

Living in Biblical Community

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Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] Good to see Pat and Janice back as well, and others who have been away for the summer.! So good to have all of you in the house of the Lord this morning.

Well, you'll notice on the front cover of your bulletin, week by week for most of this year, we have the resolutions of our church for 2016.

And those five resolutions express five ways that we as a church want to grow in this year, and certainly beyond this year.

And you probably remember that when I shared these resolutions near the beginning of the year, I indicated that I'd preach a message on each one of these resolutions throughout the year, and so far I've preached messages on prayer, on gathering, and on evangelism.

So this morning we're taking a break from our series on Ecclesiastes, and I'm going to preach a message on community. As noted in the bulletin, this word community is commonly used.

[1 : 14] We refer to all kinds of communities. We are in all kinds of communities. And I think what we want to consider this morning is whether the church community is any different from these other communities.

And if it is different, what is different? And these are some of the questions that I hope to address this morning. The goal for this message, just so that we would be clear on that, is to stir our hearts to think about biblical community in ways that will cause us to grow as a church.

And from the outset I would say the obvious. The obvious is that it is impossible to say all that can be said about biblical community. As a matter of fact, the entirety of Scripture, Old and New Testament, is really a book about biblical community.

So I'm not attempting this morning to say all that can be said, but I'm trusting that what is said the Lord will use and help us to build and live in community as a church family.

The truth is, by nature, all of us are selfish. By nature, all of us are independent. And really, only the Lord can transform selfish, independent hearts into people who would embrace and live in community with others who are total strangers.

[2 : 55] Only the Lord can do that. So I'm trusting the Lord to do a work in our hearts, even as we sit under His Word this morning. So with that introduction, please turn, if you have not yet done so, to Acts chapter 2.

And this morning we'll be reading verses 37 through 47. Acts chapter 2, 37 through 47.

I'm going to be reading from the English Standard Version, but before I read, I just want to give a bit of context for this text that we are going to read. The context is the day of Pentecost.

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out upon 120 waiting disciples in an upper room. And Scripture says that they spoke in other tongues that they had not learned.

And the massive crowd that had gathered in Jerusalem, Luke says, from every nation under the earth, on the earth.

[4 : 03] This large crowd, Scripture says, they heard these disciples speaking things, praising God, saying wonderful things in their own language, in their own tongues.

So all these nations were gathered, and this miracle took place where those who were baptized with the Holy Spirit spoke in tongues. And these tongues were understood by those who were present.

Some, though, accused the disciples of being drunk, drunk with new wine. And then Peter responds to them, and Peter's response is the first message preached in the church.

Peter tells them that this event was really something that was prophesied by the prophet Joel, that Joel had prophesied the pouring of God's Spirit on all flesh.

And then Peter preached, and he preached Christ. He preached his life, his miraculous works, his death, his burial, and his resurrection. And then he ends his sermon in verse 36.

[5 : 16] With these words he says, Now we pick up in verse 37.

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 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 those who received his word were baptized, and there 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 came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

[6 : 45] 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. Let's pray together. Father, how blessed we are this morning to have the holy word of the living God.

Lord, we pray this morning and ask that you would grant us illumination as we consider this text this morning.

Holy Spirit, we ask that you would open the eyes of our hearts. Lord, we pray that you would use your word to sanctify us because your word is truth.

[8 : 01] And I pray that the truth about community, the truth about biblical community and what it looks like to live in it would be etched on our souls.

We pray, Lord, that you'd help us to repent of selfishness and independence that are contrary to biblical fellowship and any kind of attitude or practice that undermines the community that you want to build in this local church.

Lord, I pray that you'd help us to sit under the weight and the authority of your word, allowing you, like the master potter, to shape us and conform us into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, I ask for grace to help me to be faithful to these who are gathered. And Lord, bearing in mind all the circumstances that you would give me grace to expedite bringing your word to your people for the benefit of this church.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. In this passage that we just read, what we have is the first description recorded in scripture of what New Testament biblical community looked like.

[9 : 34] In particular, in the church at Jerusalem. This is the first divine description of what that looks like. And what is very insightful about this is when we consider that this is the church being formed on the day of Pentecost.

And it is interesting that this is the aspect of church life that Luke zeroes in on first. This vital aspect of biblical community.

So this morning, here's a question that I want to seek to answer as we consider this text. And it is this. How can we grow in living in biblical community?

How can we grow in living in biblical community? In this passage before us, there are two main ideas that communicate two necessary components for biblical community.

And in our remaining time this morning, I want to consider them. The first idea is what I would call divine addition. Divine addition.

[10 : 47] And what this means is that biblical community begins when God joins together people in spiritual community, people who He has saved.

We see this so clearly in verses 37 through 41. Again, the background, as I said before, is the day of Pentecost. This is in response to the preaching of Peter.

those who were convicted by it asked, what shall we do? And Peter tells them what they are to do in verse 38. He says, 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.

This is the way that everyone is to respond to the gospel, to repent, turn away from sin, starting in our heart and our mind, and then be baptized.

And notice that both water baptism and repentance are commanded, or repentance and water baptism are both commanded. He says, repent and be baptized. Now, water baptism for sure does not save us, but it should not be minimized because it is a command.

[12:09] And to minimize it is to say that it is not important, but it is important, and therefore it is to be obeyed. When a person says, I have come to Christ, I'm a Christian, and they ignore this command to be baptized, essentially what they're doing is they're starting the Christian life in disobedience.

You're starting not obeying what the Lord has called you to do. and truthfully, one of the things about life and the Christian life is that we demonstrate maturity when we don't need a reason to do everything we've been asked to do.

That's a sign of maturity. Now, obviously not foolish things that someone just say, do this and you do that, but we want to be careful that we demonstrate the kind of humility that enables us to obey particular things, even though we may not understand the importance of it or the necessity for it, we obey nonetheless.

Water baptism is a picture of being washed and cleansed from sin. We sang about it this morning, we can wash away our sins. It is that picture of being washed and cleansed from sin, but it is also a picture of a death, a burial, and a resurrection.

The old person of sin is immersed in water, a kind of burial, and then they come up to the newness of life, a kind of resurrection.

[13:49] And I felt impressed to mention this this morning because there might be some present this morning, you've trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, but you have not obeyed him at water baptism.

I want to urge you and encourage you to be baptized, and recognize that in doing so you are obeying the Lord. And that's you this morning. I gladly arranged to have you baptized, so speak with me after our gathering and we can make plans to do that.

But notice also in verse 38 that there's this promise of the Holy Spirit. Here Peter is saying that to those whom God forgives, he gives the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is true for all believers. This is what all believers have in common. Notice what he says. He says in verse 39, the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

Everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself, he gives the gift of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. And the Spirit enables us to be united together in one body, united together in one community.

[15:11] Now notice verse 41. Verse 41 is very, very insightful. It's very insightful because of what it says. It says, so those who received his word were baptized and they were added that day about 3,000 souls.

How do we know who received the word that day? The way we know who received the word that day is those who were baptized. And the implication is that not everyone was baptized, so those who were not baptized were those who did not receive the word.

Those who received the word, not heard the word, not acknowledged the word, but those who truly received the word, they were baptized.

And they gave evidence to receiving the word by being baptized. And what we're told is that they were added to the apostles, that group of believers, they were added to them.

We know there was about 120 of them in total. So the latter part of verse 41 says, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls.

[16:30] Now verse 47 gives us some insight into this addition that took place. Verse 47 says, the latter part, and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

we can call this divine addition. This is that first idea, divine addition. Only the Lord can truly add to the church. We can't add ourselves to the church.

We can't just by signing a form be added to the church. Now those who are added to the church are those who have repented from their sins, those who have obeyed the Lord, in water baptism, those who he gives the Holy Spirit, they are the ones who are added to the church.

You can think of it as a kind of divine knitting, a kind of divine joining of hearts, and it is essential for biblical community. This is the starting point for biblical community.

It's more than just being friendly and close and mushy mushy with one another. It's more than that. It begins on this foundational ground of being saved by God, indwelt by the Spirit of God, and then being divinely added by God.

[18:01] Not just to the church universal, but also to the church local. Not just to this unseen community of believers, but to a tangible body of believers in a location where you can know and be known.

And so I believe that foundational to growing a biblical community has to be this conviction that the Lord has added us to a community. That the Lord in his providential dealings has added us to a community of brothers and sisters.

He has divinely placed us together. This is the foundation for true biblical community. And so for those of you who call this church home, this church Kingdom Life, your home church, when asked you, is it based on a sense of the Lord's joining?

Is it based on a sense of the Lord and his providence has brought you here and added you to this body and connected you to these individuals? Or is it perhaps based on some other reason?

Or perhaps it's something you've not really given thought to? Really not considered the reality reality of that whole situation?

[19:31] I encourage you this morning to think about it and try to settle that in your own heart. That you would have a witness one way or another about the Lord's divine addition.

Because the reality is that whether here at this church or some other church, it is the Lord's will that you be out of the community with brothers and sisters who have been forgiven of their sins and who are living in the midst of a crooked generation as the Lord's redeemed community.

And the awareness of this provides a foundation upon which living in community with brothers and sisters can be pursued. One of the realities about living in community is there are times when community is threatened in community.

There are times when strong winds blow and rough waves rise. And sometimes community is threatened by disagreement.

Sometimes community is threatened by misunderstanding. Sometimes community is threatened by sin. The sin of others against us and sometimes our sin against other people.

[20:50] And when these things happen, they threaten community. community. And having a sense of divine addition, having a sense that the sovereign Lord has joined you to a community of believers will help you to weather many storms.

Will help you to weather the storms of misunderstanding and disagreement and enable you by the grace of God to stay in community because there's a sense the Lord has added me.

The Lord has providentially brought me and joined me. Part of the spiritual warfare that we face in life is this division between those who are connected to one another.

And we see it from the very outset of the fall. This division between Cain and Abel where one brother's heart will turn against another to the point that he would murder his brother. And the enemy works in a very similar way because he hates community.

He himself rebelled when in divine community. And so he seeks to separate brothers and sisters.

[22:10] brothers. But having the sense of the Lord's addition, having the sense that God has done something in my life that is beyond my own doing and bringing me to this local church gives us a certain degree of sticking in community even when it is difficult, even when it is hard.

And it's a form of protection for us. Now I'm not just talking about protection from leaving the church. Because the truth is you can leave community when staying in the church.

You can check out from community even though you are physically within the church. And when that happens, it's like a double kind of robbery.

It is you robbing yourself of the benefits of community and you robbing the church community of the benefits that you can bring by actively participating in community.

So the awareness of the Lord has sovereignly added us to a community of believers is the foundation for pursuing and living in community with those believers.

[23:35] So that's the first idea, divine addition. The second is found in verses 42 through 47. And it is the idea of personal devotion.

First, divine addition. Second, personal devotion. Luke tells us that this new community of believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

discipleship. And I think what we should see is divine addition is not enough. There must also be a personal devotion and in verse 42, Luke refers to four aspects of community to which the believers were devoted.

And I think we can also call this the life of discipleship. discipleship. These are the big components of what discipleship looks like in a community of believers.

First, they were devoted to the apostles' doctrine. They were devoted to hearing and living the word of God. They were devoted to hearing and living the word of God as was preached by the apostles and taught by the apostles.

[24 : 54] And really, on a deeper level, they were devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ himself because the apostles were preaching his word. They're preaching the word of God.

They were devoted to the apostles' doctrine. Brothers and sisters, this is foundational for us. The life that we are to be living is to be rooted and grounded in the word of God.

We have no other basis to see life and to understand life and to live life away from the word of God.

The word of God has to be guiding us and instructing us in terms of how we are to live.

We have to be devoted to it. We have devotion to it. If we are going to pursue biblical community, there must be this devotion to the word of God.

fellowship. We have to be devoted to fellowship. And I know that when we think about fellowship, we think about getting together, spending time with one another, interacting over food and just good company.

[26 : 06] And that's certainly a part of it. But the fellowship that is being referred to here in this passage is so much more than that. It literally means sharing life together.

It's almost like you're breaking off portions of your life and you are sharing it with one another. You are feeding each other, feeding off of each other's lives.

You're partaking. There's this social intercourse that takes place. The word is actually also used for two individuals who would join in a partnership together, where they put their lot together and they share in the risks and the benefits of that particular situation.

It is a mutual sharing of life together. Not just in a surface way, but in a substantial way. And it is rooted in a sense that God has joined us together.

God has added us together. And therefore, there's an element of faith and trust and belief that this is the doing of the Lord. And therefore, we're able to pursue this. So in fellowship, we share not only our food, we share our very lives with one another.

[27 : 28] They were also devoted to breaking of bread. And this breaking of bread was more than likely a fellowship meal that was popular among the early disciples, where in addition to the meal, they would celebrate the Lord's Supper at the same time.

And that's why we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, where Paul is admonishing the church, they would have this meal at the same time celebrating the Lord's Supper, but many of them would be drunk from the meal, having drunk too much and so forth.

But it was this time of eating together and sharing together. And really, when you think about that, one of the, in that culture at the time, one of the highest honors that you would be given is to be invited to have a meal with someone.

And this is why one of the penalties of excommunication was that you would not eat with a person. Because it was such an honor to be able to eat and to and to share food and company, enjoying food, enjoying the blessings of God, enjoying the blessing of friendship.

And they were devoted to this. It was a devoted thing. And I think about us in our busy lives, and I think of myself.

[28 : 58] I was convicted that this is a value that needs to grow in terms of being devoted to it so that we are able to set priorities for it.

And then last, he says that they were devoted to prayers. This would have been prayer times in the temple, prayer times in their homes. And David has already touched on it this morning.

one of the unthought about ways that we grow together in community is praying together.

Because oftentimes in praying together, you hear the burdens, you hear the concerns of brothers and sisters in a moment when otherwise you may not hear it. We learn so much about other people,

even sometimes when they're not even sharing a burden or concern, but they're pouring their hearts out to the Lord.

And you're growing, and you are being knitted as a result of that. And these individuals were devoted to praying together.

[30 : 12] It's a vital part of biblical community. And so, I pray that many of you would have already decided in your heart, after David's admonition this morning, to be a part of corporate prayer.

Because it is also a part of growing and living in community. In verses 44 and 45, we read, And those 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. These words speak of a community of believers who were marked by selflessness, compassion, and generosity.

And these community marks are not accidental. They come from a sense of divine addition and through personal devotion to a community of believers.

That's where selflessness will be expressed. That's where compassion will be expressed. That's where generosity will be expressed.

[31 : 32] In my 28 years of pastoral ministry, I've heard people express many incorrect views about verses 44 and 45.

Some people think it means that believers are to live communally, meaning we own everything together. You don't own anything. You just own it on behalf of the community.

Everything is really at the disposal of the community. But that's not so. And the text itself is proof that it is not so.

The mere fact that people were selling possessions and selling belongings is proof that they did own things. They were selling what they owned.

If you turn over to Acts chapter 5, this is the account of Ananias and Sapphira. Acts chapter 5 verse 4, this is sometime later.

[32 : 37] Here's what we see Peter saying to Ananias in verse 4. Talking about the land, he says, while it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?

In other words, it wasn't the churches, it was your own. And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?

You can do with it whatever you wanted to do. So, there's no requirement, there was no requirement to do what Ananias and Sapphira decided to do.

There were people who were doing that out of the generosity of their hearts. And you have to appreciate that this is a new fledgling congregation. no doubt some of the people who came to Jerusalem for Pentecost and who were saved remained and had to be cared for and housed and have their needs met.

And so, this was a spontaneous kind of thing that was happening, that people recognized that there were needs. And so, we learn a little later on that this man Barnabas, the son of consolation, he first sold property and he gave the proceeds to the apostles later at their feet and others began to do likewise.

[34 : 08] And so, they centralized the resources so that they were able to manage and meet the needs as they arose in the congregation. This was not done by compulsion, it was done out of Christian love and Christian concern, being aware that there were needs in the congregation.

Another important aspect to note is the fact that the resources, I touched on this already, they were distributed centrally. And they were done so on the basis of need.

In other words, the needs were assessed and then the distribution was made, it was not based on desires or wants, it was based on needs.

Linden touched on this as he exhorted us as we were giving and this issue of stewardship because it comes out in this passage as well.

We see the results of being a good steward where you are able to have to be able to give. And good stewardship is more than just taking care of our finances so that we could have enough, so that we would not have to depend on others.

[35 : 27] That's good stewardship but good stewardship is more than that. Good stewardship is not just managing what the Lord blesses me with, not getting in debt, not overspending so that I won't have needs to look to others to meet.

good stewardship also contemplates not just being mindful of our needs but also the needs of others.

And that's what we see being so prevalent among the early disciples that Luke takes note of it. There seems to have been a value among them where they were mindful of the needs of others. And so when we steward our resources well, then we would have to be able to give to the needs of others, not just thinking about ourselves.

And see, this is why we have a benevolence fund at the church, that we're able to give to it so that we're able to meet needs as they arise from time to time.

[36 : 39] This community was marked by this generosity, expression of concern for brothers and sisters who are in need.

And we see this wonderful description of them in verses 46 and 47. It says, 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.

This was a rich community, a community that enjoyed spiritual vitality. You know, in a world where we have many wonderful groups doing wonderful things, wonderful service groups, they do excellent community work.

It is so easy to mistake the church community as a spiritual version of those kinds of groups, a spiritual rotary or spiritual Kiwanis.

[37 : 54] But it's a mistake to do that. The church community is not something that we are a part of because someone recommended that we join it. We got two references and therefore they accept us in it.

No, we are a part of it because God had mercy on us through Jesus Christ. He saved us and he reconciled us to himself and he joined us with one another.

He put us in a family where we call him father. And if we call God father, then we have each other as brother and sister.

And he calls us to live out a devotion to him and a devotion to one another. And that devotion flows out of a recognition of what the Lord has done in our hearts and in our lives.

And it demonstrates that he has transformed us from independent selfish people into those who would live in community with others. Brothers and sisters, only the Lord can do this.

[39 : 06] Only the Lord would have been able to transform those early disciples. You know, it's interesting about what they were doing.

A big thing in Israel was owning land. And one of the first things that happened when they got into the promised land was the land was divided into the different tribes and the different clans.

And there was great concern that they kept the land in their communities. Some of you may remember this one account of these girls who had no brothers and they were going to be in a situation where they were going to get no inheritance.

And Moses inquired of the Lord and the Lord said that the inheritance that would have gone to the males, if there were males in that family, would then go to them. And there was concern because there was concern of other relatives in their tribe that if they got this land, they got married, that they were going to go over and take it into another tribe.

And the Lord said, no, we'll remain in that tribe, but they get to keep the land. So land is a big thing for them. And here what we have when the church starts, it's not a big thing for them.

[40 : 22] They're selling it. They're parting with it. And they're doing that because God has touched their hearts. God has transformed their hearts. without this transformation of our hearts, it's hard to live in community.

In a true sense, we can be visibly in community, but in terms of being able to really live in community, living out these ideas, these values, these expressions of devotion is only possible through a transformed heart.

heart. And that transformed heart is only possible through these words that the Apostle Peter spoke in verse 36 when he said, let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

Brothers and sisters, living in community, truly living in community is only possible through people who have been saved by God and added by him divinely to a group of people and as they live out in

a devoted way the life to which they are called, but ultimately depending on the Lord to work in their hearts because only he can transform our hearts.

No amount of discipline, no amount of commitment in our own strength will cause us to exhibit what we read about this morning.

[42 : 00] So I pray that this picture of biblical community for us in Acts chapter 2 and indeed in all of the book of Acts will encourage us to grow and embrace living in community not only this year but also in the years to come.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together.