

2-B. The Believer's Fellowship

Acts 2:42-47

Context:

With the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter preached with the Holy Spirit's power. Many people repented and were baptized. One other thing that Peter said to them in warning was this. **“Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”**

- **How could these words, “Save yourselves from this present generation” help us understand this passage about the fellowship of the believers?**
 - A **“generation” is a whole culture. Each generation - has its own common characteristics of thinking & behavior..**
 - So the **main thing influencing their minds and hearts** must no longer be the spirit of the age, but spirit and truth of God.
 - **The church itself is a “new generation” — a whole new people**, a new culture. The church is supposed to show the world a whole new way of living as humans under the Lordship of Christ.

And this story is how the people in the early church, this “new generation,” lived together:

STORY:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

INTRODUCTION: Ask a Pre-story question to the whole group or to discuss in pairs.

- Think of a time in your life when you experienced a deep sense of fellowship with other believers. When did that happen? What made it so special?

THE STORY: Tell the story and learn it together as a group through many repetitions.

POST-STORY DISCUSSION: Lead a discussion guided by these questions:

OUTLINE VERSION (for teacher to use when teaching)

Details: What happened? To see what truths we can learn.

Focus on characteristics of a healthy church?

- **What happened just before this passage that displays what the church was founded on?**
 - Holy Spirit empowered response to the preaching of Gospel.
- **What was the basic attitude of the believers toward the fellowship?**
- **What in particular were the believers devoted to? How does this guide us toward healthy churches today?**
- **What was happening that affirmed that the Gospel being taught and believed was real? Why was this important in the early stages of Christ's church? How should this apply to our churches today?**
- **How did the church display a true sense of unity and faithfulness toward the fellowship? How can we learn from them?**
 - How does believing the Gospel deeply promote this sense of unity?
 - What characteristics of real fellowship should we find in a small group of devoted believers who are really walking together with the Lord?
- **How were believers feeling in the early? Where did this come from?**
- **It's very easy in our churches to become comfortable with our own group, with the people we like. How did the early church avoid this? How did they remain faithful to growth? What was the obvious fruit of their fellowship?**

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Signs and wonders guaranteed?**
- **Seek unity: Hope for great things from God:**
- **Build small groups:**

General Application: (discuss with whole group)

- Believers need to be in local fellowship - breaking of bread, praying, hearing and applying the teaching of God's word, and being generous with their resources.
Which of these ideas do people in our churches struggle with the most? How could this story encourage us?

Personal Application:

- **Which of these aspects of the early church do you struggle to live out the most? How can remembering that we have been forgiven help us to repent of this and allow the Holy Spirit to empower us to follow Christ in deeper and more trusting ways?**

FULL VERSION (for teacher to use for study in preparation)

Let's look at the details that we observe describing what happened in the story in order to see what truths we can learn.

What do we learn in this story about the early church?

What characteristics of a healthy church do we see?

- **What happened just before this passage that displays what the church was founded on?**
 - The church was led by Holy Spirit.
 - The church was built on a Holy Spirit empowered response to the preaching of Gospel of Jesus Christ leading repentance and faith.

Now, let's look at the main passage:

- **What was the basic attitude of the believers toward the fellowship?**
 - They were DEVOTED – a sense of whole hearted commitment to the whole process.
- **What in particular were the believers devoted to? How does this guide us toward healthy churches today?**
 - The **teaching of the apostles**. They were devoted to the Scriptures. Not just the prophetic word, but to apostolic explanation of the meaning of the Scriptures (ex. Peter's preaching).
 - The **fellowship**. They were committed to one another, to following this new life as a body or a family.
 - The **breaking of bread** (eating together and/or the Lord's Supper to remember Christ) Eating together builds community.
 - **Prayer** - should be at the heart of our fellowship
- **What was happening that affirmed that the Gospel being taught and believed was real? Why was this important in the early stages of Christ's church? How should this apply to our churches today?**
 - Wonders and signs were being performed by the apostles, those who had been together with Jesus.
 - These kind of signs from were especially common at important times of the establishment of the church to affirm God's presence.
 - They always were confirming the Word of God being taught. And the Word was always bringing glory to God.
 - While God does not promise to commonly work these kind of miraculous signs among us today, we should still have great hope and expectation that God will continue to act with power to grow his church.
 - It is important for us to be sensitive to the Spirit so that we recognize and praise God for the miraculous work he does in the hearts and lives of people - not just the external miracles like physical healing, but the major changes God works in hearts through the Gospel.

- **How did the church display a true sense of unity and faithfulness toward the fellowship? How can we learn from them?**
 - It says they were together and had everything in common shared their possessions. We should have a true concern for the needs of brothers and sisters and be willing to sacrifice ourselves in order to share our blessings.
 - Met daily, regularly, valued being together
 - Ate together in homes - share their food.
- **How does believing the Gospel deeply promote this sense of unity?**
 - The Gospel of grace tells us that we sinners are forgiven and made right through repenting and trusting in salvation through Christ who died for us and rose again. When we believe this more and more and rejoice in being God's children, the Spirit leads us to a growing humility in the way we relate to one another. We know that none of us deserves anything from the Lord so there is no boasting or self-centeredness. We are made able to truly serve each other with love. This leads to a growing unity.
- **What characteristics of real fellowship should we find in a small group of devoted believers who are really walking together with the Lord?**
 - Mutual sacrificial love and help for one another.
 - Openness with each about personal struggles. Confession of sin.
 - Trustworthiness and gentle accountability to encourage toward repentance and growth in holiness based on God's Word..
- **How were believers feeling in the early? Where did this come from?**
 - Sense of awe, expectation, and wonder
 - Sense of gladness and thanksgiving
 - Praising God
- **It's very easy in our churches to become comfortable with our own group, with the people we like. How did the early church avoid this? How did they remain faithful to growth? What was the obvious fruit of their fellowship?**
 - They enjoyed the favor of all the people, good reputation.
 - They welcomed seekers. They were obviously committed to spreading their witness and drawing others in.
 - They honored God with their praises.
 - The Lord added daily to their numbers those who were being saved!

Summary: What do we learn here from the early church? What commandments or examples to follow are found in this story. Which ones still apply to us today?

- **Signs and wonders?** Should the church today expect to regularly see signs and wonders if the church is real and truly committed to God's Word?
 - No. This was a unique time in establishment of church. (more later)
- **Seek unity:** But, the devotion to the unity of the church, the solid teaching of Scripture, prayer, sharing and generosity, regular gathering and eating together,

welcome to outsiders, and people coming to faith should always characterize our churches.

- **Hope for great things from God:** We should believe that God can be trusted to do great things among and through us. And a great attitude of thanksgiving and praise.
- **Build small groups:** important to the life of the fellowship. They met in homes and met together. Obviously 3000 people could not experience a deep personal connection with everyone, so they needed to be able to fellowship in smaller groups as well.

General Application: (discuss in large group)

- We observe that the natural outpouring of someone who has repented and is following Jesus is to be involved in the local fellowship of believers, breaking of bread, praying, hearing and applying the teaching of God's word, and also being generous with their resources. **Which of these do people in our churches struggle with the most? How could this story encourage us?**

Personal Application:

- **Which of these aspects of the early church do you struggle to live out the most?** (teaching of God's word, fellowship, breaking of bread together, prayer, generosity). How might this reveal that you are holding something back from God? **How can remembering that we have been forgiven help us to repent of this and allow the Holy Spirit to empower us to follow Christ in deeper and more trusting ways?**