

Acts 2:42-47

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 April 2023

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 0 0] So we are looking at Acts 2, 42 to 47. Just a really quick note on the context, because we're kind of jumping into it here. Most of Acts 2 is Peter preaching a sermon, and a summary of how that went is in verse 41, to the passage immediately before what we read. And it reads, so those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day around 3,000 souls.

Isn't that brilliant? You've got like a mega church overnight. I love that. But what happened to these people? What happened to them? What did they do afterwards? What did life look like for them afterwards? And that's what's so great about our passage, 42 to 47, because it gives us a window into the rhythms of life of these early Christian communities. So let's dive into the passage, and we have three questions to answer from this passage. The first question is, what did this community do? Like what were the rhythms of their life? Secondly, what did it produce? And thirdly, what motivated them? So what did they do? What were their activities?

What were the results of those activities, that way of living? And what drove them? What animated them? What motivated them to live the way they did? So let's have a look at what the early church did.

What did their life look like? The rhythms of their week. And the passage is, it's quite easy. It's quite good for a preacher. Verse 42, it says, they devoted themselves, they committed themselves to the apostles' teaching. So that's one of the things they did, which is what we're doing right now. I'm teaching you the Bible. When you go to small groups, somebody teaches the Bible. So this morning, I'm not giving you a talk on my life hacks for saving money or my hot tips on parenting. This space here is not for my internet assembled musings on the divine. No, I'm just trying to communicate what the Bible says, because that's God's word. So it's the best thing we can do with our time here.

So teaching, listening to teaching, that was one of the things that they did as part of their regular life. It also says they devoted themselves to fellowship, which means they wanted deep relationships with one another. They prioritized community over individuality. Verse 42 says, that looked like breaking bread together and praying. So they would eat together and would seek God together. And if you look at verse 46, let me read it to you. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.

[2 : 49] So the breaking of bread, I don't know if that's communion or if that's just a meal or a meal, including communion. We don't know for sure, but whatever was happening there, their together, their togetherness, being together was really a really precious thing in the early church. So what did they do? Teaching, fellowship, meals, prayers. Okay, I know I'm going through this really quickly. I just want you to see though, it was a shared life. It was a common life. It was a real community built around the gospel. So I'm going to get to an application point right here. Folks, if you were here on Sundays, if you were here today, great, great to see you. I guess if you weren't, you wouldn't hear that. As I think about that myself right now. But I'm glad you're here. But if your Christian journey looks like mostly just coming on Sundays and that's it, I'm happy you're here, but I want you to know you're missing out. You're missing out on a much richer experience of doing life with others, of sharing life with others. And if you don't know what they could look like, come and talk to us afterwards. So the early life of the church, what did it look like? It was a comprehensive sharing of life. Let's keep going. The next question, what did it produce? This is what I want to get to. What did it produce? What was the fruit of living this way? Here's a couple of things.

Verse 47. Praising God and having favor with all people. Isn't that great? Having favor with all people. The Lord added to their number day by day, those who are being saved. So they had this great community thing going on. But they weren't so insular that they forgot about the rest of the world. No, they were missionary. They were outward looking. So they lived these winsome, grace-filled lives.

And that attracted people to the faith. It says right here, they had favor with all people. That was one of the things the life they lived produced. It was attractive. I came to faith when I was 17 through a group of Christians. I worked at a fast food restaurant with. And they were, at 17 years old, when I looked at them and I saw how they talked to each other and how they acted, how they conducted their lives, there was something so appealing about them. They had a peace and a joy about them. They seemed to really love each other. They were just in the world so differently.

They had attractive lives. They had an attractive community. So when they talked, I listened. And they told me about Jesus. And that's how I came to faith.

Let's be a community like that. Let's be an attractive community. And of course, we don't always get there. We're not always like, I am not always an attractive Christian. I remember, maybe I've told you the story. I can't remember. I've been driving one day a few years ago. There was this guy behind me, tailgating me in this huge SUV. He was driving very aggressively. He overtook me on a turn very dangerously. And I was furious because he was a bully. You know, these drivers who were bullies. And we came to a stop sign. He was in front of me.

[6 : 22] I got out of my car. And I said, no, it's not very Canadian. I got out of my car and I started walking towards him. I was walking towards his car and I was so furious. I was going to educate him.

And just before I got to his window, I remembered I was wearing my collar. I was going to lead a Maundy Thursday service. And in the few seconds between that realization and arriving at his window, I calmed myself down and he rolled down his window and I said, oh, I just wanted to see if you're okay. Folks, all that to say, let's live in such a way, let's engage each other in such a way that we are attractive to others and we do what this passage says. We build favor with others. So when we talk, people will listen. Let's keep going. There is more fruit in the early church I want us to talk about. Look at verse 44. This is a bit radical.

Here we go. 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. That's radical, wasn't it? Question is, is Luke, is he kind of talking it up a bit? Is he just talking it up? Did this really happen? Yes, it really did happen. They really lived sacrificially. They really did care for the poor and the widows and the strangers and the sick amongst them. And we know this because people outside the church wrote about this. They were famous for it. I'm going to read to you a little quote from a letter from a Roman emperor called Julian the Apostate, which you can guess from his name, was not a friend of the Christian faith. Julian the Apostate. He writes this, and he's writing to his priests, his pagan priests. He writes this, the impious Galileans, he's talking to Christians, he's talking about Christians there, the impious Galileans relieve both their own poor and ours.

It is shameful that ours should be so destitute of our assistance. These Christian communities were so generous that it had become an embarrassment to the empire.

And their help was extensive. It wasn't just, you know, it wasn't small things. It was expansive. So they would do things like buy plots of land so they could bury the poor with dignity.

[9 : 11] They would buy hostels to house people. They would visit prisoners and to comfort them. And I'm sure you guys know this, that Christians basically invented hospitals by turning homes into places to care for the sick. And for those in the community who weren't sort of super financially liquid, they would sell stuff in order to support others. This is a community that valued people over stuff.

Our concern for others, particularly those who are struggling amongst us, is very important to God. It's a mark of God's people. And it's talked about throughout the Bible. Let me read to you from Deuteronomy 15, 1 to 5. Again, this is quite radical. It's going to be a bit trigger, but just listen to it. Deuteronomy 15, 1 to 5. At the end of every seven years, you must cancel debts.

This is how it's going to be done. Every creditor shall cancel the loan he's made to his fellow Israelite. He shall not require payment from a 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 any debt your brother owes you. And now listen to this part. There should be no poor among you.

Isn't that interesting? I know what you're all thinking. You're thinking, oh, this with cancelling debts, it wouldn't work. You know, like too complicated, these contracts. People would take advantage of it. Of course, of course, of course. I know, I know, I know. But think about it like this.

Just don't put that aside to remember the big point here. This was simply a mechanism, a mechanism for helping people not to remain impoverished. The big point, the shocking point is this. There should be no poor among you, is what God says. There should be no poor among you. Why should there be no poor among you? Because we look after each other. There's a sense in the passage, if there is poor among you, if people are really struggling amongst you, it's like a slight on God. And these passages are not isolated. We're going to be looking at Amos in a few months. And I just want to, let's just dip our toe in the water a bit here in Amos. Some brilliant verses here. Listen to this. This is very, very interesting. Amos chapter 5. You trample the poor and force them to give you grain. I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins are. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Okay, listen to this next part. This is God speaking.

[11 : 38] I hate and 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 choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs. I will not listen to the music of your harps. Let justice roll on like a river of righteousness, like a never failing stream. It's brilliant, isn't it? God is saying here, you can sing all you want, but if you are not looking after each other, if you are not looking after the struggling, I will not listen to your songs. I'm not going to go to your church or not take your offering. No matter how fancy it is, no matter how beautiful it is, I'm not going to go to your church. God says. It's very challenging, isn't it?

In the Roman world, it was common for people to share, but only amongst the same sort of socioeconomic group as you. It's like, oh, you can borrow my yacht. I'll use your holiday home, that kind of thing. I'll scratch. You scratch my back. What is this saying? You scratch. People are scratching backs, whatever it is. It's like a give and a take, you know? We look after each other.

But here in Acts 2, it's so different, isn't it? We're seeing people selling what they've got, sharing what they've got, expecting nothing in return from those who are in need. So it's not just the giving of resources. It's like they're surrendering their right to be reciprocated for what they're giving. No status bump, no favors in return. It was just a group of people who valued people over their stuff. Now, can I just say this? I know that some preachers can really beat people up about this stuff, and I'm not trying to do that. I'm just trying to tell you what I think the Bible says about this kind of thing. In fact, we're a generous church on the whole, and my family has been at the receiving end of your generosity. For example, a few years ago, someone at this church paid for my family to go on a vacation we couldn't afford. It was just brilliant.

Vacations are expensive. At the time, the giver promised me I wouldn't say anything to anyone where the money came from, but I'm going to break that promise now and tell you it was Lynette Heinle, who died two weeks ago. And I can't go to her funeral this week, so I just am really happy for this opportunity to honor her publicly. All right, let's keep moving, shall we?

I hope you're saying that belonging to a church, being part of God's people, it's more than just listening to a nice sermon and being nice on Sundays. It means being devoted to one another. It means making room for one another. It means a comprehensively shared life, a life that is attractive to others.

[14 : 47] It's what it produced. It produced an attractive community that grew because of that attraction and a willingness to make what we have available to others. This is the Christian way of being in the world. So my question, my challenge to you is this, are you actively cultivating this kind of life?

If not, what steps do you need to take to do that? If you can't think of any, come and talk to us. Okay, my last question, very quickly, where did all of this come from? What animated this really radical way of being in the world where a group of people could be free to give and eager to meet our needs and be filled with joy and generous in their prayers and their time with others? Very quickly, look at verse 43. An awe came upon every soul. Friends, they were gripped by the gospel of a God who gave himself away, 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. We follow a God that did what he's asking us to do.

That's what captured the hearts of these early Christians, and that's why they could live like they live. Let's be captured by that gospel, folks. Amen.