

Acts 2:42 - Devoted

Last week we looked at **Luke 8:4-21** - the Parable of the 4 soils - and talked about where we are as individuals before the Lord. Are we truly followers of Christ, do we not just hear his word, but do we do his Word? Some hear the word, but it means nothing. Some hear and follow for a little while then die. Some follow for years and decades but get choked out by cares, riches and pleasures. But those who are true believers slowly and patiently bear fruit. They grow and mature and follow the Lord Jesus.

This morning, I want to really take the next logical step and address: where do we go from here? Assuming you are a believer and do want to follow the Lord, what's next?

I think Acts is a great place to look because this is really the birth of the local church. This is a church at the very beginning stages of life. And since we're in something of the same boat, I think it will be good for us to consider what it was the very first believers, under the direction of the apostles, did as a church. What were they committed to, what occupied their time, what was their focus.

It is from this first gathering of believers that numbered a little more than 3,000 that has, thought the ages, grown to over a billion people. Should the Lord not return for another 2,000 years what kind of legacy do we as Redeemer Bible Church want to say we had on eternity? And how do we have a legacy? How do we have an impact? I think - just like the church in Jerusalem - it starts with a proper focus from day one. They are gathering and growing as a new church, worshipping and there is awe and amazement.

What we'll see is not an exhaustive list of all the things they did, nor is it an exhaustive list of everything that we should do in the local church. But I think it is a good start. And I want to be very practical this morning. As we look through this passage I want to take the elements and show not only how they work themselves out in a theoretical sense, but how we want them to work out here at Redeemer Bible Church. What do we understand these things to mean *practically*?

Context

Most of you know the context here. This is the day of Pentecost, approximately 50 days after Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead. He has already ascended into heaven where he has sat down at the right hand of God and where he reigns even to this day.

Pentecost was a Jewish feast that celebrated the first fruits of the spring harvest. The first fruits was the first bit of crop that was to be dedicated to the Lord. And Jews from all over the world travelled to Jerusalem to join the feast and celebrate the Lord's provision. It's here that God the Holy Spirit came and miraculously dwelled within the followers of Jesus. If you recall from earlier in the chapter, when the Holy Spirit came into the believers they all began

speaking in tongues; speaking in languages so that all these foreigners who were visiting Jerusalem could understand the apostles in their native language. Something miraculous and amazing was happening and people didn't know why.

So Peter gets up and preaches to the Jewish crowd. He explains to them in a sermon that the OT Scriptures are coming to fulfillment. All these Scriptures that anticipated a Messiah - a Christ - to come and deliver God's people and to pour out God's Holy Spirit have all been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. And although Jesus was rejected by the local Jews and put to death by godless men, God raised him from the dead. The grave could not contain the Lord Jesus. He then ascended into heaven and one day he'll come back to judge all humanity. This Jesus is Lord, he is Messiah, he is God. And all of these people - whether they were there or not - are guilty of killing him. And he is coming back to put everything to right. To put it mildly, they are in a heap of trouble.

What's their response? They believe! They believe Peter's sermon, they believe in Jesus. So they say: "What do we do now?" **Read 41**

This is day 1 of the Church. Verses 42 through the end of the chapter is a summary of where they go from there. This morning we're going to just look at **Vs. 42** and see what the first church devoted itself to and the result of that devotion. **Read 42**

So there are 4 things here that the earliest believers devoted themselves to. Four things that were the glue, as it were, that held the church together: teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer.

We'll get to these one by one in just a moment but first I think it's good to take note of the word "devoted." Not only is this a very strong word, but in the original it's used in a very strong way. Devote in Greek is a word that means to attach oneself to, to persist, be busily engaged with. This is the thing that took up a ton of their time and effort and energy.

There are a lot of things that can take up our time and energy in life. Chores around the house, extracurricular activities, hobbies, television shows - I've been devoted to television shows in the past. These are things we make strong commitments to.

Luke - the writer of Acts - says that the earliest Christians devoted themselves to teaching, prayer, fellowship and breaking bread. That's what they busied themselves with. That's what they were faithful to and persevered in.

And not only is the word strong, but how he uses it it strong. If you're a grammar junkie like I am, it's a participle. It's an "ing" word - they were continually **devoting** themselves to these things. It's as though they were re-upping their devotion over and over again. They were

continually intensifying it. Again, this was the glue that held the earliest communities together.

We live in a society where church is often viewed as a commodity: what's there for me, what ministries meet my needs, does the music match my style or my comfort, are the kids' programs good enough? We so often want maximum return on minimum investment. We want the awe and wonder that **Vs. 46** talks about, but we don't want the devotion that **Vs. 45** talks about. The reason that the early church had the impact that it did and had the awe that it did was because there was devotion in these 4 areas.

First, was to the apostles' teaching. Now, someone might say, "Well, we don't have apostles so we can't really devote ourselves to their teaching." But the emphasis here is not primarily on the apostles so much as it is the content of what they taught. We could just as easily translate it "the teaching of the apostles." That's the issue: the content of their teaching. The apostles were devoted to the Word of God.

Actually an interesting study in Acts is the phrase "the Word of God." The Word of God almost takes on a life of its own.

Acts 6:7: The Word of God continued to increase. What does that mean? It's not that the Bible got bigger; it's that more people were submitting to the Word of God that was taught by the apostles.

Acts 8:4: Persecution comes and believers are spread and it says they went about preaching the word.

Acts 12:24: The word of God increased and multiplied - again, Luke's talking about people coming to faith.

People gather to hear the Word of the Lord, they glorify the Word of the Lord, they rejoice at the word of the Lord, they bear witness to the word of the Lord, they strengthen each other with the word of the Lord.

The apostles are important, but what's supremely important is the content of what they are teaching.

Turn to 2 Tim. 2:1-2 for just a minute. This is critical because what I want to show you is that if we are teaching what the apostles taught, then we are devoted to the apostles' teaching.
Read

Notice Paul didn't say lay hands on someone and make them an apostle. Or only listen to the apostles. What's he say? What I taught you, you teach to others so they can teach it to others.

It's Paul's *message* that is important. It's the content of what he taught that matters, not that he specifically taught it. And the content needs to be passed to faithful men so that they will carefully and accurately pass it on to others down the line.

So when someone is teaching the Word of God, if they are doing so accurately, they are actually engaged in the apostles' teaching. The teaching, the doctrine, of the apostles. So if someone is faithfully teaching the Word of God in the same way the apostles would do it, they are devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching.

What does that look like at Redeemer Bible Church? Well, of course there is Sunday morning Bible Study, there's the corporate church service. And as time goes on and we have qualified faithful teachers, we would like to have small groups and Bible studies and so on. We want to always encourage the teaching of and devotion to the Word of God.

Side: About book studies. I love book studies, I know there are some of you doing them. I've done many of them, I'm doing one right now that is excellent. But I just want to encourage you to make sure that you're also studying the pure milk of the Word of God. That you are devouring big healthy T-Bone steaks of pure Scripture. Books are good and will change your life, just don't forget *the* Book.

2nd: They devoted themselves to κοινωνία - to fellowship. **Read 42**

What does that mean? Is that just potluck, is hanging out? Fellowship is so vague that it's often hard to define. Definition: Close, Christ-based friendships. Some people will say Christian community and that's okay but it's a little vague. But the idea is real, authentic relationships where Christ is at the center. Yes, there's vulnerability and openness and awkwardness and love and unity and grace - those are aspects. But the real issue is that it revolves around Jesus.

So this isn't just being real with people you automatically click with and get along with. This isn't even just even hanging out with friends who happen to be Christian. This is developing, cultivating, striving to make close friendships where Jesus is the common and constant theme of your friendship.

Can you have fellowship at a potluck? Sure. But that can't be the be-all end-all of your fellowship. And let's just be honest, this is tough. Making time for people is tough. Investing in people is tough. Being rejected or not clicking or miscommunications are all difficult. I'll be honest, when we read this section I think we can put our rose-colored glasses on and think the early church was almost heaven on earth. What's our problem?

But I promise you these people were sinners and I promise you there were difficulties. How do I know? Because in **Chap. 5** you've got God killing some of the people who were lying to

the congregation, to the apostles and to God. And in **Chap. 6** you've some of the widows who are feeling so neglected by the congregation that they have to call in all the apostles and set up 7 guys to oversee food distribution.

That's friction. It's always been in the church. You read any NT letter and the church is messed up. They've all got issues. But what do they do? They continually devote themselves to each others lives to have close, Christ-based friendships.

Can I tell you something? That's the only way you're going to thrive in any church. To be devoted to creating close, Christ-based friendships.

"Well no one reaches out to me." Well, if we all - every single one of us - *devoted* ourselves to reaching out to others we'd have eventually have it all covered, wouldn't we. Introverts, you don't get a pass here. New folks, you don't get a pass here. This is everyone devoted to fellowship.

"There's no small groups, I can't devote myself." Does it say devoted to small groups? No. It says devoted themselves to fellowship. If starting a small group helps you achieve this, great. Start a Bible study. But the reality is that we can devote ourselves to each other without programs and groups and scheduled things. In fact, what I think we need to be careful of is devoting ourselves so much to the idea of some sort of program rather than being devoted to actual people. I've known people who were devoted to the idea of a small group more than they were devoted to the actual people in a small group.

Our true devotion needs to be to the difficult task of developing close, Christ-centered friendships.

3rd: They devote themselves to the breaking of bread. **Read 41**

What is the breaking of bread? The short answer is that it refers both to the Lord's Supper and meals that the early church ate together. And it's noteworthy that Luke actually mentions this twice in the span of a few verses. **Read 46**

I think it's safe to say that if Luke says they continually devoted themselves to this - and then he repeats it - that this is an absolutely critical aspect of life in the church.

Let's talk about the Lord's Supper first. Why is the Lord's Supper critical? Because it is a constant reminder of what the Lord has done for us on the cross. See a lot of times we come to church, we get in our singing, get in some prayers, get in some coffee, get in a sermon, and go home and we fail to stop and remember why we're doing all of this in the first place.

We fail to remember the bloody and brutal sacrifice of our Savior for sins - for **our** sins. That the sins that we've committed throughout the week are the very reason he was beaten, spit on, scourged, and nailed to piece of rough, blood-soaked lumber. Our sins are the reason he was in pain, he was exposed, and ultimately suffocated to death at the hands of vile sinners. Everything he got on that Friday 2,000 years ago we deserve an eternity of. His body was broken for us. When we eat the bread, that's exactly what we are remembering.

As you taste the cracker and it breaks in your mouth and you crush it with your teeth into and grind it to bits, what you need to remember that Jesus' body was broken in that exact same way for you. And you need to remember that all the - all of the wrath - you deserve and I deserve was placed on his body. I'm not trying to make this more spiritual than it is, but in a way you are tasting substitutionary atonement. That Jesus was crush and died on the cross in your place for your sins.

And when you take the wine - that is bitter and yet sweet - you are reminded of the promise of God: that trusting in Christ alone - not your good deeds, not your families' devotion to Jesus, not your Bible knowledge - but Christ alone to pay for your sins and give you his righteousness, that he clears your guilt forever. Your sins are absolutely and eternally forgiven and gone.

We need that reminder, don't we? We need that reminder often. Luke says they devoted themselves continually to this. It is our conviction here at Redeemer that this devotion was at least weekly. And probably more often. **Vs. 46** seems indicates they did this every time there was a gathering. **Read** And because they recognized that it was worth devoting themselves to, we want to devote ourselves to it weekly as well.

I want to be careful here because every church has to decide how often they do this. But if we only prayed once a month or once a quarter or once a year do you think people would say: "Wow, you're really devoted to prayer!" If we only preached once a month or once a quarter or once a year do you think people would say, "Wow, you're really devoted to the apostle's teaching!" No. And neither does it make sense to say we are devoted to the Lord's Supper to only take it once a month, or even less.

So we are going pattern ourselves after the apostles and the early church and believers for most of church history in intentionally reminding ourselves of the Lord's sacrifice every single week. Starting next week when we have full services, we will begin observing this critical element of worship every week.

Now, I said there's a second aspect of this. And that is that the Lord's Supper was often accompanied by a meal. The book of Jude talks about love feasts. Other sources talk about how believers were always sharing meals together. Now, just so you know we're not going to devote ourselves to potlucks in the same way we devote ourselves to the Lord's Supper

because I don't think the connection is quite that strong. But what I do want to say is that breaking bread - having meals - was a connected and important aspect in the church.

Why is that? Because there's just something intimate about having a meal with other people. It's inviting them into one of the most personal aspects of your family life and your home. And **Vs. 46** says it was in the homes. The early church was continually in each others' homes eating together. That's where people talk and open up and share and learn and grow.

And again, I don't think we need to have a program for this but I think we need to consider how we can fellowship over meals in homes. Not everyone is comfortable with people in their home. I get that.

Maybe your home is messy or not what you think would be comfortable. I have to tell you, it is amazing the wake of clutter and destruction 2 little babies can make. We usually get our home cleaned by about 11pm just in time to go to bed. So if you come over to our house, you'll see toys, and dirt, and dirty dishes, and clothes and diapers. That's just what kids do. But if you come over around dinner time I'm going to invite you for dinner. One person: "If you want to see me, stop by any time, if you want to see my house make an appointment."

Maybe you don't have kids, but it's something else. Let me just encourage you that if people are judging the cleanliness of your house these are the ones who need discipleship the most!

Whatever the case, having meals with people can be one of the most spiritual things you can do. In a very real way it creates a sense of family and community that not many other activities do. And just like the early church, I think we should be devoted to it.

4th: We are to be devoted to prayers. **Read 41**

I think we all know this - and it probably causes a fair amount of guilt because we aren't as devoted to prayer as we should be. And I have to say that I need to be more committed to prayer than I am. But this is something that is continually talked about in the NT.

In fact, what's interesting is that this word for "devoted" in the Greek is used often with prayer.

Rom. 12:12: Be constant - devoted - in prayer.

Col. 4:2: Continue steadfastly - devotedly - in prayer.

Acts 6:4: The apostles appoint 7 men to serve food so they can devote themselves to the Word of God and what? Prayer.

If a church is to survive it has to be a praying church because it is through prayer that we truly rely on the strength of God and not our own clever inventions. We need to continually come to God understanding that without his work we are not building his Kingdom, we're building our own Kingdom.

By the way, if you are interested in devoting yourself to prayer you can do this all on your own, of course. But we do have a small group of folks who are considering starting a prayer group. The idea would be to commit yourself to meeting together to pray for the spiritual needs of the church once a week for 6 months. If that's something you're interested in, let me know.

Can I make one other comment here? None of this is magical or amazing. If you read on you'll see that there were miracles that were amazing and brought awe on the people. But that wasn't a lasting aspect of the church. What lasted was devotion to these 4 things. And the legacy to such devotion is you and I and all of us sitting in this room right here.

Often meeting together as a church is very mundane, very ordinary, very simplistic. That's how it's meant to be. But it is through dedication to ordinary, average means, that God does extraordinary work - gospel work - that lasts for all eternity.

Pray