

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 Church's Core Activities, Pt 1

Acts 2:41-42

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SermonAudio Blurb: In an age of innovation, entertainment and social retooling the Church is to stand aloof as to its core activities. Established on the person of Jesus Christ through faith in the gospel and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Church is then called to be a light and witness to the world. However, the activities of the Church are clearly delineated in the Scripture. And one of the simplest and clearest examples of this is in Acts 2.

I. Introduction.

- A. We come again to Acts 2 and the beginnings of the Church.
1. This chapter is so full that it requires us to go slow through it. Foundational information that is developed within the rest of the book and in the epistles.
 2. At the beginning of the chapter we had a small band of believers who had not yet experienced two key events brought about through the Holy Spirit.
 - a. The indwelling—an ongoing, permanent reality.
 - b. The Spirit baptism—a one time event.
 - c. Until these occurred the Church did not exist and so Acts 2 is a very important passage for understanding the Church.
 3. With this group of a few believers we then saw the Spirit come and the Apostle Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, stood and preached boldly to the people at the Temple.
 - a. They were now living in the last days because of the coming of the Spirit and God's judgment is coming.
 - b. And they were guilty of rejecting Jesus, sent by God to be their Messiah and King. They killed Him and God raised Him from the dead.
 - c. And now He is seated at the right hand of God the Father and He is waiting for the Father to bring all His enemies under Him. And if you rejected and killed your Lord then you are definitely His enemy.

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4. Many became frightened and cut to the heart and wanted to know what they could do. They were guilty. They knew they were under God's wrath. And they wanted to know if there was hope.
 - a. Repent. Be baptized in Jesus' Name. All of this assumes they believe that Jesus is the Savior and King. That He did rise from the dead.
 - b. And if they do this, then they too will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - c. And then Peter speaks a word of hope and mission to those who will obey and come to Jesus by faith. This promise of participating in the New Covenant is for them, their children and for those far off (39).
 - d. With that we find this formerly timid Peter now boldly calling for them to turn from this broken, twisted age and come to Jesus to be saved.
 - e. And on that day the Church was born.
5. What happens next is the focus of the next few sermons as we consider how this early expression of the Church acted and functioned. What it valued and what it practiced. What it invested time to do and therefore, also, what it did not invest in.
6. This is important for us today.
 - a. The American Church is undergoing a major shift and separation. It is sad and painful, but it is also good and necessary.
 - b. What is the local church supposed to be doing? What is the local church's marching orders? This is something every church needs to ask on a regular basis to keep centered on the path upon which God set it.
 - c. There is a distinction between what the local church should do and what the individual Christians in that church should do. A distinction, not a separation, but this is still very important.
 - (1) Often a local church gets sidetracked by doing many nice things for the community and people, but it never does the main thing.
 - (2) Clothes ministry and food pantries are fine, but they cannot replace what the church is supposed to be doing.

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- d. What we have in vss 41-42 is a description of core activities of the local church. As I read the passage see if you can identify them. Most are easy but maybe not all of them.
- B. Read Acts 2:41-42.
- C. Over the next few Sundays we will consider six key activities that the early church practiced on a regular basis. Six vital aspects to the life of any stable church. Each of these are clearly expressed in greater detail throughout the epistles given to the New Testament Church.
 1. Baptism, Membership, Biblical teaching, Fellowship, Lord's Supper, Prayer.
 2. When you think about what a church should look like and what it should focus its people and energy upon, these six activities should be central. They are the core.
 3. Sometimes a church can expand to other areas and activities, but never at the expense of these. Two of these activities are a one time event; while the others are ongoing practices.
- D. Today we will focus on the first two activities, baptism and membership.
 1. These are the two that are one time events.
 2. But these are very important as well because they function like entry ways into the local church.

II. Core Activities of The Church.

- A. Baptism.
 1. I spent a lot of time on this subject already but we did not consider vs 41 in detail.
 2. First, remember that physical baptism is not the same as what we are calling "Spirit baptism." Spirit baptism is the work of Jesus Christ placing a person into the Church universal by immersing us in the Holy Spirit.
 - a. The gospels repeatedly speak of a time coming when Jesus Christ will baptize us in the Holy Spirit. Jesus then told the Apostles in Acts 1:5 that soon they will be baptized **with** the Holy Spirit.
 - b. "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:13)

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- c. This began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and continues to this day as a person places his faith in the person of Jesus Christ and His work.
 - d. But this baptism is a spiritual work that we cannot see. And it puts us into the universal Church but not the local church.
 - (1) The universal church is made up of all who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. This includes the past, present and yet future. But it is only those who are truly Christians and truly saved. *Only a few times in the New Testament is this what is in focus when the word “church” is used.*
 - (2) The local church is made up of those who claim faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. But this does not mean they are actually saved.
 - (a) In small, remote areas there might only be one local church. Especially true in missions work.
 - (b) In more populated areas then you have multiple local churches. An example is the letter to the Galatians where Paul says in 1:2 “. . . to the churches of Galatia.”
 - (c) Christians are to identify with a local church even though they are already part of the universal church.
3. So Spirit baptism brings us into the universal church. But water baptism is the initial entryway into the local church. It is the first way we determine if a person is a fellow Christian. This is seen for us in Acts 2:41.
- a. First, baptism is for those who have already believed the gospel.
 - (1) “those who had received his word were baptized.”
 - (2) To receive is to accept. Which is one of the many ways the bible speaks of believing. In fact, in John’s gospel you will find that to believe, to come, to follow and to love all mean the same thing when speaking of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ.
 - (3) These were the people who heard the warnings about what they were guilty of and who Jesus truly was and they wanted to be saved.

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- (4) They heard that they must repent. And they heard they must be baptized in the “name” of Jesus. Meaning, they had to identify their hope and repentance specifically with Jesus. No room for wiggle or vagueness.
 - (5) And they received it. They embraced that command. They bowed their hearts and soul to it.
 - (6) We can easily see in this passage that professing faith in Jesus Christ came first, then baptism. Here are the other examples in Acts:
 - (a) Acts 8:12 They believed and then they were baptized.
 - (b) Acts 8:36-38 The man heard, believed and was baptized. And this man even knew that he was supposed to be baptized and asked for it.
 - (c) Acts 9:18 Paul, having seen the risen Christ and believing is now baptized.
 - (d) Acts 10 37-48 Gentiles hear the gospel, believe and are then baptized.
 - (e) Acts 16:20 The jailer in Philippi and his family are told the gospel, they believe and are baptized.
 - (f) We can go on and on, but this is the pattern of the New Testament. You believe and then you are baptized. Always.
- b. Second, baptism was not optional.
- (1) It was not something the people had the option to do or not do and be considered a Christian. In fact the bible does not given any indication that this is possible.
 - (2) Peter did not say, “repent, and if you are comfortable with it, we suggest you get baptized too.” No, it was not negotiable.
 - (3) That is not to say that baptism saves, but it does mean that to **willfully** refuse to be baptized means that you should not be treated or accepted as a Christian.

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- (4) What amazes me is that today it is not at all unusual to find churches not requiring baptism.
- (5) 3000 people on one day. Throughout the Temple area were large baptismal pools. The Temple had cisterns that held up to 10 million gallons of water. There were massive baptismal pools that would easily handle this large number.
- (6) It must have been an incredible sight.
- c. Third, and those who were baptized were **added** to something.
 - (1) This may seem strange to point out but notice what it says, “on that day there were added about three thousand souls.”
 - (2) Added to what?
 - (3) The answer is the Church.
 - (4) And until they had been baptized they were not treated as being part of the Church.
4. This required a strong sense of order and administration to execute these baptisms.
 - a. You did not get to just line up at one of the pools and they quickly dunk you.
 - b. It required one of the original 120 people to interview you. Make sure you understood what you were doing. Hearing you say what you believed and what you were repenting of.
 - c. There had to be some way to record this so that everyone knew who had been baptized. This requires writing and witnesses. It is not a small project.
 - d. But it also leads us to the next point, membership as a core activity of the local church.
- B. Membership.
 1. This one requires a little bit of explanation. Many years ago the whole issue of membership was a point of great division here.
 - a. Many opinions on this subject.
 - b. And many positions on the subject.

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- c. I want to show you that in one way or another you likely believe in membership and that the bible teaches it.
 - d. There is a clear membership in the Universal Church, only those who are the elect are part of it.
2. With only a few exceptions, anyone who would call themselves a Christian believes in some sort of membership standards for the local church.
 - a. For some churches the process can be rather complex and long. This is certainly true wherever the church is persecuted.
 - b. Others are very minimalistic, they only require you to be a professing Christian. This is the absolute minimum requirement though, if you are going to call it a church.
 3. What you must see in our passage is that there was a small nucleus before this event involving baptizing 3000 people. That core group is mentioned in 1:15. These were the first to be baptized with the Spirit and they made up the entirety of the Church.
 4. So when we read in 2:41 that about 3000 more were added, it was to that original group of around 120.
 5. A brief survey of passages showing the need to be a member of a local church.
 - a. In the beginning it was rather simple but it rapidly grew into something that required records and administration and standards. By vs 47 we see that more and more people were being added “to their number.” Again showing that there was some sort of recording.
 - b. Matthew 18:17. Tell it to who?
 - c. Acts 20:28-29 ““Be on guard for yourselves and for all **the flock, among** which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in **among you**, not sparing the flock.” (Acts 20:28-29)
 - (1) They were responsible for a clearly understood group of people. The flock that were among/around them.
 - (2) They were not responsible for other churches such as in Rome. Just those in the area of Ephesus.

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- d. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.
 - (1) among you
 - (2) midst
 - (3) when you are assembled
 - (4) within the church.
- e. 1 Thessalonians 5:12.
- f. Hebrews 13:17, 24.
- 6. Add to this the metaphors that are used to speak of the local church.
 - a. Body, which is the most common image.
 - (1) Romans 12:4-5.
 - (2) 1 Corinthians 12:12 ff.
 - b. Building/Temple.
 - (1) 1 Corinthians 3:1.
 - (2) 1 Peter 2:4-5.
 - c. Family—1 Timothy 3:15. (God's household)

III. Conclusion.

- A. View them like our entrance ways. You have the outer doors and then the inner doors.
 - 1. Baptism is the wonderful means of hearing and seeing a person who openly testifies that Jesus Christ is their Lord. That they are resting and hoping in His death and resurrection for the resolution of their sin and its result, which is eternal death.
 - 2. Membership is the inner door to the local church, where that person now identifies with a specific gathering of believers.
 - a. It is where the leaders of that church comes to view these people as under their care and responsibility.
 - b. And where those joining make it clear that it is with these people and their elders that they are coming into fellowship and accountability.

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3. To believe the gospel and be baptized makes you a Christian and part of the universal Church. But it does not join you to a fellowship. You are not “added” to the number of any gathering. Membership, in whatever form that local church establishes, is how you connect with a church.
- B. There is a God given way for the local churches to know who belongs to their church and who does not. It allows the leaders and the people in those local churches to quickly recognize who they are accountable to, who they are to serve, care and support and even who they are to submit and learn from.
1. Frankly the entire group of New Testament epistles assumes those who are claiming Christ are connected to a local church and that those in that church know it.
 2. When you evangelize you should make it clear that when they come to faith in Jesus Christ they are also coming into the Church. And then it is important that you connect them with a church.
 3. In some types of church planting this is done differently, where the planter, really an evangelist, goes to establishes a church through the people he brings to faith. But they must gather and become a church.
 - a. This begins with baptism and often that is the only requirement at first for membership.
 - b. Given time, this will need to become more involved but the concept remains the same. Who are my leaders and who are being led? Where do I belong and serve and give and learn?
- C. What of those who do not join a local church?
1. This is unfortunately a common reality for America and it is not healthy nor wise.
 2. It is common to have people claiming Christ who never were baptized and therefore never had their profession of faith remotely scrutinized. This leaves their soul in grave danger.
 3. But what of those baptized and yet still not part of a local church? The elders here chose to accept them as people who claim Christ. They are welcome to worship. To a degree they are welcome to take part in the ministries.
 4. But ultimately they will be asked if they want to join. If they say “no” then we will try to find out why. If that can’t be resolved then we will

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encourage them to go find a church they can join with joy and commitment.

5. We will give most people more than ample opportunities to join. But we will also be very limited in certain ways. Specifically, areas of influence and instruction.

Benediction

May we stand firm against the spiritual powers that press upon us in the strength of the Lord and in His might. May we take up the full armor of God so that we might resist and stand fast in these evil days. May we walk in the peace that comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ and we live in the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father. Amen.

Small Group Questions

- Why do you think these two activities are important for the church today? Think about the state of the church in America and discuss how baptism and membership might serve as protection for the church.
- How do these activities help the elders lead and guard?
- What are the reasons you have given or heard as to why baptism or membership is not needed? How, if at all, has this sermon helped you answer those reasons?