

The Mission -10 – Walking in The presence of God

Acts 2:40-47

And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” **41** So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

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

Introduction

Over the last 12 weeks we have been looking at the start and rise of the early church.

We engaged in this study with a specific reason and a deliberate aim.

The reason is that I am concerned at the state, not of the church, but of Christians.

The church in general is nothing more than a reflection of the church individually – namely you and I.

To say that we desire a change in the church is to say that we desire a change in us Christians.

Some people look at the church and say she is not the church of the book of acts, where is the power, where are the miracles, where is the integrity, the influence, the close relationship with God

In reality what they are saying is that Christians are no longer what they ought to be and in fact the truth of it is, that Christians are not what the world needs us to be.

That's right.

The world needs the church, the world without the church is a broken, desperate and dirty place.

The way we see change in the world is not through greater education, not through greater science, not through greater political programs.

We have all those.

We are surrounded by those and the world is in a more desperate and dire place than ever before in modern history

What the world needs is the emergence of the church triumphant.

So in order for the church to become all that she is called to be, means that you and I, the church of Jesus Christ needs to become all that we are meant to be.

So we came with the **deliberate aim** of looking at the book of acts, of looking at the first hand record of these people that make up the early church at their character, their nature and their passion in order to obtain a fresh view and fresh insight into what the church should be and what we should be trying to build in these days

Recap

Acts 2:42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

We note 4 things about these early Christians.

They:

- a. Devoted themselves
- b. To the Apostles teaching
- c. And to the fellowship and
- d. The breaking of bread and prayers

In other words they were:

- a. Passionate
- b. Teachable
- c. Accountable
- d. Spiritual

Last time we were together we started looking at the nature of authentic spirituality, what it is and what it is not.

We looked at how

Authentic Spirituality embraces and encourages personal discipline

Authentic Spirituality promotes balanced and open discipleship

Discipleship is derived from the word discipline

Discipline means:

Conscious control over lifestyle or activity

The functions of any good church is to bring direction, correction and protection to its members

Pastoring is not a popularity contest – although many of the modern depictions of it would have you believe it is such.

Pastoring is a commitment to help people achieve what they could not achieve by themselves. Pastoring is leadership and it involves the development of leaders.

Authentic Spirituality is a passion for the things of God

Authentic Spirituality confronts and deals with the Spiritual Strongholds in peoples lives

Finally we looked at how Authentic Spirituality is a daily walk

It is doing a daily thing with Jesus

A daily thing for Jesus

The word Authentic means:

genuine, real, valid, bona fide, not copied

Your walk with Christ is something you must engage in on a daily basis

You must pray

You must read you bible

You must share your faith

These are individual expression of a personal conviction, not the corporate trappings of a state run faith

All of these things are things that make up our daily walk with God

Now this brings us to what I would like to spend our time on this morning

Authentic Spirituality produces fruit

You tell the nature and quality of any tree, any vine by the fruit that it bears

These early Christians were known by the fruit that they bore

We see here clearly that there are four things that flowed out of the life of the early Christians

- They communed with Jesus daily
- They daily prayed
- They were generous in every area of their lives
- And they saw supernatural signs and wonders.

The breaking of bread

The breaking of bread was not something the early church decided to do, it was something that Jesus told them to do.

The Lord's Supper, communion was not an idea of the Apostles, but a practice of the early Christians.

Why would Jesus command something like this?

A couple of reasons

The first thing is that Communion is a great visual preserver of doctrinal truth.

You cannot take communion without thinking about the incarnation of Christ.

You cannot take communion without thinking about the supernatural aspect of His birth, His life, His death, and His resurrection.

You cannot take communion without thinking of the cross and the price paid for mankind.

Down through history people have tried to pervert doctrine and truth, yet this one common held practice reminds us all of the supernatural nature of our Christ.

No matter how weird and funky, or self-centered and carnal the preacher or the preaching may be, this one simple act of remembrance brings everything back into reality.

'Do this in remembrance of me.' Is what Jesus said.

You cannot do this without remembering Christ.

That is why I love our communion services so much

It comes down to a simple time of remembering Jesus Christ and all he has done for me

That is what it means to break bread and that is why we were instructed by Christ to do

The second thing is that communion is a reflective experience

Communion is a time when you hold in your hands the very physical representations of the Lord Jesus Christ

It is not something you do on stage

It is not something that is a public spectacle

It is not something that is dependant upon a sound system or a preacher

It is something that happens between you and your Christ

1 Corinthians 11:27-29 ESV

(27) Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

(28) Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

(29) For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

When you stand before Christ holding in your hands the representation of a broken body and spilt blood, Paul is saying...*Do not under any circumstances participate in this if you have not confessed your sin before Christ.*

Before you come to him, you must be right with him.

Examine yourself – he charges the Church at Corinth.

Now think of this in light of who the church at Corinth were:

Corinth sat on the isthmus connecting the Greek mainland with the Peloponnesian peninsula. It was a place where many cultures and religions mingled. Since it was a Roman colony, Roman law and customs were important, particularly among the upper classes, but “many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’” found a home in Corinth

The worship of these gods was fully integrated into every aspects of everyday life in general.

Paul settled in Ephesus for three years but receives an oral report about some serious problems that are plaguing this young church. There is dissention, social snobbery, sexual immorality, theological confusion, confusion about marriage and divorce; pagan rituals have been incorporated into the worship services

Paul says.... before you take communion, you must examine yourself.

You must look deep into your soul

(27) Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

Don't eat in a manner unworthy of someone who says they have experienced the grace and peace that only salvation can bring.

Don't dishonor the sacrificial and atoning work of Jesus Christ
Are you clean? Are you engaged in things that you ought not be?

Communion is a time when you stand and examine your own life and own conduct and you ask yourself am I living worthy of the name Christian?

Am I living in a manner that gives God Glory?
Is the grace of God a reason for how I am living or an excuse?

The third thing is that Communion is a time of personal reflection and assessment

Communion is a time of personal reflection and intimacy between you and the Lord

Intimacy.

Into – me – see

It is a time where you take stock of yourself and your life.

You sit down and do a personal inventory.

Here are some questions I often reflect on

- Am I living for Christ or am I living for the approval of men?
- Is Jesus getting the best and first of me every day?
- How is my bible study? Is it fresh daily or am I going through the rote?
- Am I praying? Am I talking to the Lord? Daily, often?
- Am I worshipping? Am I coming to Him with an attitude of praise or to do I come begrudging what I do not have?
- Am I living in fear of anyone?
- Am I envious?
- Am I proud?
- Am I walking in false humility?
- Am I spending too much time with people and not enough time with God?
- Is entertainment taking too much of my personal resources?
- Am I reading?
- Am I learning or have I stagnated in my walk with the Lord?

Now I don't go through a checklist and rate myself

But these are the sorts of questions I may ask myself during a time of reflection

Communion is a daily thing

I do communion with coffee and my bible and I do it normally in the mornings, sometimes at night, but I do aim to do it every 24 hour period.

Do I miss some – yes

Are some times of communion with Christ better than others? Yes

But it is something that makes up the fabric of my life

I long for my times of communion.

It is something that I do not only guard and watch over, but so does my wife.

Beccy will sometimes come to me and ask me, have I had my time with the Lord.

She will sense that I am agitated and carrying a burden and she will encourage me to go and communion with my savior

Your wife, your husband, is not called to be a competition to the things of God, but the completion of the things of God in your life.

The best thing I can do for Beccy is that when I rise early to head out to the shed, I make her a cup of tea and turn the light on for her.

I some times sit her bible on the bed for her, or the devotional book she is reading.

I am not nagging her, I just know that in the morning I wake up with a bounce and run at my day, she likes to wake up and ease into her day

Two things that I find essential for my time of personal communion, three if you count coffee, My bible-reading plan and my journal

My Bible reading plan and my journal

I like a plan for my bible reading because it systematically takes me through the bible in a year.

I think every Christian should read through the bible in a 12-month period

A bible-reading plan keeps you on track and gives you a goal.

Sometimes you get it all done
Sometimes you don't

Don't let guilt weigh you down because you miss a day

But use it as the guide to get you back on track

My Journal

SOAP

Scripture
Observation
Application
Prayer

Now we come to the area of Daily Prayer

Pray produces intimacy

You become intimate with whom you pray
For whom you pray
To whom you pray

Let me start with a general observation.

This verse is in a very specific order.

Acts 2:42

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching
and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the
prayers.*

It doesn't read...

'They continued steadfastly in prayer, in the breaking of bread
and then fellowship and the Apostles doctrine.'

First comes the Apostles teaching, and then comes everything else.

The teaching must be first.

The teaching determines the nature of the fellowship.

The fellowship that flows out of the teaching determines the nature of the corporate celebration of Christ. The church culture determines the individual spirituality.

When they come together to break bread, they did not try and work up their emotions. It was an everyday act of remembrance. They were in one accord.

If you don't have the same doctrine,
If we cannot fellowship together,
If we cannot come around communion with the same set of beliefs in Christ,
We cannot possibly pray together,
That's why it is so important that we understand what the Word says,
That's why we need to be personal students of the world.

People, who on a personal level develop a discipline to read, study and understand God's Word

One of the most dynamic things we do as a church is our weekly 5:15 prayer time before church Sunday evenings.

I love them.

I would hold Sunday church just to have the Sunday night prayer meetings

The pray meetings are so powerful, not because of the nature of prayer, but because of the nature of the foundations that the prayer is built on.

We all get together in one accord.
All believing for the same thing
All viewing the Word in the same way

You see all of these preceding aspects; these preceding things that we have all talked about should all come together in prayer.

Prayer, how a person prays, or how a church prays is the best indicator or tester of their personal state and walk with God.

A church maybe busy, a church may have a lot of programs, but if a church is not praying, is not active in prayer, then it is not healthy.

It is the same for the Christians.

If a Christian is not praying,
If they are not having private intimate communion with God,
Then something is not right.

Now let's try and answer this question of what is prayer?

Not how much prayer should you be doing,
or what should I be praying, but what is prayer?

Prayer does not mean just saying your prayers,
going through a rote exercise you were taught as a child.

It is not just saying an extend grace at dinner times in the hope that it covers your preceding day and the day coming up.
It is not saying the Lord's Prayer at night before bed.

It is not reading prayers, like reading a liturgy.

May I also say it is not just sitting in a comfy chair and having a snooze with God.

Prayer is deliberately going into the presence of God with the aim of communicating with Him.

That is it

It is not an issue of being on your knees in fear.
It is not a wish list.
It is not entreating His favor.
It is not loud
It is not soft

It is all of these things to some, and a few of these things to others

Now Step back from it a minute.

Step back and ask yourself....What is this thing we are talking about?

We are going into the presence of the Almighty God.

Deliberately.

Purposefully.

We are setting our mind and our hearts to go into the presence of the God of the Universe, the Savior of my soul

It is a deliberate act.

It is a time of day or an occasion that we have set aside for the express purpose of coming into the presence of a Holy God.

So the first thing that prayer is, it is a drawing near to God.

I hope you can see how this is a natural flow on from Communion

And in a sense, you cannot pray with any real sense of authenticity if you have not had communion.

If you have not examined yourself and your soul and your conduct.

How can we with all sincerity come into the presence of God with a life that is full of diverse lust and unattended sin?

For me this is a Holy exercise.

This is not something I take lightly

This is an act of reverence for me.

The second thing is, it is a time of thanksgiving to God.

Come with reverence and start with thanksgiving.

Matt 6:8-10

*Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. **9** Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. **10** Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Thank God for the air you breathe.

Your salvation.

Thank Him for Who He is.

I found this morning a place in my journal where I realized that I had stopped coming to God with Thanksgiving, I was coming always to ask, get, whine and complain.

I had apologized and I proceeded to write out a list of 50 or 60 things that I needed to be thankful for

The early Christians prayed because they realized they had a need and God was the only one who could really answer it.

How often we spend our time worrying, fretting, and scheming instead of praying.

Now you think about this - this group of people days before had cried out crucify Him!

Now they cried out to God for deliverance, provision, forgiveness, and grace.

Why?

Why did they do that?

Because they never lost sight of who they had been and what He had done for them.

That is why you pray.

The third reason you pray is because you remember the greatness and goodness of God.

You realize you need His help on EVERYTHING.
You realize you are dependant upon Him
And you love talking with Him.
You love discussing things with Him.
You love communing with Him.

It is not a forum, it is not a ritual, it is passionate, personal, intimate communication.

Now I have heard people say... If you really want to pray, If you really want to touch heaven then must pray at least 15 minutes in tongues before you start praying in English so you have the anointing.

You have to work it up they say
You have to stir up your emotions

For me that doesn't make sense

Isn't that just like the liturgy of the Catholics or the form prayers of the Episcopal?

That to me sounds more like a timed ritual that passionate communications

Listen I pray in tongues.
I speak in the prayer language of the Holy Ghost
And if you don't, I encourage you, come tonight and we will pray for you to be baptized with the holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues

I love it, but I think in English.

I tried thinking and praying in Spanish but the only two words I know are 'Cervasa and Salsa'.... And Orlando says that is a dangerous combination even for a human need.

I pray in tongues so my spirit can intimately communicate, and speak utterances that only God can know.

I pray in English so that I know I am giving my love and adoration to He who deserves it.

I pray with my mind

I pray with my emotions

I stand and walk

I sit and cry

I am engaged with this thing called prayer as I would be engaged with any conversation with someone I love

Why do I pray?

Because I am on Earth and He is in Heaven and I need as much help as I can.

Prayer to me is communion and communication.

I have communion, and I communicate.

I have intimate fellowship.

Prayer for me happens sometimes lying in bed as day breaks, He is my first thought, my only hope.

He is the fulfiller of my dreams,
The protector and provider for my family,
He is my strength.

My Hope

My Joy

My reason

My Savior

My healer

My provider

My deliver

I talk first to Him.

Then a couple of hours later I sit in my rocking chair on the deck of my shed and I watch the bluebirds drink from the pond and laugh with Him.

Then I might sit with my team and talk about the flock and ask for wisdom and guidance for them

Then I might sit with Judy and look at the finances of the church and in my heart thank Him and ask for wisdom and guidance and insight

Then I get home and I can pick up sticks in my backyard and I find myself, catch myself having a conversation with Him that I started in the morning and I never got to finish.

He is my God.
He is my Lord.
He is my Father.
He is my Friend.

I love talking with Him – that is why you pray.

I don't force myself to love my wife
I don't force myself to have a conversation with my wife

She is the only person outside of heaven I feel completely comfortable talking to and I long to talk to. How sad it would be if I sat down with her at a prearranged time every time to talk in a stilted and formal fashion

It is the same with my God

Authentic Spirituality produces Gladness

Here is the third thing that was a sign or a fruit of the early church.

Acts 2: 46-47

*And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

So much of the world's joy vanishes with money.

If you cannot afford to buy your pleasures, then you have no pleasure, you are not happy.

The joy of the world demands health and wealth.

If they don't have it, people sit in a corner sulking, fearful and rejected. The world and in fact much of the church says you cannot mix fear and joy.

But you can.

Christian joy is a deep joy, a pure joy.

It is something that goes beyond emotion to a reassurance of your soul

2Co 8:2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their **joy** and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

Real joy, goes beyond your current circumstances, goes beyond your temporal emotions

It is in part a foretaste of the very glory of God and of the heaven that we shall share with Jesus.

*1Th 1:6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with **joy** of the Holy Spirit,*

*Jas 1:2 My brethren, count it all **joy** when you fall into various trials,*

Joy: an occasion for gladness

So what is Joy, what is this gladness that was such a fruit of the early church?

It is the fuel that drives the engine of worship
It ignites our love and passion for God in spite of our circumstances, in spite of our feelings.

Days before they had crucified Him
Now they worship Him as the Savior of their soul and the Creator of the Universe.

You see these people had a revelation, an insight, an encounter that was now the greatest thing in their life and they were so thankful for all that they had received and all that they were becoming

I was praying for you as I prepared this and I realized how many of you have lost your joy.

How many of you are fearful.
How many of you have lost your gladness and your liberal and generous spirit
How many of you are hesitant to give of your tithe and offering.
How many are hesitant to give things to God with your substance or your life.

It is a poor Christian who can only praise God in the Good times.
It is a poor Christian who only tithes in the times abundance.
Not out of their income.

BUT I HAVE NO INCOME...then you cannot tithe
But you can be glad
You can rejoice
You can still worship and enjoy God

Some of you are not seeing break through not because you are not praying to Him but because you have stopped enjoying Him.

We are called to live by faith, not walk by sight.

Don't let the world rob us of our joy.
Don't let the world dictate our faithfulness.
Don't let the world dictate if you will be faithful with your time, your talent OR your treasure

Some of you are treating tithing as an option.
You can't.

As your pastor I am telling you that is the worst thing for you to do at this moment.

I can't decide not to pay the note on the church.
I can't decide not to be faithful in sheparding you.

Don't protest against the government or the economy by withholding what belongs to God, by

Withholding the tithe
Withholding your service
Withholding your Joy

You see Joy is more than an emotion based upon circumstance.

Joy is an outcome of our relationship with the Lord and our source of strength for obedience to Him

True joy, True gladness only ever really happens when our eyes are fixed upon Him

When a believer walks this way, it produces a heart that is focused on Him, a heart that is passionate for Him.

Our tests, our trails, the circumstances of our life are tremendous tools in His hands and it is our response that unlocks the doors of grace

You run to God in times of trials, not from God

Get bigger on the inside.

Walk by faith.

Let the joy of the lord be your strength.

When our joy is in anything or anyone other than the Lord it can be stolen or taken away because all apart from God is temporal. When our joy is in the Lord, it cannot be taken away or stolen because He is eternal and what He promises to do He does.

Now as a result of all this

Out of all this:

Out of Devotion

Out of Doctrine

Out of Fellowship

Out of Spirituality on a personal and corporate level

Out of this

As a result of this, the natural by-products of this...miracles, Signs and wonders

Next week I want to look at the nature of the supernatural

How it was not the super weird, but it was the natural by-product of the life of a group of people that lived passionately for Jesus

But this morning I want to pray for some of you who have lost a sense of joy in the midst of trying times

You have lost your sense of peace
You are finding yourself overwhelmed with anxiety and fear
Concern and worry