

Always Devoted

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Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[0 : 00] As many of you may know, the book of Acts is really the second of a two-volume set of narratives written by Luke. Luke was a Greek man. He was a doctor, actually, that accompanied the apostle Paul on many of his missions endeavors. And of course, the gospel of Luke is the first volume of the set, and then it is followed here by the book of Acts. And Luke's gospel begins all the way at the birth of Christ. And it continues in its narrative and its telling. It continues from the birth of Christ all the way through the resurrection of Jesus. And then it stops, and Luke picks back up in this second volume written to the same person, Theophilus, and he picks up just after the resurrection of Jesus. And it continues all the way telling the story of how the gospel spread across the known world in the first century, particularly through the work of the apostles that Jesus had called for that specific purpose and time. So in the Old Covenant, as you read the Old Testament, you see that it's the nation of Israel that God used to reflect his glory, to proclaim his truth.

But then when we get to the New Testament, the New Covenant, Jesus establishes the church to accomplish that task. It's no longer Israel that he's using to reflect who he is and to demonstrate his goodness to the world, to preach his word to the world. It's not them anymore. Now it's the church. It's a New Covenant people in the church. So Acts then doesn't only tell us how the gospel spread across the world, but it tells us the story of how the church began. So in chapter one, we see Jesus after his resurrection ascends back to heaven. And as he ascends back to heaven, he gives a reiteration in some sense of the great commission and what the apostles would then continue to do. And he promises his return. Remember, as he disappears into the heavens, it's the angels that appear and they say, why stand you gazing? This same Jesus, who have you have seen ascend, will return likewise? That's an amazing promise. It's an important promise to the church. But it's not time for that because he had a commission for the church, a commission for these apostles. And then when we see in chapter two, at the conclusion of this, we see the Holy Spirit descend upon those apostles. Jesus promised that would be the case. Remember, all the disciples in the gospel of John, they were actually terrified. They were sad because Jesus kept talking about his departure. But Jesus said, no, you don't understand. It's good for you that I leave. That blows our minds a little bit, doesn't it? How could it be good for us for Jesus to leave? Because he said, I'm going to send the helper to you, the comforter. And he's going to remind you of all of these things I taught. He's going to give you power to do the work that I have called you to do.

And he's going to continue to work. And we see that happening in chapter two at the beginning, the Holy Spirit descends on the people. We see this really incredible scene as they are gifted to speak in languages that people from all over the world were able to understand in their own tongue.

And then Peter preaches his first sermon. Perhaps it was his greatest sermon. Certainly, as far as we can tell in the scriptures, it was his most fruitful sermon, at least immediately.

He preached about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And 3,000 people came to know Christ that day. It's amazing. And then we get to these final verses in the chapter. And we see the start of the very first local church. This is how it began. And what we have in these verses at the end of chapter two is a description of the church at its purest moment. Its purest moment. It has not yet been defiled by false teaching. It has not yet been corrupted by sins within the church. It's not going to take long for that to happen. But at this point, it hasn't happened yet. It's at its purest moment.

[4 : 24] And I believe it's a snapshot for us of what it means to be a God-glorifying, Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered church. It's not comprehensive. That's why we have the rest of the New Testament.

It helps us fill in some of those other gaps. But it does provide the vital signs that determine the overall health of the body. So that's really what we're thinking of this morning.

We're taking a well visit to the scriptures today. We don't really have a particular problem in mind. We're just checking the vital signs. What does it take to make sure that our overall health is headed in the right direction? That's what we want to look at. That's what we want to examine this morning. So the focus of the message really comes from a single phrase in verse 42. Get it with me again. Luke wrote that these new believers devoted themselves. They devoted themselves to four essential elements of a healthy church. And it's the devotion to the things in verse 42 that then produces all the things in verse 43 to verse 47. This is important here. A literal reading of this phrase, it's reflected, if you have a new American standard with you today, you'll see it's already reflected this way.

It says they were continually devoting themselves. They were continually devoting themselves. It's not that they devoted themselves in a single moment and then it kind of wore off. No, they continued in these things. The phrase itself denotes a steadfast, single-minded devotion to a particular course of action. And so as the Holy Spirit is empowering the apostles and then he's falling on this early church, 3,000 people get saved. They unite together as the first local church. [6 : 32] And what the product of that Holy Spirit-empowered group of people was, is this devotion to these four things. Continually, steadfast, committed together to a single course of action that's been described for us in the rest of verse 42. You all know that Julie and I love the music of Keith and Kristen Getty very much. Mary asked us this morning, she's been listening to our church playlist on Spotify and she said, where do you find all this Irish music? It's like, I just love Irish music.

And of course, that's what the Gettys are and we produce that. They just produced a new album. It came out last week and we were driving down the road with the girls one day this week, I think, and we were listening to the new album. And they did a new arrangement and recording of Amazing Grace on it.

And they did it in partnership with Dana Masters, who for, I don't know, a decade or so has been traveling and singing with Van Morrison. And then they also had Kirk Whalum, who is a saxophone player.

You may not know who he is, but you have certainly heard him play. It was Kirk Whalum that played the saxophone solo on Whitney Houston's I Will Always Love You. So you've heard him play before. So we're talking, we're talking three massively talented people and musicians. And we were just talking about that as we were driving, just how good they are, how good they are at what they do. And that just led into other conversations. And Julie spoke up and she said, you know, I heard the other day, Kristen Getty posted something about how she was working with her vocal coach. And she said, I was really surprised that after all of these years of being a professional musician and singer, she's so good that she still has to have a vocal coach. But when you think about it, it's really not that surprising, is it? The best musicians continually devote themselves to the fundamentals of music, to the fundamentals of singing, to the fundamentals of their courses. They need coaches around them. They need people that will help them stay focused, continually devoted to those things. And in the same sense, a healthy church remains continually devoted to the fundamental truths of the Bible, to the fundamental elements of what it means to be a healthy church. And at its purest moment in history, perhaps, it was these four things that the church was most committed to doing.

[9 : 03] And as we celebrate today, we want to look at these characteristics and measure ourselves against the Word of God. Is Lakeside Bible Church continually devoted to the same things that we find true of this church? And we're going to get to the particulars of that devotion in a moment. But let's start first with the prerequisites of devotion. The prerequisites of devotion. Look with me at verse 41.

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls. Before we spend time looking at the marks of a healthy church in verse 42, we have to first understand what a church is according to verse 41. Because bringing a group of people together and establishing an organization, slapping a label of church on it, is not what actually makes a church a church.

You don't start a clothing store by building a bread factory and selling bread, right? But there are some people that think that a church is really nothing more than a group of random people that have some common interests, and they get together, and they say that they're a church.

And there are many churches, maybe even in our very Christianized culture here in the greater Charlotte area, that really, they're not real churches. They're not real churches. They say they are, but they haven't actually met the prerequisites of what a true church is.

So what exactly is it that brought these people together? What is it that set them apart? What makes a church a church? And what makes you a part of a church?

[10:54] Because merely identifying with a local church does not constitute being a true member of Christ's church. So let's think about that. There's three features of this here, just in verse 41.

The first thing, what makes a church a church? They were converted. They were converted. Look with me again. Those who received His word. They received His word.

It wasn't a desire to create another religious sect within Judaism that brought these people together. They were bound together and united first because of their repentance and faith in Christ.

By God's grace, they heard the gospel preached, and the God opened their hearts to understand it, and then they then received that word by faith. In other words, they were converted to Christ.

They became true believers. And it was this work of God's salvation that made them a part of the church.

[12:03] So then the church is not man's idea, nor is it the product of man's devices. But the church is made up of the people of God who have been radically saved by the grace of God.

But what exactly was it that they received? What exactly was it about this word that they received that made them a church?

It was the gospel. It was the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection preached by Peter. And I'll leave it to you to read the whole sermon or sermon summary as it's presented here in Acts chapter 2, but let's just walk through a couple of the main features.

First, Peter preached the death and resurrection of Christ. Look with me at verse 22. Acts 2, 22. Here's Peter. 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.

[13:27] God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. What's the first feature of Peter's sermon?

The death and resurrection of Christ. Men of Israel, hear this. This Jesus that you saw, you heard, you witnessed the signs and wonders that can be attributed to no one but God.

You crucified him, but before you get too excited about that, it was because of the determinative will of the Father. He delivered him into your hands for a purpose. For a purpose.

But he doesn't get into the purpose yet. He moved straight to resurrection. God raised him up. God raised him up.

Why? Because death had no claim on him. This is amazing. This is amazing. Listen, why was Jesus raised?

[14:25] Because he couldn't stay dead. He had no sin for which to pay. Death literally had no claim on him. He did not die because he was a sinner.

He laid his life down in the place of sinners. And Peter stands up on the day of Pentecost after receiving the Holy Spirit. And what's the first thing he says? Men of Israel, listen, this Jesus that you crucified, God raised him up.

And the reason he raised him up is because he's God. He's perfect. Death had no claim on him. What's Peter preaching? The gospel. That's the gospel.

That Jesus died for our sins. And that he rose from the dead to give us life. But he didn't stop there. It continues. He focused on the death and resurrection.

Then he moved on to describing Jesus as Lord and Savior. Look at verse 36. Let all the house of Israel, therefore, know for certain that God has made him both.

[15:34] What's the next three words? Lord and Christ. This Jesus, in case they had forgotten. This Jesus whom you crucified.

He is Lord. He is the Christ. He's the Messiah. He's the Savior, the Redeemer, the Son of Man, the one you've been waiting for. It is him.

He is Lord and Savior. There are plenty of people that want to see Jesus as Savior. Not as many want to see him as Lord. Peter says there's no salvation apart from his Lordship.

There's no salvation apart from his Messiahship. This is who Jesus is. And it's not that we make him our Savior. It's not that we make him our Lord. It's that we recognize that he is the Lord.

We recognize that he is the Savior. But he doesn't stop there. He continues on. After the death and resurrection, after the Lordship and Messiahship of Christ, he gives a response of faith.

[16:35] He exhorts them to believe. Look at verse 37. Now, when they heard this, they were cut to the heart. Now, before we move forward, why were they cut to the heart?

Was it because Peter was just so eloquent? No. That's actually part of what blew their minds. You see it again in Acts chapter 4.

Peter preaches the gospel. And it's the Sanhedrin that's blown away because they look at him and John and they say, these are unlearned men. These are fishermen. There's no eloquence in Peter. What's happening here? Why are they cut to the heart? It's not because of Peter. It's the grace of God at work. That's what he does with the gospel.

When we take the gospel and we preach the gospel, what does the Holy Spirit then do? He cuts the hearts of those who hear the gospel. That's his work. Verse 37.

[17:37] Now, those who heard, they were cut to the heart. And they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brothers, what shall we do? What do 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 sins.

The forgiveness of sins doesn't come as a result of the baptism. The forgiveness of sin comes as a result of the name of Jesus Christ. And then he says, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And then there's this fantastic promise.

This promise is for you. And then who else? And for your children. And for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord, our God calls to himself.

What does that mean? This call is as much for us as it was for those people in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. This same Jesus who died and rose again, he's to be our Lord and Savior too.

And when we're cut to the heart by the gospel and we find ourselves asking, what am I supposed to do? We do what Peter says, repent and believe the gospel. This is always the message in the Bible.

[18:52] It's what Jesus himself preached. We've talked about it so many times in Mark. Mark chapter one, verse 15. Jesus came into the region of Galilee. He was going around and what was he preaching?

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. It is near you. Repent and believe the good news. Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthians 15. Let me read it to you. Now I would remind you brothers of the gospel that I preached to you.

The gospel, good news, the good news that I brought to you of Jesus, which you received. There's that receiving again. The people he preached to in Corinth received the word that he had and in which you stand and by which you are being saved.

Here's what it is. That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures. That he was buried and that he raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

[19:56] What's that all about? It's always the message. It's the message of Jesus. It was the message of Peter in Acts 2. It was the message of Paul in the Corinthian setting. It was the message of all the apostles.

Jesus Christ, he has died for our sins and he has raised for our justification to give us life. What is it about this gospel?

Paul wrote to the Romans in Romans chapter 1 that he wasn't ashamed of this gospel. Why? Because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Why do we preach the gospel? Why did Peter preach the gospel? Because it's the power of God. The only way you will ever be saved. The only way you will ever have your sins forgiven.

The only way you will ever get eternal life is through faith in the gospel of Christ. It is his power at work through the gospel.

[20:56] So God's people are not those who sign membership forms. God's people are not those who regularly attend worship services. They're not those who live morally acceptable lives.

Because today nobody really understands what morally acceptable actually is. A true church is made up of those who by God's grace have heard the gospel, believe the gospel, and followed Jesus because of the gospel.

That's what salvation is. There's nothing else. There's nothing less. Churches are full of people that identify as Christians.

Christians but have never actually received this word. Are you one of them? You say you're a Christian but you have not yet received this word.

Come to Jesus today. Come to him. Believe the gospel today. He'll forgive your sin.

[22 : 10] He'll rescue your soul from hell. He'll freely give you eternal life. And he'll make you a member of his glorious church. Otherwise, you're a pretender.

You're a pretender. But you don't have to be a pretender. What is a true church? It's made of people that are actually converted to Christ.

Not people playing games. Not people who just want to be involved religiously in some form or fashion. But people who have heard the gospel, believe the gospel, and follow Christ because of the gospel.

But it wasn't just that they were converted. We also see that they were confessing. They were confessing. Look back at verse 41. Those who received his word were baptized.

They were baptized. Now, the fact that they were baptized, immediately following their conversion, is really important. Jesus actually commanded this.

[23 : 13] We talked about it last Sunday night in the Great Commission. Jesus said, go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. And he said, one of the ways that you'll go about making disciples is by baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Some Christian traditions will distort this. They'll say that baptism is necessary for a person to be saved. But that's not at all what Jesus or the apostles were teaching.

Baptism does not produce salvation. Baptism is a public declaration. That a person has received the gospel by faith and has become a follower of Jesus.

It's a confession. Not a confession in the sense of confessing sin, but of professing that I am now a follower of Christ. He has saved me.

I have abandoned everything else, and I am following him. It's not something that saves you. It's something that you do because you are saved. It's a declaration. It's a confession.

[24 : 15] And this was a dramatic step of obedience for these people. For many of them, it likely led to them being cut off from their families. The Jews practiced a form of baptism, but it wasn't for Jews.

The baptism that would most closely relate to what is happening here, John's baptism in particular, it was reserved for Gentiles, people who were not a part of the people of God.

They were outside of the covenant people. Well, Jews believe they were already a part of the covenant people. They didn't have to be baptized in this way. It was reserved for Gentile proselytes. So if there was a Gentile that had determined to proselytize to Judaism, they would go through a baptism that would be a confession that that's what they were doing.

They were leaving behind the defilements of their past in order to become a Jew. So for a Jew to be baptized in this way in the name of Jesus was them saying, as a Jew, I'm on the outside of the covenant.

As an Israelite, I don't belong to God. Therefore, through Christ, I must confess him. And I have confessed him. That's what this baptism was.

[25 : 29] This was a big deal. It's a big deal. It's also helpful to remember here. There were no church buildings in Jerusalem at this point.

They didn't come for a long time after this, actually. So how were these people actually baptized? In the middle of the city of Jerusalem. Well, because there's mikvahs everywhere in Jerusalem.

Places where they would go through ceremonial clean cleansings for various things, things that they would have to do as a part of their obedience to the Mosaic covenant, the Mosaic law. They're all over Jerusalem. 3,000 people scattered around to these mikvahs, along with the apostles who are now 12 again.

And the apostles are baptizing them publicly in the town squares with all of their family, with all the people that they know around going about their daily business.

Now here comes Faye into the mikvah in the middle of the city. She's been a Jew, but now she's converted to Christ. And as Peter stands with her in the mikvah, he says, Faye has trusted Jesus Christ for salvation, to be a part of his kingdom people.

[26 : 36] And she is now being baptized to represent her faith in Christ. This meant something huge. It was public. It was a declaration. That's what this baptism was.

They were confessing. It was a sign that these people had truly believed the gospel and they were willing to publicly identify with Jesus, no matter the personal cost.

And there was great personal cost. And it may not have that same cultural impact in North Carolina as it still does in some other places around the world.

But we still practice believer's baptism. Why? In obedience to Christ. And to confess our faith in him. It's part of what makes a church a church.

And then there's a third thing. They were converted. They were confessing. They were committed. Committed. Look at the verse again, verse 41. So those who received his word were baptized and they were added that day about 3,000 souls.

[27 : 41] They were added, Luke says. What does he mean? What were they added to? Well, he clearly means the church. They weren't only converted.

They weren't only confessing their faith. But they immediately committed themselves in fellowship with other believers. I think this is important too.

Because the Bible knows nothing of an isolated form of Christianity. God intends for us as faithful disciples to function within the context of a local church.

And it's within this commitment to the local church that all four of the essentials in verse 42 that I promise we're going to get to can only happen within the context of the church.

If there's no commitment to a body, you can't have any of the things in verse 42 that describe the purity of this gathering and this people. You know, you have to think about these three things.

[28 : 45] Remember, we're thinking about the prerequisites of this devotion. They were converted. They're confessing. They are committed.

Take just one of those things away and you can't have a true faithful church. Now, I don't mean that different views on baptism would prevent you from being a true church. That's not what I mean by that.

I'm talking about the confession. If you take away the confession and all you have is conversion and commitment, well, nobody knows what you're actually committed to. It takes confession.

What's the things that we're declaring to this world as they drive by every Sunday when they see us here? Lakeside Bible Church. They may not know this, but what we're declaring is that we are followers of Christ. And we gather Sunday by Sunday to worship him, to hear from him.

Without that, without the confession, you can't have a true church. You're just a bunch of Christians that get together for a gathering, for clubs, for social things, whatever it is.

[29 : 45] All right, you take conversion out. It's not a true church. It's just a bunch of pretenders. Take commitment out and there's never actually anybody together. You see?

Before you can be a devoted church, you have to actually be a church. And what is a church? It's a group of people that are true believers in Christ, that are confessing their faith in Christ to the world around them, and that are committed to one another to glorify him.

Well, let's look at the particulars now. Particulars in verse 42. The full description that summarizes the character of the church.

It goes all the way to the end of the chapter, but it's the four particulars in verse 42 that really lay the foundation. It's not that the other things don't matter or that they're less important.

Generosity, hospitality, corporate worship, all of those things are indicated in those other verses. It's not that they're less important. It's that they flow first from the things in verse 42.

[30 : 55] Without the continual devotion to these four things, none of the other things would actually take place. And look, you know, we could spend weeks on each one of these, and I'm just going to barely touch on each one of them, okay?

We're doing a quick flyby here, okay? Number one. What's the essential first? The preaching of the Bible. The preaching of the Bible. They continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. The backbone of a healthy Christian life is teaching. And these 3,000 souls that were saved in Jerusalem immediately committed themselves, devoted themselves to the regular preaching of the apostles.

What exactly was it that the apostles were teaching? It wasn't a collection of their own thoughts. It wasn't a collection of their own ideas. They're preaching the Bible.

Acts chapter 2, Peter's sermon is an exposition of the prophet Joel. You can go back and read the whole thing. He reads Joel. He explains Joel. He does a cross-reference with Psalms, and then he applies it to the people.

[32 : 04] He's preaching the Old Testament prophet of Joel. He's preaching the Bible. They expounded upon the Old Testament scriptures. And in doing that, they were always explaining how Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.

That the Old Testament proves it, points to Christ, to Jesus. They taught what Jesus taught. The distinctive feature of the New Testament church is that it was continually devoted to the preaching of the Bible.

And to be a biblically healthy church, we must put a premium on the faithful exposition, explanation, and exhortation of the Word of God.

Our health begins there. If our overall health is going to continue going in the same direction, we've got to stay committed continually to the preaching of the Bible.

But just as a quick word of caution, we need to make sure that our devotion is to the truth of the message, not to the style of the messenger.

[33 : 11] I feel even silly even saying this because I know that you're not committed to the style of the messenger. You'll be somewhere else if you were. But what is it that we're actually committed to?

What is it actually that has the power to do anything in our lives? It's not how I say something. It's not any kind of eloquence on my lips or in my words. It is the power of the Word.

It is the authority of God's Word. Alistair Begg said the significance of preaching is not in the power of the personality, gifts, or background of the one who speaks, but in the authority of the message that is conveyed.

And the only authoritative teaching in the church is that which comes directly from the Word of God. That's why we named our church Lakeside Bible Church. We had people a little upset at me about that.

Not in our church, but others, friends. They thought we should have been Lakeside Baptist Church. And I'm Baptist. I am. But what I care about is the Scripture.

[34 : 18] We want this to be unmistakable to those on the outside of our church that what we care about is the Scripture. And we need to be reminded every week on the inside of the church that what we need to continue in is the Scripture.

Not what the Baptists are doing. Not what the Presbyterians are doing. But what God has said eternally for us to do. It's who we are. We're putting a premium on it.

Number two, the partnership of the church. The partnership of the church. Look back at verse 42. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship. I love this word.

I love it. Koinonia. Koinonia is the word here, the Greek word. Usually in English, it's translated throughout the New Testament as either fellowship, partnership, or sharing.

Sometimes Paul used it to refer to, like, the gifts that the Philippians had sent to him on his missionary journeys. He referred to that as a partnership with him, as a koinonia with him.

[35 : 20] And I want to show you a definition from Bill Mounce, who is a New Testament Greek scholar, because I like his definition. He summarized the use of koinonia in the New Testament in this way.

Here's what it is. All right? You ready? Here's what it is. Partnership, fellowship, the close association between persons, emphasizing what is common between them.

All right? Hope's with me. She's with me on it. Let me say it one more time. Fellowship, partnership, the close association between persons, emphasizing what is common between them.

So what does it mean that these new Christians were continually devoted to the fellowship? It means they were continually devoted to one another. They're continually devoted to one another, the church.

They entered a unique partnership that emphasized what was common between them and what was common between them. Their conversion, their confession, and their commitment.

[36 : 33] It's amazing. John writes about this in his first epistle. 1 John 1, verse 3. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, that is the gospel, so that you may have koinonia with us, koinonia with us.

And indeed, our koinonia is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Did you catch that? He and the other apostles preached the gospel of Jesus so that others could have koinonia, partnership, fellowship with them.

And then he reminded the readers that what makes us koinonia with one another is the fact that we have first been made koinonia with God. And how have we been made koinonia with God?

Through the person and the work of Jesus Christ. In other words, the church is not merely a group of religious fanatics. It is the very people of God that have been saved by the sovereign grace of God.

He has brought us into partnership together because He has first brought us in fellowship with Him. It starts vertically with Him.

[37 : 50] And because of that, He then brings us together like this. I love this so much. I love it so much we put on a t-shirt. You can go buy the t-shirt today. And on the back of it, it's got this verse on it to remind us of what this is.

And it's for this reason. I think we need to stop referring to this as church membership. I think we need to start calling it in our church. I'm being serious. I think we need to start calling it church partnership or church fellowship.

Why? Because that's what we are. And as we move forward by God's grace, it's only going to be as we're checking the vitals, not only that we are preaching the Bible, but we are committed to the partnership of the local church.

Quickly, the last two. Number three, the practice of ordinances. The practice of ordinances. To the breaking of bread, Luke writes, which is a reference to the Lord's Supper that we'll observe in just a moment.

Shows that these new Christians, under the leadership of the apostles, were continually devoted to the practice of gospel ordinances. What does that mean? They're ordinances because Jesus has ordered the church to do them.

[38 : 58] They're gospel ordinances because they symbolize the gospel, the death, resurrection of Jesus Christ. And there's two of them. Baptism. We know they were regularly observing that.

And the Lord's table. They're signs of the new covenant. Baptism is the sign that brings a new believer into the fellowship of the church. And the Lord's Supper is the perpetual sign that continues to identify those who belong to God's church.

And depending on what Christian tradition you're a part of, one may be emphasized more than the other. Many times in the Baptist circles, baptism, of course, is emphasized, but maybe sometimes to the neglect of the Lord's table.

Maybe if you have a Presbyterian background, that's flip-flopped around a little bit. But the early church was committed to both. And it's interesting here that Luke puts it here in verse 42 as one of the essential vital signs of a church.

Why? Because it keeps our focus on Christ and the gospel. And we need to routinely commit ourselves to it. Finally, number four, the prayers. The prayers.

[40 : 09] Prayer is one of the most crucial of the Christian practices. It's also one of the most neglected of the Christian disciplines. It's not really surprising that it's listed here as something the church in Jerusalem was continually devoted to.

I mentioned Acts chapter four a while ago. Would you just flip a page over? I'm not going to read this whole thing to you. I'm just going to read one verse. Peter and John have been preaching the gospel. They healed a man by God's grace, the spirit of Christ.

The Sanhedrin didn't appreciate that, so they brought them in for questioning. Some people wanted them martyred at this point. That wasn't God's plan.

They questioned them and ultimately decided to let them go. But they told them, if you keep preaching Jesus, we're going to do something about it. We're going to stop you. And immediately after leaving that, they go to the church in Jerusalem.

They gather around with some other believers. And they begin to pray. Begin to pray. In fact, the prayer begins in verse 24. Here's what they prayed.

[41 : 16] When they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, why did the Gentiles rage and the people's plot in vain?

