Then in verse 23, Peter addresses Christ's crucifixion.

he says, Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God and crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. And here we have on display the divine sovereignty of God and the human responsibility of man.

[ 18 : 38 ] We have on display divine sovereignty when we are told that Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

And human responsibility you crucified and killed him by the hands of lawless men. We need to hold both of these in tension. But we also need to recognize where the weight is.

The weight is on what God planned, what God foreordained, and not what lawless men did. Before there were lawless men who would crucify Jesus, who would kill him.

There was an eternal God who had eternal past before the foundation of the world, ordained it that he would send his son into the sinful broken world to be a sacrifice for sin so that sinners who put their faith in him can be saved.

So the crucifixion was no accident. It did not catch God by surprise. he foreordained it. It was carried out by the hands of lawless men who would one day give an account for their deeds if they haven't repented.

[ 19 : 56 ] but it was foreordained by God. This crucifixion was foreordained by God.

And that in itself should cause us to think about the grand plan of God. That Jesus this one who they could find no fault with this one who lived a perfect life God would ordain that he should die.

Why would God ordain that he should die? He ordained that he should die and be crucified in the place of sinners so sinners could be reconciled back to God.

And then in verse 24 we see him addressing the burial and resurrection of Jesus. The burial is somewhat implied even though as he goes on he does specifically talk about Jesus not being left in the grave.

But he says in verse 24 God raised him up losing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. Now up to this point in Peter's sermon nothing was really controversial.

[ 21 : 10 ] I now when he comes to the point to say that Jesus was raised well there's some controversy around that because the chief priest had spread a rumor that the disciples stole the body of Jesus away.

And so Peter doesn't just state this as a fact what Peter does is he goes to support this he goes to the Old Testament to support this he appeals to Old Testament scripture to prove the resurrection and he does this in verses 25 through 28 then he quotes from Psalm 16 verses 8 through 11 and then he goes on in verses 29 through 32 to make the point that David could not have been talking about himself in Psalm 16 verses 8 through 11 because in Psalm 16 verses 8 through 11 David is talking about someone not being left in the grave and Peter makes the point Peter says well it couldn't be David because his tomb is still with us David could not have been talking about himself that he was not abandoned to the grave that his flesh did not see corruption David's grave was still with them

Peter goes on in verse 32 and he essentially says not only did David prophesy Christ's resurrection God did in fact raise him from the dead and we are witnesses of the fact that he raised him from the dead no doubt pointing to the others who were standing with him and then he moves from there and he addresses the ascension of Christ in verse 33 he preaches that Christ also ascended and is exalted at the right hand of God and the evidence of that is that he has received from the father the promise of the spirit and poured out the holy spirit which those who were gathered were seeing and hearing but again as he did for the resurrection this can be disputed how do we even know where

Jesus is even we grant that he rose from the dead how do we know that he is in heaven so again Peter appeals to old testament scripture to support it he appeals to psalm 110 verse 1 which says the Lord said to my Lord sit at thy right hand sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool Peter tells us that psalm 110 is about the ascended Christ and that Jesus since his ascension is seated at the right hand of the father while the father is making his enemies his footstool he is conquering his enemies and quite interestingly when we think about this how does God conquer his enemies I think the picture of the apostle

Paul is certainly one way that we see how the Lord conquers his enemies because we have the apostle Paul who is hostile towards Christians he is going to Damascus to persecute and imprison Christians and the Lord conquers him on the road to Damascus with the gospel and so now the ascended Christ is seated in heaven and the gospel is going forth and many who are his enemies are being conquered by it many are coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and they cease to be the enemies of God and they become the sons and daughters of God Peter says the proof that Jesus Christ has ascended is what you're seeing now this pouring out of the spirit on all flesh where sons and daughters males and females young and old will will prophesy will have the spirit upon them he says you're seeing it and that's the evidence

[ 26 : 28 ] Christ is now seated at the right hand of the father and he has poured out the spirit ushering in a new dispensation of God a dispensation when all who would call on the name of the Lord will be saved now this is significant because this part of Peter's sermon which is the conclusion of the sermon in verse 36 where Peter says this let all the house of Israel know therefore for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified now what does this conclusion mean why does Peter end the sermon here Peter in essence is really saying I'm done I'm done preaching Christ presenting Christ to you Peter is saying that

Jesus Christ is Lord and Christ in other words he's the promised Messiah he's the savior king that God has promised in the Old Testament that he would send and what is especially significant is that he connects it back to verse 21 what we see in verse 21 that it says and it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved and now Peter ends over in verse 36 when he says that all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified in other words Jesus is the Lord upon whose name you must call for salvation that's the faithful preaching of the gospel which is to preach Christ his God approved life his God ordained death his

God orchestrated resurrection and his God exalted ascension he is the only one through whom salvation is available that's the first aspect of true church growth true preaching of the gospel let's consider the second aspect which we see in Peter's sermon which is repenting from sin please follow along as I read verses 37 through 40!

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 and with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them saying save yourselves from this crooked generation so having heard the gospel there was a response Luke describes the response of the people in verse 37 as being cut to the heart we will soon find out that not everybody was cut to the heart although many were they asked

Peter what shall we do and Peter tells them in verse 38 repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and he goes on to assure them that the promise is not just to them but it is also to their children and all who are far off everyone whom the Lord calls to himself I don't have time to elaborate on it but I would just point out to us this morning that when we talk about church growth this becomes very key what Peter says that salvation will come to all those everyone whom the Lord calls to himself that's divine initiative it comes to everyone whom the

[ 31 : 21 ] Lord calls to himself it's not as simple as hiring a consultant and say let's just grow the church no it is everyone whom the Lord calls to himself and then it says in verse 40 and with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them saying save yourselves from this crooked generation brothers and sisters this is the way the gospel is to be responded to it is to be responded to through repentance from sin and obedience by being baptized in water and I want to say this is no small deal on that day this is no small deal I mean all kinds of things were at stake this was a risky path to follow and Peter didn't call them off in some little secret place and try to get them to make some secret decision but he said you need to repent and you need to be baptized that's the answer to their question what should we do

Peter doesn't say repeat these words after me he doesn't tell them to simply join the group and start meeting together and getting busy in church activity no he says you need to repent and be baptized you need to turn away from the world Luke says that he continued to say to them you are to save yourselves from this crooked generation in other words you are to turn away from it this world that is lost and the object of the wrath of God he says you are to save yourselves from this crooked generation and so brothers and sisters I say to us this morning that this is the only legitimate response to the gospel we must repent we must turn from our sin we must turn to Christ Jesus as Lord I may ask you this morning whether this has been your response to the gospel that you have turned from sin that you have repented from sin that you have consciously walked away from the world and its ways and its values and you have pursued

Christ and you were signed on the bottom line by obeying and being baptized in water when you think of some of the numbers of people who we are told have come to salvation in particular locations we must ask how come they aren't transformed how come it's business as usual and only God knows the heart only God knows the transformation that takes place in people's lives the brothers and sisters I would say that many of what we would call conversions are defective they're defective because they first of all don't entail the preaching of the gospel I've heard people preach on any manner of things any number of things and then say okay if you want to accept the Lord

Jesus into your heart pray these words after me and many people do and many are told but now you're saved we hear no gospel there's no repentance there's no turning from sin and therefore there's no true church growth there's no true addition to the church maybe you heard this morning and you would say I've trusted Jesus Christ as my Lord and my personal Savior I have turned away from sin Christ has transformed my life but I've not been water baptized I would say to you this morning please speak with me and be water baptized because delayed obedience is disobedience and that's no way to start the Christian life you don't want to start the Christian life disobeying the first thing we're called to do the first act of obedience is to be baptized baptized but in

Luke 41 sorry in verse 41 Luke writes verse 41 of chapter 2 Luke writes so those who received the word were baptized and there were added that day about 3,000 souls and this brings me to my third and final point being added to the church notice who were added who were added those who received the word and were baptized Luke tells us there were about 3,000 of them but we know that there were many more people gathered in Jerusalem on that day for the feast of Pentecost Luke tells us about 3,000 of them believed and this is very instructive very instructive for what Luke says how does Luke determine who received the word how does he determine who really believed this word that

[ 37 : 06 ] Peter preached they received it to heart they were the ones who were truly cut to heart how does he determine it he determines it by those who got baptized that's what he says those who received the word were baptized in other words if you weren't baptized the understanding was you didn't receive the word you didn't accept this message of Christ crucified buried resurrected and ascended on high and pouring out the Holy Spirit so that whoever calls on the name of the Lord may be saved you have not received that message if you have not been baptized now be careful because the point is not that baptism saves us it does not it does not but it does give evidence to us having put our faith in Jesus

Christ he says they were added that very day they were baptized that day they were added that day it's a massive baptism I imagine they had everybody all hands on deck baptizing people on that day notice that they didn't add themselves they were added to the church and we can't add them only the Holy Spirit adds them the Holy Spirit adds them to the church when they experience conversion that's how the church grows when the gospel is truly preached and sinners truly repent not by engaging consultants who show you what to do to gather the large crowds the businesses gather customers that's the way the church grows brothers and sisters and I believe you share this with me as well I pray this church grows but may the growth not be cosmetic may it not be because of some human ingenuity and human creativity that has a show but really there's no substance instead I want to see growth that comes because we truly preach the gospel and because men and women boys and girls truly turn from their sin the interesting thing about

Mr. Perry Noble is that despite the fact that he no longer qualifies according to scripture to be a pastor despite the fact that he was disgraced and terminated from his church I have no doubt he's going to run a very successful business no doubt many churches will pursue him and no doubt they will experience measures of growth that he and other consultants tell them that they can achieve what the church needs more than that what the church needs more than this show of people packing through our doors when our families are the same when our communities are the same when truth be told in our own hearts we would acknowledge that nothing has changed what we need to hear more than the words of

Perry Noble is we need to hear these words of a deceased pastor a deceased pastor theologian by the name of James Montgomery Boyce who in his introductory words to his commentary on the book of Acts wrote the following and he wrote these words back in 1997 and they are more true today than when he first wrote them there's nothing today's church needs so much as to rediscover the doctrine spirit and commitments of the early Christian community that's what we need that's what we really really need I want to close by just suggesting one specific way that we can apply this week's sermon throughout this week as we prepare to gather again next week for part three of this series let's pray that the Lord will help us as a local church to rediscover the doctrine the spirit and the commitments of the early Christian community let's pray that God will do that for us as a gift and next week we will look at some of those commitments that the early church had let's pray together so