

The Church Alive – The Response to Biblical Preaching (Part 2) Acts 2:37-41

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" 38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Have you ever thought about why you go to church? What are the possible reasons for your desire to go to church? How do you determine whether or not your attending church is merely out of habit, or simply because it is something you are supposed to do? Are you able to cite biblical reasons for your being at church? We all know that we are supposed to go to church, but have you heard an appeal for that based upon the Scriptures?

I would expect that most of you here today would know that God's word has something to say about your church attendance. And if God's word has something to say about this, then such a matter needs to be faithfully proclaimed and reverently received.

Well the issue of your attending church may be a settled matter in your mind, know that there may be others in the congregation, including our children, who are not yet so convinced of such a truth as faithful church attendance.

I read an interesting statistic in preparation for this message. It stated that of those who call themselves born-again Christians, only about four of ten attend church one or more times a week. Another four self-proclaimed born-again Christians, those who say they believe in and follow Christ, are said to attend church anywhere from a couple times a month to just a few times a year. And, of the remaining two of ten self-proclaimed born-again Christians, one seldom attends church and the other one never attends church. How can it be that one who says he follows Christ would seldom or never be found with the people for whom the Christ died?

What does all this tell us? It tells us that some 60 percent of self-proclaimed born-again Christians have an improper, or low view of the church which Jesus Christ purchased with His blood. It also tells us that they have a low view of Jesus Himself. And further, it tells us that they have not exposed themselves to solid biblical teaching on the matter.

Last week, as we looked at Acts 2:37-41 we began noting the results of biblical preaching. From these verses we examined the first two results of such preaching as being, 1). the exposing of the sinner to the reality of his sin, and, 2). the exultation of the Savior to whom we must pledge our allegiance. This morning I would have you know the third and final result of biblical preaching as revealed in our text. For not only does biblical preaching expose sinners, not only does it exalt the Savior, but finally it expands the church.

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

III. It expands the church (2:40-41)

40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

Let us read our text again beginning in verse 40. It is hard to imagine the excitement of the first response to the first sermon preached there on the day of Pentecost. I remember when our brother Tyler was gloriously brought to faith in Christ, how excited he was and how excited the church was with him as he began to grow in Christ. I recall the stirring testimony of our brother Jim, as after decades of false professions, he was able to confidently assert and demonstrate the reality of his conversion by and to Christ. What joyous occasion these were. But can you even begin to fathom what it was like for that little congregation of 120 people on the day of Pentecost, when almost instantaneously there were added 3,000 souls to the church; 3000 born-again sons and daughters of the kingdom; 3,000 additional ambassadors of the ministry of reconciliation to proclaim eternal life in the name of Jesus.

How phenomenal was this event? Consider this, in just one day, with just one unified message about Jesus Christ as having died for the sins of His people and the call to repent and receive Him as Lord and Savior, more converts were won to Christ than in the three and a half years of the preaching by Jesus Himself. This should have been no surprise to the disciples, nor should it be to us as this kind of wonder was promised by Jesus. In John 14:12 Jesus said,

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.

When Jesus said, “greater works than these”, He could not be speaking of miracles and signs as no one has done the number or magnitude of miracles as Jesus, including rising from the dead. No, He was speaking of the influence and the impact of proclaiming His message of the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal as realized in His work on the cross, promised to those who believe in Him and His message, being transformed, made new as they believe.

Here on the day of Pentecost, the church expanded from 120 to 3,120 as a result of one biblically-based sermon! And so we see the seed of this truth, that when the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed, it will expand the church. Now this does not mean that every time a sermon is preached there ought to be the expectation that 3000 will respond. In fact, even in the book of Acts, we do not see a number like this again. If you turn to Act 4, the context being on the heels of Peter and John healing the crippled man, the beggar; and Peter’s subsequent sermon given to the masses; and the rulers of Israel expressing their displeasure, we read in Acts 4:4 these words, ***“But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”*** Here it is not that five thousand more men came to faith, but from the time of Peter’s first sermon where three thousand had been added to the church, to this time, the church had swelled to include five thousand men (not including the women or children). Then look with me at Acts 6, here the context being the faithful preaching and service of those in the church; and in verse 7 we read, ***“And the Word of God kept on spreading; and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem...”***

In Acts 9:31, as Paul begins to preach Christ, we read of the result, ***“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on***

The Church Alive

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in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, in continued to increase. In Acts 16:5, as Paul and Timothy were declaring the teachings of the Apostles and elders from Jerusalem to the people of Asia Minor, there we read, **“So the churches were being strengthened in the faith and were increasing in number daily.”** The point is this, while the numbers may ebb and flow, the result of biblical preaching is that it expands the church.

But what does this mean, it expands the church? Are we merely interested in numbers? Certainly the Acts texts speak of numbers as the church was increasing; but I think we may be missing part of the larger picture. What does it mean that “the church,” this group of people joined together, as we will see next week, for the express purpose of learning the Word of God, of fellowshiping (or being in common contact with one another), of partaking of the Lord’s supper and of praying together; what does it mean that “the church” is expanding? Whatever else it could mean, I believe our Acts 2:40-41 text explains that when a person truly responds to biblical preaching, they were instantly incorporated and integrated into the local church. To become a Christian in the book of Acts was not simply a matter of becoming a citizen of the grand but abstract and invisible kingdom of God, although this is true; but rather, the emphasis was upon that person quickly becoming a meaningful, contributing member of the local church. In today’s vernacular we would say that they were purposely plugged in. And we will see in just a moment what that means from our text, but let me ask you, are you purposely, meaningfully, plugged into your local church? If you call Hope your home church, are you integrating your life, your schedule, your activities with those of the local church? These people in the first century church often gave up everything in order to participate with the body of Christ. They sacrificed much for the privilege of being part of the local church in order that they might minister not only to one another but also indeed to other churches and other saints. We see this in the poverty-stricken Macedonians, who in 2 Corinthians 8:3-4 gave to the even more poverty-stricken saints in Jerusalem, coming together to not only determine to do something as a church for another church, but also begging Paul for the favor of such participation or fellowship. Beloved, church growth expands the church, it brings in people and becomes a useful tool in the hand of a mighty Master, Jesus Christ. Not to be engaged in the church; not to be integrated and incorporated; not to sacrifice time, energy and resources, is simply not to be a part of the tool that Jesus intends to use for His glory.

As is the star football player to the rest of the team, when he holds out and refuses to participate and practice with team in hopes of more money, of something for himself, thus hurting the effectiveness of the team as well as proving himself to be unuseful; so too is the Christian who separates himself from the body of Christ, who puts up unbiblical boundaries and limits as to what he will or will not do for the body of Christ, thus hurting the effectiveness of the body and proving himself to be most unuseful. As Proverbs 18:1 to pointedly states, **“He who separates himself seeks his own desire, he quarrels against all sound wisdom.”** Are you plugged into the body here at Hope? How are you plugged into the body? As will see from our text, looking at verse 41, when these three thousand believed, they were “added” – a word that can mean to “add or increase” but literally means “to put along side” one another. They were lined up, rank and file, ready to serve; like an army ready to march. Have you fallen into rank, ready to serve?

Remember that Peter had just preached on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The people were pierced to the heart, exposed as sinners, and Peter called them to exalt the Savior by repenting and being aligned with Him via baptism. Peter continues his invitation to the people,

The Church Alive

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calling them join the church. But what did this mean for these people and what does it mean for us. Let us note now from our text two tasks that biblical preaching calls people engage in as they become part of the church, the body of Christ.

First, from verse 40, *our preaching and proclaiming must call people to be untied from a corrupt and corrupting culture.* Look again at verse 40, **And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!”** Notice again that Peter’s words are solemn, intense and to the point as he exhorts, continually calls, pleads, begs the people to do what, **“Be saved from this perverse generation.”** That will win you points, telling people that the entirety of culture, from what we see on TV, to what we listen to on the radio, to what we experience in politics, that within it all is a perversity. What is a perverse generation? The word “perverse” is *skolios*, meaning “warped, twisted, or crooked.” A person who has scoliosis has what, a curvature of or crooked spine. In context, to be crooked or warped means to be out of step or out of touch with that which is good, straight and right, in this case, the purpose and will of God. We are to be untied from such a way of thinking and acting.

It is the crooked generation that says killing unborn children is not murder but a matter of personal convenience. It is a crooked generation that calls men and women to sacrifice family for their careers. It is a crooked generation that embraces and tolerates sexual perversions as that of gay and lesbianism as normal and acceptable. It is a crooked culture that offers to fill our minds with pornography of all sorts, be it soft or hardcore, whether on our TV’s as your children are watching cartoons or on the internet via some vile site. Peter’s world, which had far less availability to such perversions, was perverted nonetheless and his call to the people is what, “Be saved from all this!!!” The verb **“be saved”** here means to be rescued. It is in the passive voice meaning that we cannot save ourselves from this culture, but we must look to and depend upon the only one who can save us, not just from our sins, but from following the whims of this godless culture, that is Jesus Christ. Peter, I believe, expands upon this idea in 2 Peter 1:2-4. Follow along there:

2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature [non-perverse people], having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Beloved, part of the call to Christ not only exposes sinners and exalts the Savior, but it expands the purity, the counter-cultural realities and experiences of life in the church. As I used to say so often to the youth week by week in Bible study, “There has got to be a difference!” There has got to be a difference between what excites us, what motivates us, what we talk about, what write about and even what we think about and that of the world.

I read another statistic this week that said nearly 50% of those who claim to be born-again evangelical Christians believe that the Bible, while a special book, is not literally, word for word, the words of God. By definition, they cannot be evangelical then when they deny the authority, the infallibility, the inerrancy and the entirety of the Bible as being God-breathed, from the very

The Church Alive

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mouth of God (2 Timothy 3:16); but they deny this and I ask, what’s the difference? For I would suspect that nearly half of the unbelieving world would agree that the Bible is a special book, but it is not literally, word for word, the Words of God. Beloved, this is just one example of those in the church who are succumbing to the corrupting influence of the world.

And as we noted, the corruptions can be so subtle. Do you know what you are listening to and humming on the way to work? Do you know what your children are listening to? Are you filling your mind with God’s Word or with the world’s garbage. While we are in the world, we need not be of the world but are to call people to live according to a standard of a greater and higher kingdom. And to be rescued and escape the corrupting influences of the world being us to the second task we call people to when preaching and proclaiming biblical truth...

Not only must we call people to be untied from a corrupt and corrupting culture, but second, from verse 41, *we must call people to be united to a faithful community.* Look again at verse 41 where we read, **So then, those who had received his word were baptized, and that day there were added about three thousand souls.** Luke, the no nonsense historian states plainly three things that happened to the people God called that day through Peter and the other 119 disciples.

First, they **“received his word”**. And what “word” was this? It was the word about the person and work of Jesus. Peter had laid out the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus in his sermon and now there were only two options for the people. It must either be received by faith, or rejected by unbelief. For those who refused to acknowledge that Jesus was the promised OT Messiah, the coming Lord to whom they should have bowed down to, these rejected Him. And the same is true today. For those who refuse to acknowledge Jesus as God’s Son, come in the flesh to save you from your sins, to put a new heart into your being and to grant you eternal life, you are rejecting Him for who He is, Lord and Savior. You have no rescue from this perverse generation. But for those who receive Him, these are saved from the perverse generation; these are saved and this leads us to the second thing that happens to those whom God calls.

Not only do they receive the word of the Lord, but they also pledge their allegiance to Christ publically. We read in our text that they were baptized. Remember from last week that this was the way in which these who were saved would have renounced Judaism and declared their intent to follow Jesus as Lord. Three thousand people is a lot to baptize. It has been noted that there were numerous pools in Jerusalem which would have provided plenty of space for the widespread baptizing going on. As they received the word, they responded by being baptized. How do you respond to the word of the Lord? Do you immediately obey it as these 3000 did? Do you come up with reasons why you can delay or put off obeying the Lord? Biblical preaching out to result in the church obeying God’s commands.

So the people received the word and responded in obedience; and finally, as I began with in this sermon, they became united with the local church. This is what is meant by the phrase, **“there were added three thousand souls.”** The point is this, they had become part of the new, counter-cultural community known as the church. For these, their lives would now revolve around this community. Indeed, they would become identified by the church. We will look at this next week from verse 42, but we will see that these are said to be those who were **“continually devoting themselves”** to the church. The church was their identity; it was their community; it was their family. And nothing in the NT has changed this as being the expected attitude of every

The Church Alive

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Christian toward the church. Yet in our day, too many see the church as nothing much different from the grocery store. You just go there to get some "goods". And if you do not like the goods at one grocery store, what do you do? You go to another. And if you think to yourself, "You know what, I have plenty of goods this week", then you do not even bother with either the grocery store or the church. Beloved, you will NEVER see this in the book of Acts. Those who became genuine believers as a result of biblical preaching were **"added"** to; put along side one another so that the Holy Spirit might meet the growing needs of that body and more effectively spread the word concerning Jesus. For these believers, church was not some place they went on Sundays, church was a part of their life and for a time, a part of their everyday life. They were devoted, sold out, inconveniently committed to the church. How about you? Can this be said of you? Would the believers of the first church in Jerusalem look at each member of our church and say, "Yes, the same Spirit that caused us and enabled us to be devoted to one another day by day is clear at work in each member here at Hope." If not, why not? What are you more devoted to than to the body of Christ? What are you biblically called to be more devoted to than the church? Name one thing. A spouse? A family? A job? I think you would be hard pressed to find any Scripture say you are to be more devoted to any of these things than the church. The issue is that we need to learn to be rightfully devoted to each of these things without neglecting the others. Are you neglecting the church? Have you been "added" to the church? Then live it out. Let the body of Christ see it. Do not rest until you have shown yourself to be an active, engaged, and entrenched member of the local church to the glory of God. This is what biblical preaching calls you to; to expand the church, not only in numbers, but in involvement, purity and devotion. Let me ask you, are you living your life for the glory of God by living it out among the people of God? Does the church of Jesus have your devotion. Remember that Christ loves His church. Do you?

Soli Deo Gloria

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