

DEVOTED TO THE MISSION

Open your Bible with me to Acts 2. Over the course of this past week, I had the joy of leading music alongside some of our own Trails Church musicians at the CROSS Conference in Louisville, Kentucky. CROSS is a collegiate missions conference that exists to convince students that every Christian has a role to play in making Jesus' name known around the world. The tag line we use is, "Make your life count, make His name known." For some, this means leaving behind their culture, language, and family and going to unreached people for the sake of the gospel. For others, it means living to the glory of God here in the culture and language God has placed us in while leveraging our lives to reach people with the saving news of Jesus. CROSS is one of the initiatives I am deeply thankful to have been involved in over the last ten years.

Multiple times this week I looked out across a sea of 11,000 students and thanked the Lord that I was able to see with my own eyes the next generation of Christian leaders spending their Christmas break listening to expositional preaching, singing great hymns of our faith, and thinking about the mission of God in the world. I loved seeing missionary friends from around the world and hearing what God is doing in the Middle East and Asia. Still, being there made me eager to be back here with you and continue in the work God has called us to. I was reminded of the very reason we planted The Trails Church.

When Jamie and I decided we were going to give our lives to planting and pastoring this church we began to pray, "Lord, if you call us to stay here, we will joyfully stay. This is our home. We love this place and these people." But we also wanted to live like missionaries. We saw an incredible opportunity to reach people coming from all over the world to make their home in North Texas. We wanted to see men and women converted and disciplined in the fertile soil of a healthy church. And over these first five years, haven't we have seen God do a remarkable work?

Through the fall we spent five weeks in Acts 2:42-47, looking at how the first Christian church in Jerusalem was *Devoted* to the word of God, to fellowship, to prayer and generosity, all as expressions of discipleship. This morning I want us to explore this passage one more time to highlight how this church that was completely devoted to discipleship was equally devoted to evangelism, to the spread of the gospel, to kingdom advancement. John Stott explains it well, “Those first Jerusalem Christians were not so preoccupied with learning, sharing, and worshiping, that they forgot about witnessing. For the Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit who created a missionary church.”¹

My prayer is that as we begin a new year, move to a new building, and see God do new things in our church family, that we would think, pray, and live like people called by God to this place. Sent to this place. I pray for nothing short of revival as we see our friends, neighbors, and coworkers come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. So, here is what I am asking myself, and what I want each of you to join me in asking, “In what ways can I better align my life with the mission of God this year?”

Sermon Summary

Among all the characteristics that describe the first New Testament church in Acts 2:42-47, the final words reveal how they were *Devoted to the Mission*. The church which had been built on the gospel through evangelism understood their call to spread the gospel through evangelism. From their example, I want to show you three features of the mission of the church from Acts 2:47 that I pray will strengthen our witness together. Our heading will highlight that we have been given: *1. A Dependent Mission, 2. A Shared Mission, and 3. A Continuing Mission.*

“And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, The Church & The World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England ; Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 86.

A Dependent Mission

The first feature I want to show you is that ours is *A Dependent Mission*. We begin by emphasizing that it was *the Lord* himself who added to their number. Now, we see the church buzzing with activity in this handful of verses. The apostles were preaching and teaching the Word of God, the people evangelized friends and family members, the church gave of their resources to help each other through difficult times. The congregation praised God and prayed publicly. They even enjoyed favor with all the people – yet none of these acts in and of themselves were the reason why people were converted and added to their number.

The church's evangelism itself was not engaging enough to convert a soul. Their apologetics could not argue a person into belief in Christ. Their love for one another was not strong enough to bring someone from death to life. No, it was *the Lord* who worked *through* their evangelism, apologetics, and fellowship to draw the hearts of men and women to the irresistible grace of Jesus by the power of the gospel. These were the means God used to accomplish his purposes, but Jonah 2:9 states it clearly, "Salvation belongs to the Lord."

The Word, The Spirit, and Prayer

As we think about our dependence on the Lord in the mission of the church, let me show you three places in the first two chapters of Acts we have seen this already. First, look at how they were *A. Dependent on the Word*. (2:42) From the beginning it was this way. When Peter stood up in the street and preached Christ from the Old Testament, it was the Word itself that cut them to the heart so that they asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?" It wasn't Peter's perfect eloquence that converted those three thousand souls. The Word did the work. It is in Scripture that God has revealed Himself and told us how to be reconciled to Him by grace through faith in Christ. It is in Scripture we are taught how to live as His holy people. It is in Scripture where we learn doctrine and how to flourish as a new community. This is why sitting at the top of the list of things the early church was devoted to, and dependent on, was the apostles' teaching. They needed the apostles' teaching and the writings of the Old Testament in order to

navigate this new life in Christ. To say it differently, the church needed to know God's Word to know God. In the same way, we are dependent on the Word.

Next, let's see that the church was *B. Dependent on the Spirit*. Acts 1:8 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The disciples of Jesus were not sent on this mission of evangelizing and discipling *before* they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Why? Because their message and their mission were completely reliant upon the Spirit of God to work through their words and their witness. Their evangelism was effective because the Spirit of God spoke through them. It was the unction and power of the Spirit that caused people to come to faith in Christ. When Paul is trying to help a local church understand this truth, he explained in 1 Corinthians 3:6–7, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth." David Wells summarizes the point like this, "Ultimately, God is the evangelist."²

Finally, we find that the church was *C. Dependent in Prayer*. (2:42) Already in the book of Acts, as they sought to choose who would replace Judas among the apostles, they waited on the Lord in prayer. As they obediently stayed in Jerusalem for the Spirit to be given, they waited and prayed. Still, what we will see as we journey through the pages of Acts, is that the people are found continually in prayer. Why all the praying? This devotion to prayer is evidence that from the beginning these Christians could not trust in their own wisdom, or strategy, or ability to navigate the Christian life. They must wholeheartedly depend on the Lord in prayer.

Standing, Keeping, Praying

What does this mean for us? Well, I think it would be helpful if we simply retrace these three steps in the form of application – even after we leave this place today. Let's ask the Lord that we might grow in our dependence upon the Lord and learn how these truths might

² See David Wells, *God the Evangelist: How the Holy Spirit Works to Bring Men and Women to Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

shape our lives today as we seek to live on mission together. We must stand on the Word of God and continue to trust the Word to do the work. We must keep in step with the Spirit as we go about gospel ministry, allowing the Spirit of God to lead us. We must be prayerful. A prayerless church is an oxymoron. Prayerlessness in the Christian life is evidence that we simply do not understand the depth of our dependence on the Lord. Let us never move past simple, basic, prayerful dependence on Word and the Spirit.

A Shared Mission

The second feature we see is how ours is *A Shared Mission*. Let's move on in this phrase to consider how the Lord added to "*their number... those who were being saved.*" What I would like to emphasize here is the cooperative effort of this church. The sharedness of the ministry. We have been looking at these various characteristics for weeks now, but have you noticed that not one specific name is mentioned? Has it stuck out to you that the entire church was fully engaged in in this shared task of witnessing and making disciples? Look with me back through these verses and see it for yourself:

[42] And *they* devoted *themselves* to the apostles' teaching and *the fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon *every soul*, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] 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. [46] And day by day, attending the temple *together* and breaking bread in *their* homes, *they* received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to *their number* day by day those who were being saved.

What is my point in pointing this emphasis on the pronouns used in this paragraph? This: *the Great Commission is not for some of God's people somewhere, but for all of God's people everywhere.* Every Christian who has been saved has also been sent. Every Christian is called to be a disciple maker. Yet, I want to make sure this translates correctly. I'm afraid when some of us hear that, we might think, "This is all up to me." Yet, the Great Commission isn't given in an individual, but all the people of God. We have been called to this mission together.

The mandate was not given to an individual or a specific group of super Christians – but to us. To each local church.

A Living Illustration

I was looking through our annual report that was published in December just rehearsing God's grace to us in 2023 and stopped when I came to the picture of Brandon Drummond being baptized. When Brandon and Melissa began attending the church, they both said in their own words that their eyes were opened to the real, biblical Jesus and came to understand salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But, how did that happen? Well, Jesus did it. What means did He use? He used the prayers of this congregation who have been faithfully praying since the day we planted that God would bring men and women into our lives who do not know the saving grace of Jesus. The Spirit used the preaching of the word to proclaim the gospel of Christ – so that it would be clear who Jesus is and what He has done to secure so great a salvation. God used the community of faith so that the Drummonds would experience the love of Christ in a local church. The Lord worked through men's and women's Bible studies to kindle the work and fan their faith into flame. Make no mistake, the Lord saved them – and He did it through the work and witness of the body of Christ. So, let's praise the Lord together for a couple whom the Lord added to our number those who were being saved. And let's pray for many more in the days to come.

Contributing or Consuming

If we are going to continue to see this happen, what we need is a robust understanding of Ephesians 4 where we take the sharedness of this mission seriously. Where we steward the spiritual gifts, financial resources, and our time in order to invest in others. If we get a vision for this, we will continue to see this kind of gospel fruit spring up from the soil of our church. But we will also have to fight something that is resonant within each of us: it is called consumerism. The American church is filled with people who just seek to get everything they can from a church like they would a buffet. When they get what they need, they just move on to the next

one. But the church we find in the New Testament is not marked by consumerism but commitment. Not focused on self, but living for the good of others. Let's pray we see more of that in the coming years. This church needs your gifts in order that we would be built up into maturity, to experience the fruitfulness that God has planned for us, and it will take all of us rowing together to see all of it come to pass.

A Continuing Mission

The final feature we see is that this would be *A Continuing Mission*. To conclude I simply want us to circle our attention around the phrase *day by day*. "The Lord added to their number *day by day* those who were being saved." The verb 'added' is imperfect which should be understood to mean the Lord 'kept adding,' and the adverb 'daily' points to the continuing work of God among His people. The faithfulness of the early church's evangelism and the fruitfulness of the gospel among them is without question. Their worship and their witness were both a daily practice. What began with 120 people hiding in an upstairs room in the dangerous city of Jerusalem then expanded to 3,120 people on that day that Peter preached. Historians and scholars estimate that six months into this church plant there were over one hundred thousand believers in Jerusalem. And each of us trace our faith back to this moment that began with a handful of Christians in Acts 2.

I thought this week about how much transition this church went through as the Lord added to their number so consistently. The members of the church could never get comfortable with just one small group of friends. They would need more and more elders to provide adequate pastoral care for the growing number of people. There would have to be people who chose to leave the congregation they knew and loved in order to plant new churches that would reach new people in the neighborhoods and neighboring cities around Jerusalem, throughout all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. – So that, as we sit this morning in Celina, Texas – or "the ends of the earth" as they would have known it. They shared the mission and they made room for more and more people to know and grow in Christ.

Make Room

This week I was with a friend named Mack Stiles who has served as a missionary in multiple nations, and I have the joy of knowing people he has disciplined and poured into. Mack and his wife Leeann constantly make room in their hearts and lives for new people. A couple of months ago, some of our members Stu and Lori Grubbs moved to Louisville, where Mack and Leeann now live and have joined a church called Third Avenue. Mack was so excited to tell me how they have already had Stu and Lori over for dinner and how much they already love them and are excited to have lunch with them again in a couple of weeks. Mack and Leeann are a living picture of what it looks like to make room in their hearts and lives for the lost and for believers they want to pour in to.

It made me wonder how I am doing at making room in my heart and life for others – for new people. And I want to bring you into this and let’s ask together – as we open our new building there will be a lot of new people that find out about The Trails Church, people from different cultures and backgrounds, different politics, and I pray that we will make room for them in our hearts, in our lives, and in our church.

Conclusion

Before we close, I want to make sure we all understand with clarity what the mission of the church is. I want to define it in hope that we might not forget it. Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert define the mission of the church in a helpful way:

(The mission of the church is) to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father.³

We get to the same idea in a concise way with our mission statement. We say that The Trails Church exists to glorify God. How do we go about glorifying God? One task: by fulfilling the Great Commission given by Jesus in Matthew 28 to make disciples. Discipleship begins with

³ Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2011), 62.

evangelism and continues with the ongoing work of the local church to grow people up in Christ. This is the one thing we are called to do and the way we have committed to go about it is the power of the gospel, in the context of biblical community, understanding the sharedness of this work together, and living by God's grace in dependence on Him.

I pray this coming year that we would align our lives with the mission of God like never before. In our commitment, in our giving, in our serving, in our fellowship, in our devotion to Scripture – in every part of our lives. And as we do, let us remember just how dependent we are upon the Word of God, the Spirit of God in prayer. Let us work and witness together knowing that we were not sent on this commission alone, but together. And let us make room in our hearts, our lives, and this church for those who need to hear and grow in the gospel as we remain *Devoted to the Mission*.

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