

Moving Forward in Obedience [Sermon Notes]

Acts 1; Acts 2

A growing, lively, thriving church? Is one possible? Is there a secret to it?

You don't need to go far to find growing, healthy, thriving church fellowships. They are still a rarity in Britain but go to Eastern Europe or South America or Africa and the church is spreading rapidly. The gospel is just as potent as it was in the first days of the church in Acts. God hasn't changed but unfortunately our perception of what He can do has changed.

Right at the start of my ministry here in Swaffham I want to establish the principle that a growing healthy church is not only possible but desirable for the sake of the lost in Swaffham and the spiritual health of the church that meets here. That begs some more questions.

What makes a healthy Church. What makes a balanced ministry?

It's helpful to go back to the roots of the Church, the time when it was growing rapidly to see what we can learn. And was it growing!

- 3000 saved on Day of Pentecost
- Added daily in 2: 47
- Men and women were added 5:14
- The word of God multiplied 12:24

The Church was growing so what was happening?

Acts 2:42-47 are very well-known and revealing verses about what the people of God did subsequent to that great Pentecost day. It is sometimes called the five-fold ministry because they seem to have been involved in five activities:

1. They committed themselves to God - Worship

42 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.

2. They committed themselves to one another - Fellowship

46 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,

3. They committed themselves to learn - Discipleship

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching

4. They committed themselves to serve - Service

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

5. They committed themselves to share - Evangelism

They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

In the next few weeks we are going to be exploring these aspects of the believers' lives and see where we can learn from them as we look forward to a Church that is growing and thriving. How did it start? Turn with me to chapter 1 of Acts.

Acts 1:1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Now drop to chapter 2

2:1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent

wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

How did this phenomenal period begin? It began with two things.

- a recognition that they needed to wait in obedience to Christ
- a moving forward by the power of the Spirit.

● **Waiting in Obedience to Christ**

So how did they respond to Jesus' call to remain. What did they do?

Acts 1: 12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day' s walk from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

They prayed. Jesus had given them a huge commission - You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and the uttermost parts of the world. That' s what they became with the huge movement of God' s Spirit. But how did it start - it believed with a small group of people wanting to move forward in obedience to Christ and what were they doing? They were praying.

How did the day of Pentecost start - with a group of disciples in a house - what were they doing. Well if we go with chapter 1:14 - they were constantly praying.

Do you want that breakthrough in Swaffham? Do you want to see this fellowship growing and thriving with new converts? Do you want to see that member of your family come to Christ? Do you want to see that friend or neighbour saved? It starts with prayer.

Someone once said that all great movements of God can be traced back to a praying figure. How true! Welsh Revival didn' t start with God raising up Spirit-filled people. It started with groups praying and yearning for God to revive His people again. It is still the same today. But they didn' t just pray.

- They prayed in unity. They were gathered in the one place and they prayed together. That' s why praying together is so important.
- They prepared in unity They were ready to move forward in unity. Their prayer was preparation for what Jesus had promised would come. How prepared are we? If we don' t expect renewal, revival or whatever - then what do we pray for?

How long do we wait? We wait until God is ready to move. How long. For the disciples 10 days. But the waiting can be a long time. Story of Anna in Luke 2.

Once the Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, then the waiting became moving.

● **Moving in the Power of the Spirit**

- *they moved with the prompting of the Spirit*

If we wait we must be ready to move. Be ready for that prompting - Woodberry Down. And what did they do when they were filled with the Spirit - they spilled over on to the street. People look for experiences - but as we have seen, the Spirit gives us knowledge to UNDERSTAND the things of God and it is understanding that fires us up. Assurance of salvation.

- *they moved in the power of the Spirit*

Then they witnessed in unity on that day. We read how Peter preached but it was the impact of all of them that caused such consternation. And maybe it was what they were all doing, through the outpouring of God' s Spirit that made the difference.

So what started the fledgling Church? Prayer, and being prepared to allow themselves to be used by the Spirit for His purposes.

And the Lord added to their number DAILY. Daily. Added, multiplied whatever.

God hasn' t changed. The evidence is that that is true. We are the people that need to prepare ourselves for His service. Are we ready?

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