

# Church 2.0

*“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.”  
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

*“Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” (Acts 28:28 ESV)*

## **A Picture Of A Good Church: Part 2**

**November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

**Acts 2:42-47**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Acts 2:42-47. As I mentioned last week this picture of the church in its innocence and infancy is intended to serve as a sort of plumbline. You use a plumbline to ensure that your first strip of wallpaper is hung up straight so that it can serve as a reference point for every subsequent strip that you line up against it. That’s what this is and that is how this depiction is intended to function. It has been recorded in Scripture so that it can be used as a guide and a standard for subsequent generations. As I have been studying this story it seems to me that Luke is foregrounding 7 distinct aspects of a healthy church. We spent our time last Sunday looking at the first 4 which leaves us 3 more to apply ourselves to today, so let’s do that. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 42:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42–47 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Alright, so as mentioned, what we have here is a picture of a good church. This is the first strip of wallpaper. This is the ground floor of the spiritual house that is being built up on Jesus Christ as Cornerstone. It is intended to serve as a guide and a reference across the ages and that is precisely how we are going to attempt to make use of it this morning. We're trying to answer the question:

### **What Does A Good Church Look Like?**

Last week we looked intently at the first two verses in this paragraph and from those we were able to say that:

#### **1. A good church has a healthy appetite for Apostolic teaching**

You can see that in verse 42a. We were able to say secondly that:

#### **2. A good church is a family, a tribe and an identity**

They were committed to “the fellowship”. They were US people not THEM people. They understood themselves as a family of families.

Thirdly, we saw that:

#### **3. A good church is devoted to the ordinances and to prayer**

We used the word “ordinances” as opposed to just “the Lord’s Supper” and prayer because of verse 41 which says that 3000 people were baptized. They were baptized and then they were committed to the breaking of bread and the prayers. So we used the word ordinance to capture the sense of the wider picture.

Then fourthly, we noticed in verse 43 that:

#### **4. A good church experiences the presence and help of the Holy Spirit**

“And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.” (Acts 2:43 ESV)

Praise the Lord!

That’s what we’ve seen so far, and that leaves us three more to work through and we begin to encounter these aspects of a healthy, vibrant church now in verses 44-47 and the first thing we see, which is the fifth thing in our list as a whole is that:

#### **5. A good church takes care of the poor, the sick and the vulnerable in their midst**

Look at verses 44-45:

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” (Acts 2:44–45 ESV)

Now, at first glance it might sound as if the early church was drifting toward communism but that was not the case. Whatever verse 44 means it apparently does not mean that everyone sold all their private property – we know that because in verse 46 – two verses later – it says that they were meeting in one another’s homes. The Greek verbs are in the imperfect in verse 45, which indicates that these were irregular, occasional activities, meaning that AS A NEED AROSE, people WERE their assets in order to meet that need. So this is not communism – this is Spirit motivated, free will, remarkable GENEROSITY. The church did what it did because people gave what they gave.

It might be helpful for us to just pause for a moment to explain how the church functions. A few months ago I had a couple of young people come to me asking how our church was funded. We

probably wouldn't have got that question 3 years ago, but now with passing the plate a thing of the past, we probably have to explain this every once in a while. These young folks had assumed that the government was giving us money and that we were simply putting it to use in the community. And to be fair, it isn't as though their question comes completely out of left field. That IS actually, how the church functions in Germany for example. In Germany you indicate on your tax form whether you are Protestant or Roman Catholic – or other – and a portion of your tax money is delegated according to that information and churches receive that money to use in the community, as long as they can demonstrate that they are using it according to the purpose for which it was given.

So that is how it is done in certain places - but that is not how it is done here.

There is no established church in Canada – just as there is no established church in the United States. Here WE PUT THE MONEY into the bucket. The government doesn't give it to us – despite the fact that you will often see someone on Twitter who is offended by something the church is doing saying: “I can't believe we are giving our tax dollars to these people!” Well, the good news, friend, is that you are not. Charities in Canada qualify for certain tax relief – but that has to do with how much money we put in the government's bucket, not how much money they are put in ours. The money that we spend here as a church in the community, in Newfoundland, in South Africa - is the money that WE put in the bucket.

And there is no RULE about how much – if any – you've got to put in the bucket. And that is one of things I love about the church. That is part of what is just and fair and beautiful about the church. You can come here and you don't have to give anything. You can just be here. And we will love you and care for you and support you. When you get sick, we'll bring you a lasagna and shovel your driveway and take you to your appointments. We'll provide programs for your kids, give them mentors, teach them music, teach them the Bible. We'll support you and care for your family even if you can't give anything.

That's how the church works.

But even still, some people will say: “Oh the church is just out to get your money!”

Listen, friend, if we are just out to get your money, we’re doing the worst job ever. The movie theatre – they are just out to get your money! That’s why they are charging you \$12 for a box of popcorn and \$8 for a coke – each of which probably cost them 50 cents. They’re doing that because they are just out to get your money. But can you imagine a movie theatre where they said: “Listen, you pay whatever you like. And if you don’t have any money, that’s not a problem. We want you to come in and enjoy the movie. We want you to have as much popcorn as you like and as much pop as you like and we want you to invite all your friends and family – and they can come in for free too. And if anyone feels like contributing they can, but they don’t have to.”

Can you imagine a movie theatre like that? They’d go bankrupt in a week, but the church of Jesus Christ operates like that and it has done for nearly 2000 years! And you know why we haven’t gone bankrupt? You know why we are still doing what we do? Because of the Holy Spirit of God! The Holy Spirit motivates people to give.

John Stott says beautifully here:

“Already in the Old Testament there was a strong tradition of care for the poor, and the Israelites were to give a tenth of their produce to ‘the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow’.<sup>64</sup> How can Spirit-filled believers possibly give less?”<sup>1</sup>

In a Holy Spirit church, we don’t use LAW to motivate people. There is no RULE about giving here. We don’t use law. Rather we wait for LOVE to well up inside a person’s heart. As they become more aware of what God has done for their salvation – when they begin to understand that God so loved the world that HE GAVE his only begotten Son, then a desire to GIVE BACK is going to well up inside their heart. When they experience the love of the people of God they

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<sup>1</sup>John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today. Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 84.

are going to want to LOVE BACK and so when they are made aware of NEEDS then they are going to be motivated to meet those needs.

And they do.

That's why we're still here, operating with the worst business model in the history of the universe. Because the Holy Spirit motivates saved people to give. They don't need their arms twisted. They don't need rules about giving. They don't need laws because they love. They love the God who saved them, they love their brothers and sisters in Christ and they love the lost, so they GIVE.

Now, the text says explicitly that they were giving first and foremost to take care of the poor and the needy in their midst. This detail rubs some of us modern day Christians the wrong way. We'd like this verse better if it said that they gave generously in order to meet needs in the community. But that's not what it says. Now that isn't to say that the church DIDN'T meet needs in the community – of course they did. But they understood that their primary responsibility was toward their own family – their FAITH FAMILY, so giving in the community was a sort of “overflow”.

Even their critics seemed to understand that. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, a Roman Emperor by the name of Julian the Apostate was worried that the pagan religion was losing ground to the Christians so he urged the pagan priests to imitate the generosity and benevolence of the church. He wrote to them complaining that:

“the impious Galileans (Christians), **in addition to their own, support ours**, and it is shameful that our poor should be wanting our aid.”<sup>2</sup>

That was the Christian way. We take care of our own – and we overflow into the community. And we do it all – not with the government's money – but with our own; and not because we HAVE TO – but because we WANT TO. We want to give back and we want to SHINE FORTH. A good

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<sup>2</sup> Julian the Apostate to the High Priest of Galatia as cited in Rodney Stark, *The Triumph Of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 118.

church is characterized by remarkable, need meeting, Spirit motivated generosity – thanks be to God!

The second, or sixth thing we can say here is that:

## **6. A good church is a place to do life on a 7 day a week basis**

I didn't have this point in my original outline – but upon further reflection, I don't see how I can leave it out. Look at verse 46 and the first part of 47. Luke says:

“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,<sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people.” (Acts 2:46–47 ESV)

Now, as we said last Sunday when talking about “the prayers”, it is important for us to understand how this picture intends to function within the on-going life of the church. It is giving us GENERAL PRINCIPLES that will need to be applied differently in other places and subsequent generations. The early church in Jerusalem used the temple for many of their large group functions – well obviously we can't do that anymore, because the temple was destroyed in AD 70 – and they couldn't do that even back then in Antioch or Rome – but the principle remains in effect.

What we see in this picture is that the early church was meeting together as a LARGE GROUP on a day-by-day basis – and then also they were meeting in smaller groups, in homes, on a regular basis as well for food, fellowship, prayer and praise.

Church was not a “once a week for 90 minutes” sort of thing in the first generation. As the Tyndale New Testament Commentary puts it:

“The religious devotion of the early Christians was a daily affair.”<sup>3</sup>

I think that is important for us to see. You know, legalism in general is bad, but IGNORANT legalism is the worst thing ever – and there has been a lot of IGNORANT LEGALISM around the “Sunday” dynamic in the evangelical church.

Let me make something absolutely clear: SUNDAY is NOT the Jewish Sabbath simply moved forward ONE DAY in the weekly calendar. The early church seems to have understood that the ceremonial aspects of the Jewish Sabbath were fulfilled in Christ. That’s why Paul says to the Colossians:

“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Colossians 2:16–17 ESV)

My goodness, that is breathtakingly clear, isn’t it? The ceremonial law pointed forward to Jesus. We talked about that in the Leviticus series. Its function expired the moment John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and said:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 ESV)

Now, there are on-going principles associated with the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment that carry on – but the ceremonial aspects have been fulfilled. So we don’t have to be Pharisees in terms of what work we do on the Lord’s Day and neither should we treat Sunday as THE ONE SPECIAL DAY for Christian gathering and worship. That’s not how it was in the early church! They carried on the principle of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment but dispensed with the ceremonial forms – so they would meet early on Sundays to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus – and then go to work because Sunday was not a common pause day in Israel – and nor was it in Rome in those days – so church in the morning and then off to work, and then they would gather in the temple courts for large group services in the afternoon, which was a sort of common siesta in that part of the world, and

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<sup>3</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/ Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 90.



then they would meet later to share a meal and some table devotion in private homes – CHURCH was an ALL DAY, 7 day a week affair!

And that’s why I think we need to push back on ignorant legalism. The devil would love for you to think that there is a LAW that you need to go to church for 90 minutes a week on Sunday and then hide inside your house watching football for the rest of the day so that no one can accuse you of cutting your grass or raking your leaves on the SABBATH. That sort of ignorance would suit him just fine – because that is not what the Bible is asking for anyway. The Bible here in this depiction of the early church is commending a day-by-day approach to religious devotion – to borrow the wording of the Tyndale New Testament Commentary cited above. This picture doesn’t say anything about cutting your grass – what it says is that the early church was gathering often. In large groups and in smaller groups.

Can you say amen to that?

This picture leaves room for a whole bunch of different approaches to worship and gathering, as long as we attend to the principles. That’s how John Calvin understood it. He said:

“we do not by any means observe days, as though there were any sacredness in holidays, or as though it were not lawful to labor upon them, but that respect is paid to government and order — not to days.”<sup>4</sup>

By “government” there he means church government not state government; so Calvin is saying, we don’t view any day as HOLY OR SACRED in that sense – and we’re not out there checking to see who is cutting their grass or raking their leaves – because all of that has to do with the ceremonial aspect of the law which was fulfilled in Christ. Rather, we are just appointing certain meeting times and keeping them together for the sake of ORDER, STRUCTURE and DECORUM.

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<sup>4</sup>John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 91088.

And that's what they did in Geneva, where he was pastoring in the Reformation. They met on Sundays but then also multiple times during the week, not because they HAD TO, but because they wanted to. Calvin preached on the New Testament at the Sunday gatherings and on the Old Testament at the weekday gatherings. Is that commanded in the Bible? No. It was just what they decided to do in the spirit of this passage, and others like it. The early church got together OFTEN. Their religious life was not a "90 minutes a week" kind of thing. It didn't have ANYTHING TO DO with when you could cut your grass or rake your leaves. It was about DOING LIFE TOGETHER, in the word, around the table, in prayer – 7 days a week.

Good churches get that.

And then lastly, we see here as well that:

## **7. A good church grows as the Lord calls, converts and connects people to their fellowship**

We see that in verse 47:

“And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”  
(Acts 2:47 ESV)

That's why CHURCH HEALTH is way more important to talk about than CHURCH GROWTH – because this verse seems to say that the LORD delights to ADD PEOPLE to a church that is committed to everything that this church was committed to. The Lord wants to ADD PEOPLE to a church that is HUNGRY FOR THE APOSTOLIC GOSPEL. The Lord wants to ADD PEOPLE to a church that is a family, a tribe and a fellowship. The Lord wants to ADD PEOPLE to a church that is devoted to the ordinances and to prayer. The Lord wants to ADD PEOPLE to a church that is open to the presence and help of the Holy Spirit. The Lord wants to ADD PEOPLE to a church that takes care for the poor, the sick and the vulnerable in their midst. The Lord wants to ADD PEOPLE to a church that is doing LIFE TOGETHER – day by day, in large groups, in

small groups, in the building, in their homes, around the table, in the word, with each other, in praise and prayer.

Present him with a congregation like that and he will take care of your church growth strategy – can you say amen to that?

Church growth strategy is a waste of time – and it is reflective of poor theology. No pastor, no elder, and certainly no consultant can make the church grow. The Apostle Paul knew that. He said to the Corinthians:

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:6 ESV)

The Reformers understood that as well. Reflecting on the explosive growth of the Protestant churches in Germany, Martin Luther said:

“I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing: the Word did it all.”<sup>5</sup>

Now I'm not suggesting that drinking German Beer is going to grow our church – please don't let that be your takeaway this morning – the takeaway is that all we have to do – all we CAN do, by the grace the God supplies, is BECOME THIS KIND OF CHURCH: A hungry for the Word church. A committed to the fellowship church. An ordinance and prayer church. A moving in the Spirit church. A caring for the poor church. A day by day together church – if we become THAT CHURCH – then God will give the growth.

He will do it.

The Word and the Spirit will do it.

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<sup>5</sup> Luther's Works. See quoted at [https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/the\\_word\\_did\\_everything](https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/the_word_did_everything)

He will add day by day those who are being saved.

Can you say amen to that? Amen!

Amen, that's your takeaway – now how are we doing with that?

Like last week, I want to end with a little bit of self-reflection. According to the Apostle Peter the church is a spiritual house made up of living stones – that's in 1 Peter 2:4 - so how does YOUR LIFE and YOUR attitude toward church line up with this foundational pattern? That's what I'm asking.

How is your attitude toward giving? This isn't me twisting your arm, this is me checking your heart. I don't know who gives what in this church – I'm not allowed to know. So there is no RULE and there is no MECHANISM for policing. There is just you, the Bible and the Holy Spirit. Only you know your circumstances. Maybe you're like the widow in the Widow's Mite story. She put in \$2 but Jesus – who knew her heart and her circumstances said that she put in more than all the rest. She gave gladly and in faith and that's what matters to him. The Bible says:

“God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7 ESV)

How you doing with that?

And how are you doing with day-by-day faith? Are you one of those “90 minute a week” people? The funny thing is, THAT WOULD be GOOD for most evangelicals in North America now. That would be above average. Weekly church attendance has taken a beating over the last 10 years or so – and it got a lot worse over the course of COVID. When I was growing up, evangelicals went to church 4 Sundays out of 4 – and probably 49 out of 52. Now apparently, 2 plus times a month is considered the new average – or about 27-30 times a year.

That's a long way from what we are seeing in this picture.

So how you doing with that?

Listen – everybody gets sick and everybody goes on vacation, lots of people travel for work, so again, this isn't about legalism, this is about heart check. Do you want to be here? Are you hungry for times of teaching? For times of prayer? For times of fellowship? Do you want to be here on Sunday and also midweek? Is this a “90 minutes a week” thing for you or a day-by-day approach to life? That's what I'm asking. I want you to think about that and invite the Holy Spirit to bring correction and redirection as required.

And then, how are you doing with the Great Commission? Because you have a role to play. Paul didn't say: “I did nothing. Apollos did nothing. But God gave the growth.” No, he said:

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:6 ESV)

So how are you doing there? Have you planted any seeds this week? Have you watered any? That's what I'm asking. I want to challenge you to have a Jesus conversation with someone this week – that's planting a seed. And I want to challenge you to encourage a new or a young believer in their faith - that's watering the seed. If you do that – then through you – THROUGH US – God will give the growth.

And we will be careful to give him all the glory, all the honour and all the praise in this place – thanks be to God! Let's pray together.