

# A Devoted Church

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good evening. Excited to be with you guys tonight. Before we start, I just want to be transparent because I realize that you guys aren't all in our community group. So my name is Matt and I'm a pastoral resident here. We have been coming out to Hope for a while. We've been at home participating in church virtually for a month, a month and a half. I don't know, I'll lose track. But the reason why is because we as a family, we have five, almost six adults, and we all have different feelings and thoughts and concerns about COVID. And so we work through that. We've been working through that just like you guys have here and those who are online. It's something that we all struggle with and there is no right answer. And so I share that with you just so you know that we are in it and we struggle with it together. And if there's anything that I do that causes someone to struggle or if you have questions or you want to talk about it, please don't keep it to yourself.

Whether you're here or especially online, talk to someone about it. In your community group, talk to, email me about it. Matt at Trinity Cambridge. Send me a message on Slack. But if you're struggling with something related to that, please reach out to somebody because I wouldn't want you to stay that way. And it's, I know the difficulty, especially when you're disconnected physically, the struggle in that and what it does to church life. And so I just want to, I just want to say that before we start.

Hopefully that's an encouragement. I don't know, but that's where things are. And my prayer, hopefully your prayer, is that things will continue to get better. And at some point in the future, whenever that is, we will be more unified physically together. I don't know when it is, but hopefully that will happen and it won't be too long into the future.

Let's, let's pray together before we open up the word. God, we thank you for this time you've given to us. We thank you for your word. And particularly tonight, we thank you for this passage. We pray that you would help our hearts to be open and our ears to be open to what you have to say. Lord, I pray that, that I personally would, would preach the words that you would have me preach and not my own personal thoughts, that they would not cloud and get in the way of your word, what you would have us to grab onto, to be encouraged with and to be taught and sharpened. Lord, we pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

So Acts chapter 2, we'll be reading the last several verses of this chapter, verses 42 to 47 of Acts 2. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And all came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day, those who were being saved. It's helpful to remember that what we see taking place here at Acts is not the birth of God's people. We see the birth of the New Testament church, but still the people of God that he is calling out to himself. The same group of people he began to call out 4,000 years ago when he started with Abraham. The reason why that's helpful for us to remember is because we need to not disconnect what God started in the Old Testament to what he's doing here in this passage and for us now on this side of the cross. We are witnessing here the remnant of God's people becoming the spirit-filled body of Christ. Before, in the Old Testament, sacrifices were needed regularly to cover people's sins. Now, at this time, Christ has died and has covered sins once and for all.

[ 4 : 56 ] Before, God dwelt physically in the temple most of the time. Now, we see the Holy Spirit being poured out on God's people and coming to dwell in them daily, all the time. And this passage that we're going to look at tonight gives us a brief window into the lives of this early New Testament church and shows us how their lives were changed by God. In verse 42, we see that our passage starts out and it says, and they devoted themselves to. We're going to dig into what they devoted themselves to in just a minute. But before we start out, I want to ask you a question, and that is, what are you devoted to?

Many people see church or religion as something that they just add to their life, kind of like a secondary thing, like a sport or maybe a humanitarian activity that gets added to their resume at the bottom to help them to help them look better. So how about if we change verse 42 to kind of match the tendency that people have towards God and their own Christian way of life? If we do, it might sound a little bit like this. And they attended church once a week, connected with their community group if they weren't too busy, shared meals with others, when it included doing something fun. But we try to avoid getting too personal and too deep. And for prayer, well, we do that sometimes, at least before meals.

Now, if that was verse 42, you would say, there's not a people devoted to a God here that I can see. And that's not the passage we see here before us. It's not what's happening to this church that is called out by God. And it's not what this Bible teaches for his people. If you've been called out by God to be part of his church, his fellowship of believers, then he has called you out of the world to be different from the world. Not just a nice moral version of those who are in the world, but to be devoted to what God calls us to be devoted to.

In October of 1994, I, as a 21-year-old kid, made a promise, a vow, to my then 21-year-old wife.

Sorry, it's still crazy to think about. I made a promise to her, and she made a promise to me before God and before others that we would love and be devoted to one another for life.

[ 8 : 18 ] Now, if we went into that promise of devotion, and afterwards, there was no life change. We shared things together, but our lives didn't change.

We didn't come together as one, like God calls us to, that wouldn't look like much of a devotion. You would say, that's not true love. That's easy, convenient love.

That's convenient devotion, because it works out for you. But that's not the devotion that marriage is based on. That's the closest example I could think of to the devotion that we're called to as the people of God.

Our outline for tonight's message is taken right from verse 42. It lays out what the people of God are called to, and then the remaining verses go into detail as to what that looks like.

So the first one is, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. They were devoted to learning more about this Jesus whom God had sent and they had crucified, the one who gave up their life for them.

[ 9 : 40 ] And their eyes had been opened, we saw last week, by the Holy Spirit, and they wanted more. They were hungry for the word of God. They submitted to and they wanted more of the teaching of the apostles.

Why the apostles? Why them? It was from their teaching, we saw last week again, specifically from Peter, that's the sermon that the Holy Spirit used to open their eyes.

We also know that Jesus had been preparing the disciples for this time. the great commission, if you remember, in Matthew 28, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.

At the end of Luke, Luke 24, Jesus said to them, these are my words that I spoke to you. This is after he was resurrected. These are the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law, in the prophets, in the Psalms, they all must be fulfilled.

And he opened their minds to understanding the scripture. The Old Testament is God's word. Jesus taught from the Old Testament. He taught them about himself and how the Old Testament was all about him and how it was to be fulfilled.

[ 11 : 10 ] And Jesus taught how they were all connected. If we are called by God, then we, like this early church, are called to be devoted to the apostles' teachings.

This is one of the places in the Bible, in the New Testament specifically, where we see that authority is confirmed by God. It says in verse 43, And all became upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

God is working through the apostles as confirmation that his word is being taught and that his word is true.

John Stott says this, The Spirit of God leads the people of God to submit to the word of God. That means that we, as a continuation of this New Testament church, called by the same God, spreading of the same gospel, we should also devote ourselves to and be under the submission of.

After that, we see that they were devoted to the fellowship. This word gets a little, gets a little fuzzy because it's used a lot in church.

[ 12 : 41 ] It's not a word that you would use outside of church, really. You don't, you don't use it in the workplace after a company dinner. Hey guys, let's go back and have some fellowship together.

Kind of sounds funny. It's specific to the church. The word used here for fellowship, the Greek word is koinonia.

And it's not always translated fellowship. And the reason for that is because this word koinonia is dynamic in that there isn't just one English word to describe it.

So depending on the text, it gets translated a little different. But koinonia describes a relationship which includes being active in Christian community.

It's sharing and enjoying the spiritual blessings that we have with one another. And it's the giving of material blessings. It's a fellowship that's about participation.

[ 13 : 44 ] It's a sharing what we have in common that is Christ. So it's much bigger than what we think of when we just hear fellowship.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians, God is faithful through whom we are called into the fellowship, the koinonia of his son, Jesus Christ. that's a deep version of the word fellowship.

That's got depth to it that we can hang on to. The fellowship of Jesus Christ that we've been brought into is what brings us together. New life in Jesus Christ.

For the new believers in our passage and for us, Trinity Cambridge, our commonality is Christ. That's what we share together.

So in verse 44, when it says, and all who believed were together and had all things in common, that was the unity around their commonality was Jesus Christ.

[ 14 : 50 ] That's what they shared in. What they now believed is what brought them together and gave them unity. Unity of the spirit. Witnessing what God was doing around them.

There was a reverent fear, it says, that took place because of what they were part of and what they were witnessing. That's what they had in common.

That's the fellowship that they were sharing in. But that's not all. Secondly, it's also about what they shared out. So it's about what we have in common, what we're sharing together, and also what we share out.

The same word, koinonia, Paul uses to talk about money that he collected from the Greek churches for those who were struggling in Jerusalem.

They were sharing what they had in common. If I had wealth and another brother had need, then it was shared as if we all had it in common.

[ 15 : 52 ] As we read through these verses and we hear about how they had things in common and they sold their possessions, I want to make sure that no one gets the wrong idea. Luke is not describing some type of a religious communism.

I was, I'm a Star Trek fan. At least I was when I was younger. Just so I don't date myself. Not the old original Star Trek.

So that was like in the 60s. It was a little hokey. I couldn't connect with it. But the next generation, that, that I could, that I enjoyed. That was the good stuff. But the thing I liked about Star Trek is there was this world where everybody just got along.

You never saw paychecks. You never saw people complaining about their job. Like everybody did their job. Everybody got taken care of. And there was just this commonality that was there. But that wasn't real.

I understand. It was fake. And as cool as that would be, it wouldn't work in real life. But here we, there is no religious requirement to sell what is owned.

[ 17 : 02 ] We'll see it later in Luke as we run across another passage that's similar to this. But there was no requirement to sell their own home. The desire that they had was bigger than that default desire to acquire more for ourselves.

That one that we want to collect and get enough for us to be comfortable into the future. And then once we feel comfortable enough, then, then I can give past that.

Then I can give to someone else. But let me protect myself first. That's not the heart of God. That's not the love of Christ. While there is nothing against saving for the future, God has overflowed us with blessings.

Jesus didn't come and give a little. He gave everything. And it's, it's that posture that we should be as a church overflowing with what we've been blessed with for those who are in need around us.

It's why as a church, we do specifically set money aside for when people are in need. Specifically in the church, but there could be times where we give outside of that.

[ 18 : 28 ] We also give towards Sovereign Grace churches. It's a family of churches to which we belong. And we pay money to them regularly because they give to other Sovereign Grace churches that are struggling, that are in need.

They also send to other parts of the world where there are like-minded brothers and sisters that are doing work that need money. They also use it to start new Sovereign Grace churches.

And Lord willing, in our future, our prayer is that we would be able to send out a church ourselves and be able to help support that church.

In verse 42, after the apostles' teaching, after the fellowship, we see that we're devoted to the breaking of bread and prayers, or the prayers, specific prayers, corporate prayers.

Let's look at verse 46 and 47 because it gives us a little bit more detail about that. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God.

[ 19 : 39 ] They attended the temple together. Even as God was moving among them and changing their definition of what church was like and taking out sacrifices because of what Jesus did, the temple was still the established central institutional church at the time where they went corporately to worship God and they didn't neglect that.

They didn't abandon it. They still went to that. Day by day, they attended the temple together. They also broke bread together. And this phrase, the breaking of bread, can be a reference to the Lord's Supper, communion, that we're going to take part of tonight.

It can also be just sharing a meal together. So, as we see this passage, are they celebrating the Lord's Supper? Are they doing communion?

Are they sharing a meal together? And the answer to that is yes. They're doing both of theirs. They're sharing meals together. They're breaking bread. They're remembering what Jesus had done for them.

And we can easily see how this part of sharing a meal together, of breaking the bread together, how it can easily be connected to our fellowship that we have with one another.

[ 21 : 01 ] Some of the best ways that we can fellowship is by sharing a meal with one another. It could be sharing a meal with someone who is in need of a meal. It could also be sharing a meal with someone who doesn't need the food, but needs the fellowship.

The last point we're going to see tonight is that they were devoted to the prayers. The prayers that were part of corporate worship. The prayers that we do each time we meet when we pray for different areas.

They met at the temple for prayers, and they didn't neglect those. They also prayed in homes. Back in chapter 1, we saw how they prayed together before the Holy Spirit came. We'll see them praying more in chapter 3.

In chapter 4, they were devoted to prayer. They were devoted to prayer. And so the question there is, do we feel that same need to pray?

Do we feel like we're actually praying when we come together and pray all together for different parts of the world and for other churches? Or do we just, we go through it like it's another thing in church that we just do?

[ 22 : 13 ] When you get in your community groups, do you pray? Do you pray like you need to pray? Do you pray like you're talking to God? And outside of that, personally, do you pray?

Jesus prayed. Jesus was one with the Father. If He needed it, why do we feel that prayer is not important? How prideful and arrogant to God must it look like for Him to see Christians going through a life not needing prayer?

So a couple things in wrapping up. In verse 46, we see they were receiving their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God.

This was epic Thanksgiving that was going on here, folks. Thanksgiving for what they had, for what they had been given, for what God had done with them. It was changing their lives.

It was that thankfulness combined with the devotion fueled by the Spirit that overflowed in their generosity, their love for the community around them.

[ 23 : 27 ] First, first to the community of believers because of the common bond they had with one another, and after that, to the community outside of that. Verse 47 says, praising God and having favor with all the people.

This is people outside of the church. This is people out in the community. They had favor with those people because their generosity, because their love flowed outside the church to them and extended to them.

The people outside felt that. Lastly, in verse 47, it says, and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

So first and foremost, remember that it was the Lord that added to those being saved. They didn't add it. The Lord is the one that saves, not us. We can add numbers.

We can't add souls. Only God calls people to himself. We saw that verse last week. Only God calls people.

[ 24 : 43 ] It's only Jesus who is able to save through his blood and the Holy Spirit that can change people's hearts. tonight, if you are not part of God's fellowship, know that you can be.

If you don't know his forgiveness, then let me, like Peter, exhort you to repent and look to him who can give you the promise of salvation because no one else can give you that promise.

For those here, for those who are online, who are already saved, I want you to see something in verse 47. There was a sharing of the gospel that took place with the people around them as they lived lives devoted to God.

It wasn't a devotion that was left inside a building. It wasn't left here in a church building. It wasn't left in their homes. They were devoted to the teaching.

They were devoted to the fellowship, the sharing of meals, of praying together. They interacted with the world around them. And day by day, people were being saved.

[ 25 : 58 ] That means there was also evangelism going on. They were reaching out to those around them and bringing them into their fellowship, into their generosity.

generosity. So, church. If we, Trinity Cambridge, are a church called by God, then we are a church devoted to God.

And just so, sometimes we can get lost in the corporateness of the name church and fall into that mindset like the church is responsibility for that or they'll take care of that.

Each one of us individually make up the church. So, if you've been called by God, if I've been called by God, then each one of us individually need to be devoted to God.

I'm almost done. I desire to preach the word of God and do it faithfully, but I also fight hard to try and connect things practically.

[ 27 : 19 ] So, how do we, with an example like this of a people who are devoted to God, how do we, knowing that God is calling us to that, how do we practice that?

How do we start to live that out in this weird time where we are in 2021? Here are just some thoughts that I came to while studying this passage, while praying through it, and I would invite you to take an opportunity to dig deeper in your community group as you guys discuss this.

First, I would say pray that God would help us be ready for when the smoke clears. years. Whenever this is all done, by the grace of God, we pray that things will get better, and I think that they will.

I'm not going to give you a time. I don't know. I didn't think it would be this long. But let us pray that we would be ready. Let us pray for our church. Let us pray for everyone in our church, regardless of where we are in the pandemic spectrum.

Because like all the churches, most churches spread across the U.S., we are a disconnected church. We know this. We are a disconnected church that longs for our unity to be restored.

[ 28 : 48 ] And I mean physically. And when I say these things, please don't understand that I'm saying those who are here are in a good place, that those who are at home are in a good place, or you need to fix where you are.

That's not what I'm saying. Because we're all in different spots. We all have to deal with what God has laid out for us in different ways. And there is no wrong unless we're sinning in it.

But let us pray. Let us pray that God would bring us together as a church in a way that is deeper than we knew before. Begin now, or if you haven't, or if you have been, continue on finding ways to grow in fellowship with one another.

That includes people that are here, that includes people who are at home. Find ways to fellowship with one another. it's hard. Fight for it.

We are all the same members of the same body of Christ. If you are a totally online member, then share a meal with somebody online.

[ 30 : 10 ] It's weird. We know that. But fight for the unity we have in Jesus Christ because we need it. Because there are people out in the church who need it.

You guys feel it here. You guys feel it online. Sometimes we just want to hug people and we can't.

It's not right, but it's where we are. So fight to be devoted to the church of God. And if it means, hey, will you share a meal with me online Friday night?

Because I need to eat and you need to eat. And you know what? we can have fellowship with one another in the name of Jesus Christ because one of us needs it, if not both of us. Don't be content to fall back anywhere, to hide behind a mask, or to hide behind a screen and just get lost.

That's what Satan would want us to do. But fight where you are. I'm not saying fight to get back to anywhere, but fight where you are. Fight for that community.

[ 31 : 31 ] And lastly, plan for the future. Plan how you might engage with those around you whenever the smoke clears, whenever things ease up, whenever everybody feels comfortable to do what we used to do, whenever that is.

Plan for that. God has given us this weird, quiet, time-out period where there's rest and where there's stress. And so look to him.

And then move, plan to move out in bigger, in newer ways than you did before. God has to go live a life that is devoted to God.

Let's pray, let's pray together. Lord, I thank you for your word.

I thank you for the examples that we get to see here in Acts. I thank you for the Holy Spirit and the work that happens. We thank you that you were the one that saved souls and not us.

[ 32 : 48 ] We thank you for your promise of salvation, your gift of Jesus Christ, and your gift of the Holy Spirit. God, we pray that you would help us to be a devoted church for you, to see how we need it individually, to see how we need it corporately, to see how we live in a world that needs to see it, God.

So, Lord, we pray that you would help us. Help us where we are right now. Help us to look to you and help us to plan for the future, what you'd have us do and how we would be devoted to you, God.

we ask these things for your glory, in Jesus' name, Amen.