

Supernatural Community—Acts 2:42-47—4/14/2024
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Open your Bibles to Acts 2 as we finish out this mountain-top chapter packed with powerful & pivotal truths of the church's beginning.

It's been a joy for me to share God's Word & I pray you have been strengthened in these 1st 2 chapters.

Let's read Acts 2:37-47 one more time as we finish it today. [READ]

We've covered verse 42 & related passages that clarify this example as normative for the church.

This first church of Jerusalem was an amazing example & yet this is a narrative that we must understand in the context of when it happened.

It happened in the foundational time of the Spirit beginning to give NT revelation through His Apostles as Jesus promised.

So not everything we read is necessarily expected to continue today & yet much of it is repeated as commands for the church in the NT.

So we must understand the history & then make applications.

And we must correct wrong applications like we did last week by clarifying that verses 44-45 depicted sharing & not socialism.

In all that we've covered, I must say how profoundly thankful I am for you as a church that is like the model we find in Acts 2.

As I mentioned last week about Gospel-motivated generosity, such spiritual fruitfulness is a supernatural work of God.

That's why the church is different from anything else on earth.

The church is not produced by human creativity or ingenuity.

So I thank God for His supernatural work in & through you.

As Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, He will build His church & He told us how He does so & we want to let Him do it His way.

We don't want to try to build by our own methodologies & end up with something less than the supernatural reality.

We want to be praying for Jesus to build it & then be thankful for every measure of blessing He brings.

I often say that I'm one of the richest people on the planet because God has saved me & allowed me to serve His church.

He has showered my life with the fruitfulness of your lives whom Jesus is saving & sanctifying & using for His glory.

Your lives are so often supernatural & I praise God for you as I'm constantly reminded what an amazing church you are.

As always when I say that, I also encourage you to excel still more.

I don't want us to mess up what God is doing—I don't want us to lose sight of God's priorities & paths to fruitfulness.

I want us to hold fast to Scripture as our guide & never waver.

So I want to connect what we've covered from verses 42 & 44-45 with this whole section to outline 6 characteristics of supernatural church community to keep us focused.

I want these to continue to abound in us & among us as a church.

As we outline these 6 characteristics of supernatural church community, I pray you will be grateful for blessings we enjoy & challenged to excel still more.

The 1st description was modeled in verse 42 & commanded in the NT.

Read verse 42 again to recall those guidelines. [READ]

You might say, 1st today, that this church at Jerusalem was a guided community in that it was instructed & governed by Apostolic teaching.

It was not a community where everyone did what was right in their own eyes or had free reign to invent new methodologies.

Instead, it was, point #1, a guided community, guided by divine truth.

So let's note 1st that a healthy church is a guided community.

The apostles' teaching was the revelation of eyewitnesses of Jesus' life & death & resurrection whom Jesus commissioned as His spokesmen.

That teaching was then also recorded as NT Scripture as they explained the OT & all Jesus had taught.

Verse 42 also says the prayers of seeking God & praising God were central, as was the fellowship of sharing truth & life together.

And the breaking of THE bread was the communion ceremony remembering Jesus' death for sin & resurrection to return.

That was not mere breaking general bread for meals together as verse 46 describes, but the specific bread of remembering Jesus' body given for us as the Lamb of God sacrificed to pay sin's penalty.

That Gospel remembrance keeps us rooted in the riches of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone.

We recall all that from our study of verse 42 as a 1st point as the roots from which verses 43-47 blossom & flourish.

That's what I mean that the church is a guided community.

As we follow God's guidelines, we are also a God-fearing community.

That's a 2nd point as we continue—note that a vibrant, healthy church is a God-fearing community.

Read Acts 2:43 again to see that description. [READ]

Literally the 1st part of the verse says *fear was being upon every soul*.

And the word for awe or fear literally means '*fear*' or '*terror*'.

That biblical fear is a fear of God, a sense of awe at who God is and what He has done and what He can do.

Recall what these folks had experienced to become awestruck.

Remember that God had lived among them for 33 years in Jesus & He had ministered miraculously & taught transcendentally for 3 years.

He had healed incurable diseases, fed multitudes, demonstrated power over the material world and immaterial world.

Jesus healed every kind of organic disease & ailment & handicap that was known in His time & He even raised the dead.

That's why people traveled from far away to see Him & crowded around Him & hailed Him as the Promised King.

Jesus had confounded the supposed wisdom of the teachers of His day and brought hope and freedom to souls among all groups.

Then He had submitted Himself to be arrested and mistreated and cruelly mocked and beaten and killed as a criminal.

This God-man with such wisdom and power had become like a Lamb led to a slaughter just as He had predicted.

And the earth shook and the sun was darkened for 3 hours and even a pagan soldier confessed that Jesus was the Son of God.

He proved His supremacy for 3 solid years of ministry & now these people realized that they hated Him & rejected Him & crucified Him.

Don't you think you would be struck with fear?

Yet they realized that this same Jesus rose from the dead & could be their Savior to pay for their sins & forgive them.

That's shocking & scary & also gracious & compelling!

To think they could be reconciled to this glorious God who could do such things would bring awestruck worship.

Jesus had risen & appeared to various individuals & crowds & some watched Him ascend into the clouds of heaven.

As He promised, His followers had prayed & received God's Spirit & preached to multitudes in their own languages.

And the leading Apostle Peter had preached a stirring sermon about Jesus as the Messiah of Israel & the Lord of all.

Then 3000 people had responded in faith and this little group of followers had become a powerful spiritual force.

All THAT was awesome—that is what inspired a sense of awe.

They were amazed at God's grace in Jesus dying for the very sins they had committed & they were amazed by new life in the Spirit.

Then verse 43 adds that God's proof of the Apostolic message continued through signs & wonders done by the Apostles.

Signs & wonders proved the Apostles were Jesus' messengers of new revelation from God in fulfilling Jesus' promises in John 14-16.

They showed divine power & pointed to divine purpose.

These were a part of the Apostolic testimony at this early stage of new revelation as in other times when God gave new revelation.

When Scripture was written, God attested to the human writers to make the divine inspiration of Scripture undeniably clear.

Hebrews 2:3-4 refers to confirmation by the Apostles who heard Jesus as God testified through them by signs & wonders & miracles.

Hebrews 2:3-4 says, "*how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*"

Again, Hebrews 2:3-4 says, "*After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed [that means proven, established, made certain & reliable] to us by those who heard, [the Apostles who heard Jesus], God also testifying [that's verifiable witness] with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*"

Do you hear the purpose of the signs & wonders?

They confirmed the salvation message of the Apostles, the eyewitness testimony of who Jesus was & what Jesus did & promised.

In other words, they certified the NT revelation as Scripture.

2nd Corinthians 12:12 says such signs & wonders & miracles were the proofs of the true Apostles as distinct from others.

Those signs & wonders & miracles were like what Jesus did as we'll see in Acts—like healing the sick & raising the dead.

They were not merely praying for people & then seeing God answer prayers to heal some people over time or through medical means.

They healed immediately & completely & those many miracles were only through the Apostles & their associates.

Their signs were far greater than God's providential work in all times because the purpose was far greater in that era of God writing the NT.

We don't want to minimize the majestic level of their miracles & we also don't want to minimize the importance of that time.

Just think—the Deliverer promised from Genesis 3:15 & expected & expanded through the ages as the Messiah & King had finally come.

Jesus was that Christ & Lord who had lived perfectly, died sacrificially, & risen victoriously & returned to heaven.

And now God had purposed to explain all that through the Apostles.

The purpose & proof of the Apostles was distinct & temporary.

Their signs are no longer needed today because we have the NT completed & preserved & God said do not add to His NT revelation.

Since God's purpose was completed by the Apostles, the NT & church history attest that these signs ended with the Apostles.

But that did not mean that the sense of awe at Jesus & the Gospel faded as the world was turned upside down by the church.

2nd Corinthians 5:11 says, "*knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men*" to turn from sin to faith in Christ to be saved.

2nd Corinthians 7:1 says the fear of God should move us to cleanse our lives from all defilement & seek complete holiness.

Philippians 2:12 says we should work out the implications & applications of our salvation with fear & trembling.

Ephesians 5:21 says to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

1st Peter 1:17 & 2:18 & 3:2 & 3:16 refer to the fear of God.

So be assured that the mention of fear or awe of God in Acts 2:43 was not to stop after the Apostolic period.

That same sense of awe should grip us today when we realize our sins against God & His grace to give us salvation.

When we really come to grips with how terribly sinful we are against God, then we should fear like they did.

Yet if we come to Him through grace in Jesus, then our fear should cause us to run TO Him, not FROM Him.

Then our fear is transformed to awe, shaken by what God could do but amazed by what He did do instead for us in Christ.

When we realize what we deserve in contrast to what we receive in Christ, we should be overcome with awe.

We can still experience a sense of awe that God is working among us.

When we see God answer prayer & cause the miracle of new spiritual birth & use us for eternal good, we should be amazed.

As well, sometimes I wonder if God brings trials to humble us to be in awe even at just God meeting our basic needs.

I think we would sense more awe of God & more expectation of His work if we gave & served in more ways that stretch us.

I also think we would be more in awe of God if we would simply take note of all that He has done & is doing already.

I praise God for many ways He is showing His glory among us.

And I'm praying we'll be aware to marvel at God's work among us.

And let me encourage you to pray & serve & give expecting God to be at work for His glory.

I thank God for ways that I see that among you & I pray God will deepen our faith & open our eyes to grow in awe of Him.

Living with this sense of awe, this fear of God, is the beginning of wisdom that affects us profoundly in so many ways.

It will influence what you do alone & what you do in various groups of people as you know the omnipresent reality of God.

Fear of God frees us from the fear of man that is a snare or trap as Proverbs 29:25 says.

Fear of God also frees us from anxiety & transforms us in many ways.

So we want to be a God-fearing community.

A healthy church is a (1) guided & (2) God-fearing community.

Then, 3rdly, to be like the model early church, we should also long for God to expand our passion to be a giving community.

Note 3rdly, that a healthy church is a GIVING community.

Read verses 44-45 to recall that. [READ]

As we said last week, this was not socialism or communism, which is forced seizing of property to create a structured social equality.

The idea is that out of labor to provide for your own flows this voluntary & sacrificial sharing to meet real needs.

We won't review all that we said last week about these verses modeling the fuller NT teaching of free-will or voluntary giving.

The Bible describes all we earn & own as a stewardship from God, as entrusted to us by God to use as He wants.

These people gave sacrificially from what they had for the purpose of providing for God's people as needs arose.

Being a giving community like that means viewing our money, stuff & time as owned by God & given for His purposes.

So we want to praise God for how He provides & gladly invest eternally as we trust Him to continue to provide.

That does not mean the church is a handout station for anyone who comes by with no accountability or follow up.

But church members should make needs known & we as elders keep the finances posted & try to let you know the ongoing ministry needs.

We don't want you to miss out on eternal investments & relational pleasures as we worship God by giving.

Generosity was a mark of the compelling testimony of the early church & I want that to continually shine through us also.

That's the kind of giving community in Acts 2:44-45 & I praise God for ways you live that out in our church life together.

So I urge you to pray with me that we will always be (1) a guided community, (2) a God-fearing community & (3) a giving community.

A healthy church is (1) guided, (2) God-fearing, (3) giving, and then 4thly, it is a gathering community.

So note point #4 is that a healthy church is a gathering community.

Read verse 46 to see their regular gathering. [READ]

These people came together for fellowship & evangelism in the temple & they shared time & meals together in their homes.

The Temple gatherings were persistently unifying times with one mind in worship as had been their custom as Jews.

That now would've focused on the Apostles' teaching for instruction of believers & also evangelism of unbelievers.

All their gatherings would've included prayer & fellowship as motivated by glad & sincere hearts desiring to be together.

This breaking bread generally from house to house describes meals together & not the ceremony of communion.

They simply enjoyed being with one another.

They gathered not from a selfish agenda or a sense of duty or other obstructions to love, but with sincere hearts for their own enjoyment.

And we know that regular gathering is a command for all of NT life in the church from passages like Hebrews 10:24-25.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "*let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; & all the more as you see the day drawing near.*"

A healthy church enjoys being together in relationships sharing our common commitments and passions and priorities.

Like coals of a fire fizzle out when isolated but heat up when together, so we brighten each other's fire when we are together.

I thank God how your fellowship brightens my spiritual life.

I praise God for how many of you overflow with this glad & sincere devotion to spending time together.

It's a delight to see you hang out after each gathering & to see your faithfulness to seize opportunities to serve or fellowship.

My heart was thrilled to see so many of you at the men's conference this weekend & at monthly Man-up meetings & to know how many of you ladies are devoted to Ladies Bible studies together.

Whether it's in conversational dinners or Care Groups or whenever else, it's contagious among all the ages & stages of life that we enjoy together.

You are a happy people that love to be together & I want that to be protected & strengthened & to deepen & spread to others.

I know that developing such relationships takes time and effort.

I know it may be awkward at first & take sacrifices—but it's worth it!

It's for the health of your own soul and your church.

As Proverbs 17:22 says, "*A joyful heart is good medicine.*"

So seek after & foster the glad gathering of a healthy church.

And do so with gratitude, which is the first phrase verse 47, which says they were praising God.

Again, as with other verbs throughout this section, that has an ongoing, continuous emphasis as distinctive & habitual.

Praising God is what they did as they were together.

That happened in song together as we see in passages like Ephesians 5 & Colossians 3—singing to one another.

It happened in prayer & we see that commanded throughout the NT.

And it also was undoubtedly a normal part of conversation.

Sharing reasons to praise God is biblical boasting in God & His work as several NT passages commend.

So you might quickly note that as a 5th point today—a healthy church is a grateful community.

We note point #5 from the praising God in verse 47 that is part of giving thanks in everything as 1st Thessalonians 5:18 says.

So point #5 is that a healthy church is a grateful community.

A healthy church is guided, God-fearing, giving, gathering, & grateful.

And again, all that is contagious & I'm thankful to see & hear it among you & I urge you again to excel still more.

When others see that, it is a testimony to others.

As Jesus said in John 13:35, *“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

When outsiders look at our relationships, they should see love that is compelling in a way that God can use to lead them to Him.

That brings us to our 6th & final point for today from Acts 2—a healthy church is a growing community.

By God's grace, He works to build His church to be reaching others & in that sense a healthy church is 6thly a growing community.

Look at the end of verse 47. [READ]

It may be tempting to read this section & note all the right things these believers were doing, but let's be clear who was adding to the church.

The Lord—God was adding to the church.

Only God can change the heart & only God can save a soul, so it is only God who can add to His church.

God was adding new believers to that church day by day & He was doing so through their faithfulness in following Him.

So even as we pursue the right church basics & community, we always remember that God must provide the growth.

And that's why we pray for God to bless everything we do.

We want what God can produce, not what we might mimic.

But as we emphasize dependence on God, we also want to note that a healthy church should want to be a growing community.

A church is not faithful if it does not want to reach people.

A faithful church wants Christ to be known locally & globally in carrying out the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20.

That is why praying and giving and going in missions is vital.

And it is also why serving & living evangelistically is essential.

I thank God for how many of you are reaching out to others around us and in our community with the Gospel.

I thank God for how you as a church have favor with people like the church in Acts 2 did.

And that favor is the word for grace—it means we know we do not deserve anything & whatever good is all God's gracious work.

We praise Him for every measure of favor He grants & we marvel for every soul He adds to the number of the church.

We know that God alone saves & adds to His church.

And note also that the people who were added were those being saved & that those being saved were added to the church.

Those are the same people & there was not one without the other.

Those God saved were added to the membership of the local church & that was the norm.

The NT had no category of people who were saved who were not also added to the number of the local church.

Jesus' followers were added to Jesus' local body.

And that also means that only saved people were added to the church.

Those who were merely interested or visiting or who were infants born to believers or children growing up in the church were not added to the church until & unless they were saved.

The church is the gathering of believers, not an outreach for seekers or an entertainment venue trying to attract the world.

So be clear that biblical growth is not by mere decisions.

And true disciples whom God rescues & adds to the church are to be trained to be faithful in all of life & fruitful in making other disciples.

That's God's design & pattern for growth in the church.

So you should want to be growing personally & reaching others in whatever sphere of influence you have at your stage of life.

We all should be investing our lives & resources for God to grow us & His church here & around the world.

Again, I praise God for how many of you are doing so.

And let me say that if you are not a member of this church, then we'd love to welcome you into membership.

We'd love for God to add you officially to this church but first & foremost we'd love to know that you trust & follow Jesus.

So we urge you to go back to verses 37-41 of this chapter and be sure you have embraced the message of the Gospel there.

The Apostle says to turn from your sins and seek the forgiveness available only through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Son of God who came to earth to live perfectly, die sacrificially & rise victoriously.

We can't work our way to a right relationship with God & readiness for heaven, but we can receive that all freely & only through Jesus.

If you've come in repentance & faith to Jesus, then Peter said to be baptized & then every believer was added to the church.

We'd love to help you follow that pattern & so please let us know if we can help you.

I thank God for the church He has built and is building in the local body that we call Calvary Memorial Church.

I praise God for how you are a guided, God-fearing, giving, gathering, grateful, & growing community of Jesus' followers.

I praise Him for His blessings in & through you people as the church that is God's plan for His glory in these days.

And I pray that He will abound those blessings in increasing measures.

Pray with me as we close.