

Lesson 1

What Can we Learn from the Early Church?

Introduction

Can you imagine being present in Jerusalem for some of the great religious festivals? There were three annual gatherings each year that each Jew was expected to participate in. These were the Feast of Booths, the Passover, and the Day of Pentecost. People came to the Temple to offer sacrifices, encourage each other, and hear the rabbis teaching. Jews from all over the earth came. For many who had moved far away, coming back to Jerusalem would have been like a family reunion. It would have been a happy time with rejoicing ... and reverence for God and His great blessings.

That Sunday morning probably started like any other. People were gathering around the temple for the day's activities when *suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them. Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them, 2.2-4.*

The crowds couldn't believe it. *Each one was hearing (the apostles) speak in his own language, 2.6.* People were trying to make it all make sense in their mind. How could this be? Standing in front of them were a bunch of uneducated Galileans ... *telling (us) in our own tongues the mighty works of God, 2.11.* All were *amazed and perplexed, 2.12a.* Some were trying to figure out what it all meant. Others mocked and accused the apostles of being drunk.

Peter's Sermon

Peter stood up with the other apostles and began to speak. He tells them they were not drunk as it was only around 9 am. Then he begins preaching the gospel. God promised to send the Spirit, Joel testified about it hundreds of years before. When the Spirit came, men and women would be given the opportunity to be saved. *Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved, 2.21.*

Next Peter turns their attention to the author of that salvation: Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. For three years Jesus lived among the Jewish people working signs and wonders providing proof of who He was. His coming and subsequent death were all according to the *definite plan and foreknowledge of God, 2.23.*

But the story didn't end at the cross. Beginning in 2.24 Peter asserts Jesus was alive, not dead. He had been resurrected by the Father Himself. This also was according to God's eternal plan and had been foretold hundreds of years before, 2.25-31. Then Peter recounts how *God raised this Jesus up, and of that we are all witnesses, 2.32.* All the powerful scenes they personally witnessed that day were the worked by the exalted Son who sat at the right hand of God, a place of power and authority.

Now comes the dramatic moment when Peter convicts those in the crowd of their complicity and guilt in killing Jesus. It would not be surprising at all if some of the same people standing in the crowd that day

were there fifty days earlier calling out for his crucifixion. Now it is Peter crying out, *Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified*, Acts 2.36. At this moment, it all came crashing down for so many who heard his words. Reality was sinking in. The prophecies Peter cited, which many of them would have been familiar with, made sense more than they ever had before. Tongues of fire sat upon those who were exhorting them. They knew they were experiencing the supernatural. Their hearts melted. If they remained in their condition, they would be eternally lost. *Brothers, what shall we do*, 2.37. Peter commanded them to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sin. When they did that, they would receive the gift of the Spirit, who would come to live within them in the closest possible relationship. Luke records for us that *those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls*, 2.41.

The Fellowship of the Believers

Acts 2.42-47 presents the first extensive summary in Acts. It details a summary of the activity of the church in Jerusalem in the weeks and months after Pentecost. It also shows us the ideal picture of what God intended for the life of His church where the saved rejoice in the forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Spirit. The community, in fellowship with the apostles, adhered to apostolic teaching, which was seen as authoritative because of its source in the Spirit of God. They shared the Lord's Supper together and engaged in prayer together. All of them were filled with a sense of awe that God was among them. They held all in common and sold their goods to help the needy. There was a spirit of great generosity and praise. They were together *day-by-day*, 2.46. Their numbers continued to expand, and the Christians were well received in the community.

Luke's summary of the ideal here at the end of Acts 2 is worthy of our deep consideration and time. The heart of the church centered on teaching, preaching, breaking bread, and prayer. Is such an atmosphere even possible today inside a local congregation of believers?

What holds us back from being more effective in emulating the early church?

How committed are you in created a closer relationship with fellow believers so that you will not become bored or complacent with just the Sunday morning stuff?

What can you do to help push others, keeping them more accountable in the deeper things that are of God?