

Acts 2:42-47 (PM)

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[0 : 0 0] So we are looking at Acts 2, 42 to 47. We are week two into a series called Empowered and Sent, The Church Jesus Builds, an application series on the book of Acts.

Gee, that is a very long title. You came up with that, right? You did, you totally came up with that. You totally come up with that, and I'm publicly shaming you for it. A quick word on context. Most of chapter two is this big sermon that Peter preaches, and a summary of how it went is in verse 41. So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls.

So it's like a mega church, like overnight, which is awesome. But what happened to these people? What did the church look like after that? You've got all these people who have come to faith. What did life look like after that? And 42 to 47 gives us this little window into the rhythms of life in the early church, these early communities.

[1 : 1 3] So let's dive into the passage, and I have three questions from the passage. The first question is, what did these guys do? What were the rhythms of their week? What did their weekly rhythms look like? Secondly, what did that produce?

What was the fruit of that? And thirdly, what motivated them to live in this quite radical way? So one, what did they do? What were the results? And what drove them? What motivated them?

So first, what did the early church do? What did that look like? And the passage is pretty clear.

Verse 42 says, they devoted themselves. They were committed to the apostles' teaching.

That was one of the things. Committed to the apostles' teaching, which is what we're just doing right now. I am, I'm standing up here. I'm doing Bible teaching. So if you go to a small group Bible study, somebody sits and teaches you the Bible.

So those spaces are not for, like I'm not, I'm never gonna get up here and give you my life hacks on how to save money or my hot tips on parenting or, you know, my internet assembled philosophy musings on the divine or something like that, right?

[2 : 2 2] No, I'm trying to communicate what the Bible says because I believe that's God's word. And so that's the best thing we can do with this particular time right now. So listening to teaching, that was part of their regular weekly life.

It also says they devoted themselves to fellowship. Fellowship, which means they wanted deep relationships with one another. They prioritized community.

Verse 42 says, that looked like breaking bread together and praying so they would eat and they would seek God together. In verse 46, it says, and day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes.

They received their food with gladness and generous hearts. The breaking of bread, I don't, we don't know for sure whether that means they're having like communion together or just a really big meal together or whether they're having a really big meal and having communion as part of it.

We don't know, but something great was happening. And we know for sure that togetherness, just being together as a community, it was just, it was really precious for them.

[3 : 2 5] So what did they do? Teaching, fellowship, meals, and prayers. I've gone through that really quickly, but I hope you see that life for them was a shared life.

It was a shared life. Real community was happening built around Jesus. So folks, my point of application for you early on here is this. If you were here and you just make it on Sundays and that's kind of all you do, I'm happy you're here, but I want you to know that you're actually missing out. You're missing out on a much richer experience of doing life with other people. And if you want to sort of move forward on that a bit more, then come and talk to me and we'll talk about it.

Okay, so early church, what did life look like? What are the activities? A comprehensive sharing of life. Let's keep going. The next question, what did this produce? What was the fruit of the living this way?

We see one of the aspects of it in verse 47. Praising God and having favor with all people, the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

[4 : 39] So they had this great community thing going on, but they weren't so insular that they just forgot about, you know, forgot about the rest of the world because they had this kind of cool little thing going on.

No, they were sort of, you know, missionary. That's probably a word for it. They were outward looking. And what was really cool about this is they lived these such winsome, graceful lives, grace-filled lives, that people were really attracted to their community.

And it says right here, they had favor with people. That was one of the fruits of the way they lived is they gained favor with people.

I became a Christian. I didn't grow up in a Christian home. When I was 17 years old, I worked at a fast food joint.

I've told you this before. And at this fast food joint, there was a group of Christians there. And honestly, there was something so appealing about them.

[5 : 43] There was a big group of them. There was something so appealing about them. They just had this like, it was like a peace or a joy. And they really seemed to care about each other.

They were just in the world so differently. And it was really attractive. So when they talked, I listened.

And when they started talking about Jesus, I was really attentive. I want us to be an attractive community. And we don't, we don't, we get there.

And sometimes we don't get there. Individually, I know I don't always get there. I'm not always an attractive person. I'll tell you a story. I might've told you this story before. A few years ago, I was driving and this guy was tailgating me.

Is that the word? Tailgating? Driving right really close behind me, really aggressively. He was in a massive SUV. I was in a little car. Driving very aggressively. Overtook me dangerously on this corner.

[6 : 43] And we came, both came to a stop at a red light. And so I got out of my car and I started walking. I know it's not a very Vancouver thing to do.

I started walking towards his car because I was going to give him peace of my mind. I was so angry. And just before I got to his window, I realized I'm wearing this. I'm wearing this.

Like I was on my way to lead a Maundy Thursday service. And in the two seconds before I got to the window where I was about to yell at him, I felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

And he wound down his window because he could see me coming and I was like, oh, I just wanted to see if you're okay. Anyway, all that to say, I don't always live up to this expectation of being sort of attractational to people.

But wouldn't it be wonderful if this was our community, right? We were a community that lived these grace-filled, winsome lives and people were attracted to that and want to know more about Jesus.

[7 : 54] Let's keep going. There's more fruit in this early church I want to talk about. Verse 44, I mean, this is radical.

This is radical what they were doing. Selling their stuff. Somebody has a need. Selling their stuff. Meeting that need. Radical, right? Now the question is this. Is Luke just kind of talking it up?

Like is he just, do you know what I mean? Is he just talking it up? Or did it actually happen? Folks, it actually happened. And the reason we know it happened is because people who were not Christians, you know, 1800 years ago wrote about this.

They were famous for it, these Christian communities. Let me read to you from a letter from a Roman emperor called Julian the Apostate. You can guess from his name, he was not a Christian. In fact, hostile to the Christian faith, the burgeoning Christian faith in the Roman Empire. So he was writing this letter to his pagan priests, the people that ran the sort of pagan temples, right? He writes this letter and he says this.

[9 : 06] The impious Galileans, so that's the Christians, the impious Galileans relieve both their own poor and ours. It is shameful that ours should be so destitute of our assistance.

It's shameful that ours should be so destitute of our assistance. The Christian communities were so generous with each other that it had become an embarrassment to the empire.

And the Christian help they provided was extensive. As well as doing the things you probably think they would do. Feeding people, clothing people. They also did things like this.

They would buy these great swaths of land to bury the poor in so they could be buried with dignity.

They'd build hospitals to house people or hotels, hostels to house people.

They would visit the prisons to feed and comfort the prisoners. And I'm sure you know this, but Christians basically invented hospitals about 1700 years ago by turning homes into places for the sick.

[10:15] So, that's the kind of lives they lived. They didn't have a lot of, some of these folks didn't have a lot of money, so they'd just liquidate stuff in order to support each other because they valued community over their things.

Friends, you know, our concern for each other, particularly those amongst us who are struggling, is very important to God. It should be a mark of Christian community.

And it's talked about throughout the Bible. Let me read to you from Deuteronomy 15, 1-5. And this is a bit radical. We might push your buttons a little bit, but let me read this to you. Deuteronomy 15, 1-5. At the end of every seven years, you must cancel debts.

This is how it's to be done. Every creditor shall cancel the loan he has made to his fellow Israelite. He shall not require payment from his fellow Israelite or brother because the Lord's time for cancelling debts has been proclaimed.

You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel the debt of your brother who owes you. And listen to this part. There should, there should be no poor among you.

[11:22] Now I know, I know what you're thinking. Don't get hung up on the cancelling of debt part. Our brains will immediately go to this is impractical, there's contracts, people would take advantage of that. I know, I know, I know.

Remind yourself of the big point here. So the forgiveness, the loan forgiveness thing is just a mechanism to stop people from remaining impoverished. The big point is this, verse 4, there should be no poor amongst you.

There should be no poor people amongst you is what God says. The inference is, it's like a slight on God if that is happening. There should be no poor amongst you because, because we look after each other.

We look after one another. And these passages are not isolated. Let me read, we're going to do a series in Amos, which is one of the Old Testament books of the Bible, right towards the end of the Old Testament.

And we're going to do a series in Amos in a few months, but let's just dip our toe in the water here a bit. Let me read to you a little bit from Amos chapter 5. You trample on the poor, you force them to give you grain, this is God speaking, I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins.

[12:31] You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. And this is great, this next part's fantastic. This is God saying, I hate, I despise your religious feasts.

I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring me choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. away with the noise of your songs.

I will not listen to your harps. Let justice roll on like a river of righteousness, like a never failing stream. It's brilliant, right? God is saying, you can sing all you want, but if you are not looking after each other, if you're not looking after the people that are really struggling in your community, I'm not going to go to your church.

It's great. God says, I will not go to your church. I'm not going to listen to your songs. I'm not going to take your offerings. I'll have none of you. Very challenging stuff, isn't it? In the Roman world, it was common for wealthy folks to be generous with other wealthy people.

So it's sort of like, you know, you can borrow my yacht. I'll borrow your mansion in the south of France or something like that. So you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.

[13:49] That kind of thing. Give and take. In Acts 2 here, we have something quite different, don't we? We're seeing people selling what they have, sharing what they've got, and expecting nothing in return.

It's like, they're not just giving resources, they're surrendering the right to be paid back, to be reciprocated. You know, they're not going to get anything from this. They're not going to get like a status bump. They're not going to get interest on the loan or anything like that. No favors. It's just, it's just a group of people who valued people over their stuff. Now, I can say, let me just say this. I know that sometimes preachers have used passages like this to really beat people up, really guilt trip people, make them feel bad, and I'm not trying to do that. I just, I just spend time this week looking at the Bible here and saying, just telling me this is what it says. So I'm not trying to beat anyone up. In fact, I will tell you this short story.

[14:52] My family has been at the receiving end of this congregation's generosity on many occasions. For example, a few years ago, someone, someone in this congregation paid for my family to go on vacation, which sounds like a small thing, but it wasn't a vacation we could afford.

And somebody said, I want to give you money to pay for a nice vacation. It was wonderful. The person promised, made me promise that I wouldn't tell anyone who paid for the vacation, but I'm going to break that promise now because it was Lynette Hindley who died two weeks ago. And I can't go to her funeral this week, but I am taking this chance to, I'm just happy for this moment to honour her publicly and present an example of somebody who valued people over stuff. Right, let's keep going. I hope you're seeing belonging to a church means more than listening to sermons and being nice and singing good songs.

It means being devoted to one another. It means making room for one another. It means a shared life. It's being a community that is attractive to others.

[16:20] It's a willingness to be available to others. This is the Christian way of being in the world. My question is and my challenge for you is this.

Is this the kind of life you're cultivating right now? And if not, what steps do you need to take to cultivate a life like that? What big things do you need to do, courageous things, hard things, do you need to do to cultivate that kind of life?

And if you can't think of any, come and talk to me. Come and talk to Chris. Come and talk to somebody. Okay, last point. Very quickly on this last point. Where did this come from?

Like, what animated this really radical way of living, of being in the world, where a group of people could be free to give and eager to meet one another's needs and full of joy and generous in prayer and time.

If you look at verse 43, it says, an awe came upon every soul. These folks were gripped by the gospel of grace.

[17:26] Gripped by the gospel of a God who gave himself away, a God who gave up the riches of heaven so we could inherit it. Christ who gave up his right to be free to die on a cross.

So we follow a God who did what he's asking us to do here. And that's what captured the hearts of these early Christians and that's why they could live like they lived. And I'm just inviting you to be captured by this same gospel.

Thank you. Thank you.