

An Apostolic Foundation - Part 3

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[0 : 00] But you will find it in Acts chapter 2, beginning to read there from verse 37. Acts 2, 37. Now, when they heard this, that is the message of the gospel, they were pierced 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 shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promises to you and to your children and to all that are afar off everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. And he testified with many other words and exhorted them.

Save yourselves from this crooked generation. So those who received his word were baptized, and they were added that day about 3,000 souls.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. Amen.

[1 : 28] May the Lord bless this that reading. May be to his praise and to his glory. Well, the last three weeks, we've been concentrating on this one verse. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers.

When we looked at this originally, we looked at the view that the apostles' teaching could be condensed into one sentence.

That sentence being that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That's what Peter was talking about. And we saw that that gave birth through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to fellowship, and that the high point of that fellowship was the breaking of bread, which we will participate in shortly.

But now we come to the last of it. And the last of it is the prayers. This act of devotion had come from their marvelous conversion.

and by itself was a work of the Spirit. In the opening verse, we read that when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart.

[2 : 50] And I said before that what was happening here was that this was nothing less than conviction of sin. The Holy Spirit pointing out to these people that they had sinned in the sight of God.

So they had a sense of guilt and remorse. What shall we do? Well, they took Peter's advice, and we find that they devoted themselves here to prayer.

So what sort of prayers were these? We remind ourselves, as I told you last week, that at this point in the history of the church, they were worshipping in part of the temple.

That part was called Solomon's portico. And as I've said previously, it was the only part of Solomon's temple that once stood there that still remained.

So, what can we learn about Jewish prayer? prayer? The first thing you have to learn is that this day of prayer was a 12-hour day that started at 6 in the morning and ended at 6 at night.

[4 : 12] So you find that the morning prayer would have been offered at 9 a.m. that would have been the third hour of prayer. The afternoon prayer at 12 a.m.

sometimes referred to as the sixth hour of prayer. And the evening prayer was offered at 3 p.m. sometimes called the ninth hour of prayer.

Now we know from looking at the Judaism that existed at this time that these prayers were fixed to cooperate to coordinate with the giving of offerings.

So the giving of the morning offering would have been at 9. The afternoon at 12. The evening at 3 o'clock. Now, a clear example of somebody who followed this you find in Daniel 6 verse 10.

And this is what it says. When Daniel knew that the document had been signed he went to his house for his windows in his upper chamber open towards Jerusalem.

[5 : 23] And he got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God. So there's an example of somebody who was observing these three hours of prayer over a 12-hour period.

a prayer meeting that lasted 12 hours. Also, Elijah, you find Elijah 1836, he came to prepare the altar of the Lord at the time of the evening offering.

So here it is. what can we learn about the practice of prayer? In the next chapter, chapter 3 verse 1, we read that Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer the ninth.

So if you ask the question, why did they go up there at the ninth hour of prayer? The answer is actually found in the Gospels.

And what we find by looking at the Gospels is that Jesus died at the ninth hour of prayer. At the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eli, Eli, Lama, Thabachthani, which is, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[6 : 56] So Jesus died at the ninth hour of prayer and became the great offering which was offered on your behalf and mine to bring us nearer to God.

In Acts 10, now Acts 10 is all about this Roman soldier called Cornelius and an angel appears to him and tells him to send men to Joppa and ask for one who is called Peter.

And we find that in Acts 10 verse 9 that as they were on their journey and coming near to the city, Peter went up onto the roof to pray at the sixth hour.

So that was the afternoon time of prayer. Now from these examples, this is what was happening. The apostles of this time were still in the temple.

The great break between Christianity and Judaism had not taken place. It took place with the martyrdom of Stephen. That's in Acts chapter 8 and the end of chapter 7.

[8 : 14] So they were still observing these special times. And that's why the text doesn't just say prayer, it says the prayers, meaning they were using the set prayers of the temple.

Now what were they? Let me talk about the content of prayer. How did they approach God with these set prayers?

In the bulletin that came out illustrating this service, I was asking you to read Psalms 113 to 118. Now in Judaism, they are called the great Hallel.

And the great Hallel is a description of these Psalms 113 to 118 that would have formed the basis of their approach to God.

In Psalm 113, we read this in verses 1 to 2. Praise the Lord. Praise, O servants of the Lord.

[9 : 21] Praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. So what's happening in this Psalm is the Psalm is giving the worshipper a method of approaching God.

And that method is to be seen in praise. in the next Psalm, he talks about the saving acts of God. Psalm 114, verses 1 and 2. When Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of a strange language, Judah became his sanctuary, Israel his dominion.

This is something that occurs time and time and time again in the Psalms, a reminder of what the saving acts of God actually are.

And the prophet Micah talks about knowing the saving acts of God, Micah 6, verse 5. He then moves on in Psalm 115 to the eternal mercy of God.

[10 : 31] Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory. For the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.

And in that Psalm he produces a Hebrew word which is translated as steadfast love in that particular version, but probably means something like loyal favor.

That loyal favor God extends to us in his eternal mercy. Then, if we go to Psalm 116, he's now talking about prayer that God has answered in the past.

I love the Lord because he has heard my voice and my supplications. Because he's inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

Answer to prayer in the past, a great boost for prayer in the present. In Psalm 117, moving on, he then says, this is something that all nations should be doing.

[11 : 48] Praise the Lord, all nations. Extol him, all peoples. For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.

Praise the Lord. All nations to act and take part in this great activity of prayer.

And he concludes in Psalm 118, verse 1, O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His steadfast love, his mercy, endures forever.

Now you might think that in saying all of this, he's actually repeating himself. But that would be the wrong conclusion to draw. Because in the Psalm, what he's doing is listing the saving acts of God which the Lord had performed on behalf of his ancient people.

For example, in Psalm 118, verses 10 and 12, he says this, and he's talking about deliverance in the past. All nations surrounded me.

[13:05] In the name of the Lord, I cut them off. They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side. In the name of the Lord, I cut them off. They surrounded me like bees.

They blazed like a fire of thorns. In the name of the Lord, I cut them off. The saving acts of God. In Psalm 136, he details what the saving acts of God are. What he's thinking about is that time when Moses was leading the people out of the wilderness and they're on the verge of the promised land.

And they're opposed by two implacable enemies. One of whom is Sihon, king of the Amorites, and the other is Og, king of Bashan.

Now, Og, king of Bashan, was remembered down the generations as being a great deliverance.

Now, what can we learn about him?

[14:19] In Deuteronomy 3, verse 11, we read this, Og's bedstead, it is a bedstead of iron, is it not, in Ramah of the Ammonites?

Its length was nine cubits, and its breadth four cubits. That tells you something about the size of this character, Og, because if the bedstead was nine cubits long, he had to be 11 feet tall.

That's a fact. And he's defined as being from the last of the giants. So here is not only somebody who's an implacable enemy, but the sight of this man would make you turn and run.

God is saying, heart, glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous. The hand of the Lord does valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted.

The right hand of the Lord is valiant. God is drawing our attention to the saving acts of God.

[15:42] And in this celebration this morning of the Lord's Supper, we are drawing attention once again to the saving acts of God. Not so much of Og, King of Bashan, but of Jesus Christ who died on the cross, who suffered in your place and mine.

And this is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, I deliver to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

Here is the mighty act of God. It cannot be repeated, it cannot be diminished, it is to be exalted, it is to be thought about, it is to be consumed in the heart, and it is to turn us around and face us in a new direction.

I want to consider finally the effects of this prayer ministry. Now, by seeing the effects, we have to go back and consider the nature of the challenge that Jesus gave to these early apostles.

apostles. In Acts 1, verse 8, you shall have power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

[17:31] Now, this is a challenge which Jesus gives to the eleven apostles who were left. now, from the opening verses of the Acts of the Apostles, it's clear that following his resurrection from the dead, he appeared to these eleven for forty days, speaking to them of the things relative to the kingdom of God and preparing them for their mission.

And these eleven are these. Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the zealot, and Judas the son of James.

There had been twelve, but one of them became a betrayer, so the twelve are now eleven. So it's these eleven are now having to respond to this challenge, and this they will do by prayer.

Now we find that when the prayer meeting takes place, it's an enlarged meeting, not just the eleven. All these, it says, with one accord, devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

And the women referred to are undoubtedly Mary Magdalena and Mary the mother of Clopas with others who had followed Jesus from Galilee. And then we'll see that the brothers of Jesus are present.

[19:17] Yet, in John 5, it tells us that even his brothers did not believe in him. It's unknown exactly when they came to faith, but it's certain that they did, because two of them wrote letters, James and

Jude.

Now, in the letter of James, you will find that it is a letter that quotes the words of Jesus more than any other letter in the New Testament.

That is significant. And all of that started because following his resurrection, we are told that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

So, how is it that God is going to answer prayer with these eleven? Staying with them, this is in verses four to six of Acts one, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father which he said you heard from me.

For John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. This promise of the coming of the Spirit is made twice in that chapter.

[20 : 47] You shall receive power. This is going to change these eleven beyond their own recognition.

How can we understand this today? In the case of John the Baptist, he baptized people to prepare them for repentance so that their sins would be forgiven.

But in the case of the coming of the Spirit, which is told twice in this chapter, the promise is to prepare and equip them for service so that they will fulfill the challenge which Jesus gives to them to take the message of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

So, bringing it back down to Wester Hales, is there anything different about us today? The world that we live in is a different world.

Johnson has referred to it. in which the apostles live. But the challenge you see is still the same.

What are we going to do with the ministry of the gospel?

[22 : 08] And for all of us who are involved in spreading the message of the gospel to our nation, we have to take the same promise which Jesus gave to these early apostles and make it our own.

But there's another promise I want to share with you and that's in Matthew 16 where Peter has just confessed that you are the Christ, the son of the living God.

And Jesus says to him, I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the powers of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Now there's a word play going on here in the original because the Greek word for Peter is Petras and the Greek word for rock is Petra and the rock that Jesus refers to is not the person of Peter because if you put it onto a person, the possibility is as it was in the case of Peter, he failed.

But the rock that Jesus refers to is the confession he has just made. You are the Christ, the son of the living God.

[23 : 34] With that confession on our lips, there is no obstacle we cannot overcome. and no challenge we cannot rise to.

So what we require to do is to take that statement, you are the Christ, the son of the living God, and make it our own. Pray over it, believe it, and let's see God taking us forward to do wonders that we never thought of.

Amen. Amen. Amen.