

Acts: To the Ends of the Earth

Spring & Summer Sermon Series



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Evangelism in Acts Part 1

In our day and time, there is a strong emphasis on evangelism. This harkens back to the activity of the first Christians in proclaiming the gospel message to all people. Jesus commands the disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." The disciples begin to do precisely that activity.

Amazingly the Church in Acts has the most successful numbers of evangelism. We read that one hundred and twenty persons are present at the choosing of Matthias (Acts 1:15). This doesn't even include the five hundred who saw the resurrected Lord (1 Corinthians 15:6). Then after Peter's sermon three thousand people were baptized on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Soon the total number of believers were around five thousand (Acts 4:4). While any pastor would be thrilled to have these numbers in so short a time, these Christians were about to continue to proclaim Jesus Christ to many, many more as Jesus promised in Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit

has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Robert Hoerber comments about evangelism in Acts; "The theme of Acts describes two prime aspects of early evangelism: geographically, the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem throughout the eastern Mediterranean as far as Rome; theologically, the growth of the church from a group consisting primarily of Jews to a movement which included numerous Gentiles of various national backgrounds throughout the Graeco-Roman world, possibly even predominantly Gentiles." The church faced challenges both internally and externally in those two categories; which we will discuss next week.

The source of the growth of the early church and even today, is the work of the Holy Spirit, poured out at Pentecost and continually active. The Holy Spirit is particularly active in Word and Sacrament as we see in prayer and fellowship (Acts 1:14; 2:42, 46). The growth of the church is always the work of the Holy Spirit



The Beautiful Mess

By Daniel Bonnell, American Painter

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The Teaching, The Fellowship, The Breaking of Bread, & The Prayers

Acts 2:42 “And they [early Christians] devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” This verse describes the early Christians formal worship practices. The definite article used in the Greek is called a “well-known” article which means that these things [teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers] were well known to the readers even though they were not mentioned in the preceding context.

As was said earlier, these were the elements of worship for the first Christians. They gathered at the temple and home to worship Christ. In their worship the Apostles taught them everything Christ had commanded them. Paul reiterates what was taught in 1 Cor. 1:23 “We preach Christ crucified”. The Apostles’ teaching can also be summarized by the Apostles Creed.

The first Christians also had fellowship together. This fellowship first came in the form of fellowship found solely in Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. 1:9 states; “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” They were united with Him in their baptism (Romans 6:1-11). Fellowship with Jesus Christ shaped and formed the fellowship they had with other believers, whom they called their brothers and sisters. As recorded in Acts, the early Christians were so united by this fellowship found in Jesus Christ that they shared everything with their fellow believers. They supported each other in all their needs, particularly those who were poor.

A major part of the early Christian worship was the breaking of bread. The breaking of bread refers to the Lord’s Supper for several reasons. First, the use of the definite article shows that this is unique or different than just a normal meal. Secondly, the word and phrase breaking of bread is used in 1 Corinthians discussing specifically the Lord’s Supper.

While the phrase is used again in Acts 2:46, in this case the context indicates that in Acts 2:46 it serves as a double meaning: a normal meal as well as the Lord’s Supper.

The last part of their worship is the prayers. The Jews have always used memorized or recited prayers, often found in the Psalms. The early Christians, while worshipping at the temple incorporated these prayers into their worship. They also incorporated the prayer that Jesus taught them.

As we examine early Christian worship in Acts; it is amazing to see how similar their worship is to ours today. Our liturgy or order of worship, includes the Apostles teaching (preaching, creed, reading of God’s Word), the fellowship (sharing of peace, confession and absolution, baptismal service), the breaking of bread (Lord’s Supper), and the prayers (prayer of the day, communion prayer, thanksgiving prayer, Lord’s Prayer, prayer of the church). Indeed our worship is an ancient form of worship that follows the early Christians.

Study Questions:

Read Acts Chapters 3 & 4.

1. Compare Peter’s speech in Acts 3:12-26 to his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:14-39. What do they have in common? What are their differences?
2. What was the Sanhedrin’s attitude toward Peter and John?
3. What did the Sanhedrin decide to do with Peter and John? Why?
4. Barnabas first appears in the text. Describe his character. (Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-28; 11:19-30; 13:1-3; 14:21-28; 15:36-41)