

## Lesson 12

# They Were Filled with Praise

## Acts 2.46-47

Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

## Introduction

It should really be no surprise that as Luke concludes this section on the first Christians that we find them full of praise and joy. These are the natural products of unity and fellowship with God and one another. At its most basic level, praise is an expression of our approval or admiration, of gratitude and devotion for blessings received.<sup>44</sup> For them, Christianity was their life. And because of their sincere devotion, they couldn't help but give God praise. They were very aware that God was at work in their midst in a new way and that they were enjoying the benefits of being a part of God's family.

## Joyful Hearts

The wording here simply means to rejoice. They were simply glad. They were blessed. The blessing they shared in wasn't so much about physical goods and financial appropriations as much as it was the love they possessed together. This is fantastically contagious. It has a way of building on top of itself. Behind it all was a unity produced by the Spirit . . . a singleness of heart.

## Sincere Hearts

Luke says the members of the church ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts. The phrase *sincere hearts* occurs only here in the New Testament. A similar expression is used in Ephesians 6.5 and Colossians 3.22. The word means *simplicity* and comes from a root word that means "without rocks," or "smooth." Someone has said, "there were no stones of selfishness in their hearts."<sup>45</sup> God's kindness to them bound them to Him wholeheartedly and to one another with generous self-giving. They truly cared for one another.

## Praising God

The church had one mind in praising God. If everyone in the local church is involved in praising God and giving Him the glory, then everyone will be one with everyone else. This is why we fix our eyes on Jesus. Problems come when we decide to fix our eyes on anything else but Him. If someone demands everyone give them the glory, problems will arise. Joy will be absent. When a person becomes fixated on praising himself, exalting his ways and methods, he will ultimately find no joy because it will eventually

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<sup>44</sup> Unger, Merrill Frederick, R. K. Harrison, Howard Frederic Vos, Cyril J. Barber, and Merrill Frederick Unger. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1988.

<sup>45</sup> MacArthur, p. 89.

lead to him being the only one doing so. *There is no joy in praising yourself because you'll wind up the only one involved.*<sup>46</sup> In the church, no one has the preeminence but the Lord. Joy is found through praise and observing what God does as He works among us. When all are focused on the Lord, unity results through prayer and praise. Unity results when we all care about the glory of the Lord and not our own. God centered churches continually praise God. Their center of gravity is a happy one.

## What We Can Take Away

When the local congregation is God-centered, praise will be the result.

### *What we mean when we say God-centered*

The first Christians continually spoke about the Lord. They were thankful for Him. They were submissive to Him and surrendered their lives to Him.

When we are praising God, there will not be any time to speak ill of anyone else. *What characterizes your speech and topics of conversation?* What do others hear and see when you speak? Do you speak often of the work God is doing among your local church family? What are some success stories you see? How can you work these things into conversations with those outside of Christ to show them the hope He offers? What topics of your own study and growth are you working into your daily conversations?

A God/Christ centered church will reflect its disposition . . . which will be one of praise. God will be thanked out loud, appreciated, and honored in words and deeds. It will be manifested in the way it worships, its singing, and reverence for God. It will make a conscious decision to refrain from complaining and grumbling. *We need to spend our time in praise.*

### *What contributes to this climate of praise*

It's simple. Acts 2:42-47 gives us the details. God-centered instruction. God-centered fellowship. God-centered prayer. God-centered communion. God-centered stewardship. God-centered hospitality. God-centered relationships. As you consider the aim of all these activities, it leads to a people of praise, which leads to a fruitful and productive church. Praising God characterizes the converted. It is natural. It is continual. It is never contrived or forced. It is the fruit of the Spirit who works inside of us.

### **A Way of Life**

*Praising* in v. 47 describes the “they” of v. 46 and the “number” of v. 47. The first Christians did all the things of v. 42-46 *while* praising God. The praise was not an additional thing on the list, but it was the condition in which they did all these things. Praise was their way of life. It describes their spiritual state and mode of life. J. A. Alexander says it best:

This evidently means something more than that praise formed a part of their worship. The phrase is obviously intended to describe their whole life as a life of praise to God. It is not so much an additional particular in the

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<sup>46</sup> MacArthur, John. “The First Fellowship.” MacArthur, John F., Jr. *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You, 2014.

description as a pregnant summary of the whole. As if he had said, 'In a word, they only lived to praise God and glorify their master.'<sup>47</sup>

### **A Symphony of Adoration**

Imagine the scene with over 3000 new believers on the first day, with many more coming to Christ each day. Imagine the work of transformation going on among them ... so visible to all. How many changes were occurring in what people lived for, all of which were prompts to adore God, the transforming One. How many situations of need were being supplied (Philippians 4.19) as God-moved givers?<sup>48</sup> Can you imagine the volume of praise ascending to God?

### ***What causes praise***

The new Christians in Jerusalem properly understood the enormity of the grace of God in His forgiveness of their murder of His Son. The fact that God is the saving God is more than sufficient reason for us to continually praise Him. The public nature in which they praised God is also a factor in why they enjoyed favor with all the people, 2.47b. Forgiven people live attractive and fruitful lives. The experience of being transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into a world of spiritual life and light fueled their praise, Colossians 1.13; Ephesians 2.1-10.

If our hearts are not full of praise, then it may be because we have a lack of appreciation for what God has done in saving us. The surest way to avoid that is continually focus on the gospel. Everything about the life in the local church should aim at the goal of increasing praise.

### **Will We Continue to Praise God?**

The natural response of the converted is praise. But the challenge is, *will we continue to praise God?* What is your life presently? Is it presently active, *praising*, or is it something in your past, *praised*? The difference is determined by whether you view God as real. Are you continuing to embrace that reality? If we lose that sense of reality, then we will also lose the sensibility of rejoicing.

Keep your connection God and His church close ... and the praise will flow.

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<sup>47</sup> Alexander, Joseph Addison. *The Acts of the Apostles Explained*. Vol. 1. New York: Charles Scribner, 1857, p. 95-96.

<sup>48</sup> Rosscup, James E. *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible: Igniting the Fuel to Flame Our Communication with God*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2008, p. 1887.