

Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Not-Normal Church

Acts 2:43-45

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PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: In the early beginnings of the Church Luke records several activities and events that were unique and not normative for the Church as it grew and matured. Born out of the joy of their shared salvation and the sweetness of new life this young Body of people watched, experienced and participated in many unusual activities. This sermon seeks to caution against making these activities as the norm for churches while also showing that what is happening is the birth of a new epoch, the age of the Church.

I. Introduction.

- A. Read Acts 2:43-47.
- B. Five sermons on the core activities of the Church. These ought to be the norm, the base standard for any local church.
- C. Today we pick back up with the storyline of Luke and this time we are going to see several actions and events that are not normal for the Church as a whole.
- D. An issue in all of this has to do with how to handle descriptive passages.
 - 1. Descriptive vs prescriptive. Events vs Commands.
 - 2. Acts is primarily a series of stories/events. The commands given are not necessarily for us; rather they are part of the story and are usually concerned with the persons in the story.
 - 3. Epistles are different, they are written to give instruction to the local churches.
 - 4. Here in our passage we have several events and activities described that are used by various people to push some agenda or doctrine. But this is not the purpose of the passage.
 - 5. What we have here is a description of several reactions to the advent of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. It is a wonderful picture and even one to wish for in our day, but it is not normal.
- E. Today we will see six unique reactions to the gospel and the birth of the Church. Six ways people, both believers and unbelievers, reacted to this new entity we call the Church.

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II. The Not-Normal Church.

- A. First, we see a sense of holy dread upon unbelievers (43).
1. This is speaking not of the Church as much as those in Jerusalem who were witnessing what was happening every day during this unique time.
 2. The term that is usually translated as “awe” is *phobos*. It simply means fear and this is a better choice though it is understandable why “awe” is used.
 - a. Luke uses this term in Acts 5 as well when he records the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, who died lying to Peter in front of the whole church gathered there. As vs 11 says, “A great fear came over the whole church. . . .”
 - b. Again he uses it in 19:17 (turn) where the story of the seven sons of Sceva are trying to cast out demons by the name of Jesus. Vss 14-17 then record the somewhat humorous results.
 - c. In both of these situations the fear is caused by a frightening supernatural act. God’s hand of judgment or demons attacking, it doesn’t matter for what drives the fear is the awareness of something way beyond our ability to understand or control takes place.
 3. The same is happening in our passage where we see further into vs 43 that signs and wonders are happening through the Apostles.
 - a. This is one of those passages that gets misused quite often within the various Pentecostal, Charismatic and Third Wave groups. It is also very popular is what is known as the NAR movement along with the Word of Faith movement. None of these groups would we recommend.
 - (1) John Wimber, who help found what is known as Vineyard, USA uses this passage, among others to argue for Power Evangelism.
 - (2) The idea is that the most effective form of evangelism is when signs and wonders are present. As the people see those miraculous events they then believe in Christ.
 - (3) John 6 1-2 with 15 and 26 along with the result in vss 65-66.

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- b. The signs and wonders Jesus did were to confirm that He was the Christ.
 - (1) John 2:11, 23.
 - (2) John 3:2; 7:31
 - (3) Acts 2:22.
- c. At the same Jesus did not place some hope or expectation in the signs and wonders. (Matthew 12:38-39)
- d. Note that the miracles and signs were done only through the Apostles. The New Testament evidence about the performance of wonders is through the Apostles and through those closely connected to them.
 - (1) Acts 5:12; 6:8; 14:3; 15:12 (this is good since it ties the Gentile work of Paul to these early events in Jerusalem).
 - (2) 2 Corinthians 12:12.
- e. It is worth noting that after Acts 15 there is no more mention of signs and wonders taking place.
 - (1) Likely due to the spread of the gospel having gone forth as intended.
 - (2) Also the age of the Apostles were drawing to an end and the Church was now fully established and growing outward to places the Apostles simply could not go.
- 4. One thing that is often missed in talking about miracles is actually how rare they were.
 - a. This is where so much error takes place so often as churches and people begin to fixate on these and the power of simple, mundane living in obedience to Christ begins to fade into the background.
 - b. As an aside, if miracles were commonplace then they would cease to be considered “wonders.”
 - c. In the bible we see no miracles between Genesis 1 to Moses, unless you count the Flood. That would be right at 2,500 years. But in the Exodus and entrance into the promised land we see a handful of miracles with Moses and Joshua.

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- d. The next time these happened were during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. That would be about 500 years later. After that no one was doing signs and wonders, though at times God would do a miraculous action, such as the destruction of Sennacherib's army.
- e. From there we have several hundred more years until the coming of Jesus Christ and the time of the Apostles.
- f. And then we see it stop. No matter what the many claims are today of miracle workers they never hold up under scrutiny.
 - (1) If any of you ever follow Bethel Church in Redding, CA you see some of the more horrid examples that are also heart-rending.
 - (2) The lead guy is a man named Bill Johnson and the list of false teachings and practices are well documented. But a sad situation came with one of the leaders there. Their 2 year old died, Olivia. For days the church and people throughout the world prayed, sang, and declared with absolute certainty that God would raise her, but He did not. In spite of the prophetic words and the theology that Johnson teaches that sickness has no place in the realm of Christ and His people.
 - (3) Read the story of Joni, who would go to faith healers to be healed of her quadriplegia.
 - (4) History is strewn with people claiming to carry the ability to do signs and wonders, but what is interesting to me is that in the end of this age it is written that the one doing the signs and wonders will be the Antichrist for the purpose of deception.
- 5. So here is the point behind this whole thing. The unbelievers in Jerusalem were afraid. The reason was the incredible things the Apostles were doing.
 - a. But this did not last long. Soon they would be in unbelief and outright rejection.
 - b. Fear of God among unbelievers happens, but it is not normal.
- B. Second, we see an incredible sense of generosity among the believers (44-45).
 - 1. Forgiven people should be generous people.

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2. Consider the example in the parable in Matthew 18:21ff. Incredible forgiveness should be marked by a spirit of generosity in all things.
3. Luke 6:35 lists three things those who follow Christ should be known for.
4. Not communism. Not even normative. You see no place in the New Testament where this is commanded or even counseled. This was a simple, beautiful reaction to what they had all experienced and shared with regard to salvation.
 - a. With the rise of a strong socialism and communist ideology taking place in our nation this is becoming a popular idea in the general population and in the church.
 - b. But these systems always take what is not theirs which is theft and is a great evil. Even though many who would consider themselves to be Christians will advocate it.
 - c. Here in our passage this is not what is occurring. People, of their own free will, are choosing to freely sell and then give to those who had need.
 - d. No where is this commanded.
5. 4:34 shows this took place for quite a while. Though I suspect over time this became a challenge as properties were sold off and they began to run low on options.
6. But again, this not normative for the Church, either at a macro or micro level.
 - a. In chapter 5 we have the story of Ananias and Sapphira selling land with the spoken intention to give to the Church so it could be dispersed, but lying about how much they got. They died.
 - b. By chapter 6 these same people were not helping feed Greek-speaking widows in the church.
 - c. So in a very short time the early church goes from selling anything they own to help others who have a need in the church; to lying about what they made in a sale and withholding food to widows.
7. But while selling your property off to give to others is not normative, the spirit of generosity is to be something we are known for.
 - a. God is described in James 1:5 as One who gives to all of us generously.

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- (1) We all possess skills and abilities that are not from us, but by our Maker. Deuteronomy 8:18 says that God is the One who gives us the ability to make wealth.
- (2) In other words, all we have is because God has been generous to us.
 - b. Jesus makes it so simple and we make it so complex. He tells us that if we wish to know what we love we merely need to see where we invest our property and money.
 - c. Our heart always invests in what we delight most in. We may diversify our investments but that is only hedging our bets.
 - d. Note the wording in Matthew 6:19-24.
 - e. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 is an application Paul gives.
8. A true believer should be generous. They should be open-handed. And they should be quick to help.
 - a. This is natural and evidence of the Holy Spirit Who is poured out upon us in fullness.
 - b. But it is something we can also unlearn as we allow people who are not believers or who are not well taught begin to speak into our lives.
- C. Third, we see an unusual level of harmony and hospitality (46).
 1. Daily they gathered in the temple and in homes. The temple was the place they would gather *en masse* as it could allow for many people. Realize also that they did not see themselves as separating from Judaism. They believed Jesus was the Messiah and as Jews they were still functioning like Jews, just now with a realization that the Messiah had come.
 2. Understand that many of these people did not live there. They were foreign born Jews and had no where to live and eat. They should have begun to travel back to their countries, but remained because of what happened to them.
 - a. This is again a beautiful picture of mutual care and concern. But chapter 6 shows us it did not last.
 - b. Note how they were taking the Lord's Supper extremely frequently.
 - c. Also sharing meals. But what stands out is the spirit in which they were sharing these meals.

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- (1) Gladness. This was due to their fellowship. They shared in the gift of life in Jesus Christ. They shared in the power and life of the Holy Spirit. They shared in the instruction of the Apostles. So there was gladness. A one-mindedness.
 - (2) Sincerity. ESV makes it “generous.” KJV makes it “singleness.” NET makes it “humble.”
 - (a) This gives you the sense how broad the actual Greek word is.
 - (b) It speaks of a humility of heart born out of a simplicity of perspective.
 - (c) They did not over think things. People needed a place to stay, they were fellow believers, so they shared what they had.
 - (d) This simplicity of thinking flows from humility. It is pure and without subtle trickery or motives. And it is something all here who are older in Christ must strive to maintain, for it has a way of fading over time.
- D. Fourth, the believers were filled with a heart of praise (47a).
1. OK, I lied, this should be normative. But sadly it is not all too often.
 2. However I think we need to understand that this activity and attitude is flowing from new believers. So like the prior point, a mind set of praise is common and very natural for those who come to believe the gospel.
 - a. They were lost but now found.
 - b. Their sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ.
 - c. They have life in the Spirit.
 - d. They have eternal life promised.
 - e. They shall participate fully in the new heavens and earth.
 - f. All of this is now theirs and the shift is a radical one for them and so praise naturally comes to their minds.
 3. It is over time that the trials of life come and they can become the excuse to stop our thanksgiving and praise to God. Even the mundane things of life can rob us.

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4. And it is for this reason the gathering of the church for corporate worship is so important for it helps fuel praise.
 - a. We share in song, prayer and the Lord's Supper.
 - b. We share in hearing, reading and learning the Word of God.
 - c. We share our lives together and if we are wise we speak to one another in such a way that we look for ways to encourage and show kindness to one another. We take on the role of a slave toward each other so that we might serve each other.
 - d. And this then helps draw our hearts back to praise.
- E. Fifth, the early Church was embraced and appreciated by the unbelievers around them (47b).
 1. There are times in the history and life of the Church that the governments and people shall see the presence of a church as a good thing.
 - a. Church history is littered with excellent examples of this as Christians sought to be a blessing to their communities. During the Black Plague it was the Christians who stayed to care for the sick.
 - b. In many villages in various countries and nations such as Africa and Asia, the village leaders love the presence of a good church. It produces stability to the village life. Often it is the place the weak and poor are welcomed and cared for.
 - c. George Mueller of Bristol, England cared for thousands of orphans and was a relief to the city as well and untold children.
 - d. The purpose of Sunday School was first designed as a way to take children living in abject poverty and orphaned and teach them. Not just the bible and the gospel, but how to read and do math. Things society was not doing.
 2. But like all things, this too passes away at times. And we are living in one of those times.
 - a. During the good times, the Church needs to use the freedoms to advance and establish strong foundations for those who will follow.
 - b. Unfortunately, what often happens is that they fritter away the blessings of freedom and approval and end up losing ground gained by those who went before them in the times of struggle.

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3. In the very beginnings of the church God created a bubble of safety for them to become established. But then this changed rapidly and by chapter 4-5 the leaders are being beaten and jailed and by chapter 7 they are being killed.
 4. Which is a sign of blessing? Both. God is sovereign and we do not know His ways. He does things that He calls wonderful and amazing and we call frightening and bad.
 - a. In the good times, He gives rest to His children.
 - b. In the bad times, He gives grace to endure and even grow.
 - c. It is in persecution that the Church expands. It is usually in peace that it becomes lazy and wanders from sound doctrine.
 5. So we should not assume it is our right to be at peace with the governing authorities or the people around us. But when we are, we should be thankful.
- F. Sixth, the early Church was growing numerically (47c).
1. They were all faithful to share their new found faith in Jesus Christ. They wanted those around them to hear and believe.
 - a. This was not something that was a private point of personal belief. It was something to tell others about. And the effect was seen and felt quickly.
 - b. This is also what likely led to the persecution that followed. It is one thing to have a harmless group off to the side, but once it begins to grow and have influence then the power structures are threatened.
 2. But this also is not normal.
 - a. People can be very casual and flippant with statements about churches. “Well if they are doing what they should be doing they will grow.”
 - b. The reality is that you can do everything right as a pastor and not grow. In fact you can shrink. And many times it is good, though painful.
 3. Let me make just one observation here that bears noting. The growth of the church was not due to brand development, church growth techniques, marketing or a really good band. It was God adding to the numbers.

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- a. Salvation from beginning to end is always a work of God in us both individually and corporately.
- b. Not all growth is God's growth. But all growth that comes from God remains to the end.
- c. We cast forth the gospel, others will water that gospel, but God will cause the true growth.

III. Conclusion.

- A. When we look at a passage like this we can become discouraged or defensive if we do not measure up.
 1. But it really is not normal for any church to function like this.
 2. Even a so-called mega church plateaus at some point. So we remember to not allow a passage like this to control our thinking or standards.
- B. Growth is not the ultimate goal for churches, rather fidelity to the Word of God is the goal.
 1. In the good times the church is ready to bring new people in and train them to maturity.
 2. And in the bad times the church is able to remain stable and endure well.
 3. And in the in-between times it is able to remain pointed in the right direction because the Word is the standard, the glory of God is the goal, and the hope found in Christ is the reason.
- C. Our task at Missio Dei Fellowship is to be faithful. May we each own it

Benediction

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)