

SRM14091

9/7/2014

“The Acts of Bethany: Reaching Jerusalem”  
Acts 2:42-47

Today, with Rally Day, we began our Sunday School year, and we begin the Fall season. Let me urge you to support Sunday School with your attendance. Many years ago, a friend of Sue’s who was the wife of the pastor of a small church told her how she always encouraged their people to support all the activities of the church because if they did not, those activities would not survive.

As we begin the church year, we have been reminded how important it is that we be reaching our world for Christ. The main speaker at Growth in Truth this year told us how God had convicted him about the importance of making disciples of Christ.

He said he had to repent of focusing on building the church, and changed the entire focus of his ministry from building the church to making disciples.

I was reminded that in the last chapter of Luke, Jesus reminded his disciples who were fishing of his call to follow him, and they would catch people.

Then in Acts 1:8: (ESV) “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

This month I hope to encourage you from Acts to pray and work to reach our world, and this morning concentrate in reaching our Jerusalem, the place where we live.

My text is a familiar one on which I have preached before, but it is one that we can still learn from. It is the first extensive “summary” in Acts, Acts 2:42-47.

It depicts a number of activities characteristic of the earliest church that led to a powerful evangelistic outreach in their home city of Jerusalem.

It began with dedicated devotion, which led to a loving lifestyle and the sharing of salvation.

1. Reaching Jerusalem begins with Christians’ dedicated devotion to the Faith, Fellowship, Communion and Prayer. V. 42

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

“They devoted themselves.” Do you get the intensity? They still had their jobs & families, but they wanted a new life, and they wanted to spend it with other people who wanted that life!

They devoted themselves to 4 things:

the apostles' teaching  
the fellowship,  
the breaking of bread &  
prayer." Or "the prayers".

First, it was a learning, or studying, church.

The apostles' teaching would have included Jesus' earthly teaching plus what he taught the apostles in his 40 days of resurrection appearances.

They had the Holy Spirit of Truth... but they didn't think He was the only teacher they needed. They listened to the apostles.

How do we devote ourselves to apostolic teaching when we no longer have the apostles?

By the study of God's Word. Apostolic authority is the standard for the canon.

Second, "They devoted themselves to ... the fellowship".

Fellowship is what we share in together and what we share out together.

We share in the love of Christ and love for one another.

We share out to each other and the world whatever God gives us to share.

Third, "They devoted themselves ... to the breaking of bread", which likely covers both the Lord's Supper and a larger fellowship meal

It was both formal and informal, in the Temple and in homes.

It was both joyful and reverent. V. 46. "they received their food with glad and generous hearts,"

Fourth, "They devoted themselves ...to the prayers'.

What kind of prayer? We know it involved adoration, confession and thanksgiving as well as requests that they would be bold witnesses.

And I'm sure it was specific, including the names of people they knew in their "circle".

Transition: Luke then tells us that this dedicated devotion led to a Loving Lifestyle.

2. Dedicated Devotion leads to the Loving Lifestyle produced by the gospel. V. 43-46

"And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles."

ESVSB: “The church experienced awe (reverent fear) in response to miracles (wonders), which served as signs of the Spirit’s power and presence among them.

‘Miracles were occurring regularly (many ... were being done), many more than the few that Luke records in detail.

44-45 “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

How are we to follow this? It was voluntary sharing, and done according to ability.

But it was genuine caring that motivated this new lifestyle. It leads many to reduce their standard of living to provide for the needs of others.

While, as Peter said to Ananias, there is no obligation to sell your property, remember the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment and 1 Timothy 6:6-9 (ESV) “But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.”

And 2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV) “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

v. 46 “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,”

Transition: Dedicated Devotion leads to the Loving Lifestyle produced by the gospel.

3. When you and I worship God by loving people and sharing the gospel, God will draw people to Himself. V. 47

“[they were] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

A Christ-like, loving lifestyle brings glory to God and changes the world.

John 15:8 (ESV) “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

1. Jesus, "the Lord," added the people. This is “an affirmation of God’s sovereignty in salvation, since he alone can change the human heart to enable true repentance and faith.” - ESVSB

2. He did 2 things: saved people & added them to the church.

3. He did it daily. Evangelism is not a sporadic church activity.

Action: One way you can apply this Acts-inspired strategy is a recent version of something I have shared with you before.

The Love2020.com website describes it as “a call to followers of Jesus everywhere to be loving others by living a simple and powerful lifestyle of praying, caring and sharing the love of Jesus Christ with those around them in deed and word.

“It is time for a great movement of godly love in the United States and beyond. It is time to commit to follow Jesus Christ unreservedly and to share His love in deed and word with every possible person.

“Every person, young and old, in America should have the opportunity of being authentically loved by at least one committed follower of Jesus Christ by the yearend of 2020. Every person should know God loves and cares deeply for him or her.”

Let me share a brief video to illustrate it:  
[Show <http://love2020.com/love2020/#Video>]

The LOVE 20/20 bookmarks can be a reminder of what I’ve described as dedicated devotion, leading to a loving lifestyle and the sharing of salvation. The keywords are Prayer, Care and Share.

There are places for you to write down the names of five people you will pray for, and five things to pray for them. B.L.E.S.S.

Body - physical needs  
Labor - work or student  
Emotional needs  
Spiritual needs  
Social needs

The prayer will also be to ask God for opportunities to show love to unbelievers. When you have done so, give God the glory by sharing your own story or inviting them to church.

In fact, here’s a target for you. Sept 21, 2014 will be National All-The-Church, Prayer~Care~Share Day and National Back To Church Sunday.

It’s only two weeks from now, but God is not limited by time. Let’s ask this great thing of Him!

When Luis Gonzales played outfield for the Houston Astros, he told the press about his personal motto: "Go hard or go home!" Jesus said something similar when he addressed the issue of discipleship while talking to the rich young ruler in Luke 18:22-25. The call is clear: "Go hard or go home!" \* Houston Chronicle, Oct. 1, 1992, p. 3G