

Acts 2:41-47 And the Lord added to their number

December 13, 2009

Unless otherwise stated, all scripture references are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Please turn to Acts chapter 2:41

Page | 1

Verse 41

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

This afternoon we as a church once again are having the privilege of witnessing someone who has received Jesus' word and is going to be baptized. And hasn't it been a wonderful thing to see Rebecca who came along to this church first for her husband Warren and then shortly after coming along she decided it was then for herself.

And today she is going to follow her Lord in a simple act of obedience and confess publicly that she belongs to Jesus and has chosen to follow him.

To me there is no healthier sign of a church that is moving with God on his mission than when we see people receiving his word and being baptized. We can easily take these things for granted. The angels in heaven don't for we know that when one sinner turns away from their sin they are rejoicing in heaven.

Luke 15:10

Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Now there were three thousand souls that were added on that one day so there would have no doubt been quite a large queue for those getting baptised.

So what did they do after being baptised?

Verse 42

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

This first crop of disciples did four things that make up (and should always make up) the very heartbeat of every local church.

- 1) **They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching.**

This is not about just listening to great messages and honouring the speaker as someone who has charisma and can string some great sentences together but rather listening intently for the voice of Jesus in the teaching and what it is that God wants to say to us as individuals and together as a church. Teaching that does not strive to allow God's word to do a transforming work in our lives is simply a lecture. These disciples heard the teaching and APPLIED the teaching. This was their devotion.
- 2) **They devoted themselves to the fellowship.**

This wasn't a 'take it or leave it' consumerism that we can often see in the church today, but rather a commitment to each other that didn't waver. To devote ourselves to the fellowship means that we come with an attitude of what can I bring rather than what can I get. And can I say that some of the simplest things you bring like a smile or a friendly hug, or a prayer for someone can have the most profound impact on the fellowship. They devoted themselves to this.
- 3) **They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread.**

This is not just communion with a piece of biscuit and a small cup of juice but also the sharing of meals together where bread is broken and fellowship enjoyed. There are many books out there that tell you how to grow a church, but I am yet to see one that focuses on sharing meals together. I personally know of no other way whereby we have the opportunity to grow together in Jesus than sharing meals with each other.
- 4) **They devoted themselves to the prayers.**

This is one area that virtually all churches struggle with in some way to get a broad base of people praying together. We are ok for the Sunday morning meeting and a midweek gathering, but when the call to come together and pray, sadly there is mostly only a small minority that make the effort and the devil loves this.

As a result many churches back away from calling people to prayer and have settled for an intercessor mentality that seeks to raise up special prayer warriors above other disciples who don't seem to have this gift. Let me say that this is not bible.

The whole church is called to prayer and it is not so much about what we pray or for how long we pray, but rather it is what's in our heart when we pray. You may come to a prayer meeting and not say a word, but your heart is there and you have faith the God is going answer the prayer of the saints. They devoted themselves to the prayers.

They very important thing to notice with all of this is that THEY devoted themselves to this things. They were not coerced, or forced to do these things, they WANTED to do these things. And that's exactly how it should be for us also.

Verse 43

And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

With this heartfelt, simple, pure devotion for God's glory came awe upon every soul. And it was in this environment that God did extraordinary things through the apostles.

Verses 44-45

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.

One of the hallmarks of the Christian faith is that we share a common Lord and that no matter what our ability of gifting, not one is greater than the other. We have all things in common. And it is in this environment that there was no one in need. Those who had an abundance shared with those who didn't.

This was not an early form of communism as some have suggested as this was not forced on them from a centralised government that sought to balance up the scales by making people sell their property and give to others so that there would be equality. No, this was purely voluntary acts of generosity springing from a heartfelt desire whereby they were simply following Jesus who said it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Verse 46

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts

These first disciples of the disciples if you like could not be kept apart. At different times and different places they just loved to get together and celebrate what Jesus was doing in them and among them.

Often when we come the book of Acts that describes in vivid detail the lifestyle of these early Christians we look for formulas that we can repeat to capture what took place during those times. And while our motives are good in this respect, we need to be very careful that we don't look to the formula rather than the principle.

For example there will be those who say that we should only ever meet in homes, and I was one of them at one point in time. To me this is often put forward as a formula to try and recapture the spirit of these times, but here we see them meeting in the temple courts and in homes.

What is more important is their motive not their method. The important thing is that we meet to praise him and to share that with each other, and not necessarily where we meet. God can never be reduced to a formula.

Verse 47

praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

I am firmly convinced that the world is not interested in our selling out of the Christian message, by packaging it in the look and feel of what they are used to when they shop at Chadstone shopping centre for example - full of glamour and prestige, but when they come in contact with the genuine, authentic heartfelt love of people who are devoted to Jesus and to each other, then I believe the world will look with eyes wide open as this is the thing they expect of us but often don't see.

I was reading an article online last night titled "Why would anyone want to be a Christian" and the following is an excerpt.

One reason that Christianity spread so quickly in the first century is the believers. They set an example of sincerity, faith, love and mercy. They were letting Christ live in them. They, like their Master, were willing to give their lives to serve others. They changed their ways from selfishness to helpfulness, from violence to peace, from greed to generosity. It was an astonishing transformation, and their friends wondered why they no longer lived in debauchery, lust and drunkenness (1 Peter 4:3-4).

These Christians had a change of life that spoke well of Jesus Christ. Some people were convinced of the truth of Christianity simply by seeing the results in their lives (1 Pet. 3:1).

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/church/pamphlet/whywould.htm>

As we praise God in this way we will have favour with all the people, even our critics. They may not like us but they will not be able to deny us.

And what I believe we will find is that the Lord will add to our number those who are being saved.

Now we might think that we personally like to see as many as three thousand added to our numbers like the early church did, but one thing we must never forget is that the church around the world now numbers in the billions of people and in China alone it is estimated that there are between 3 to 10 thousand people being added to the church each day.

I believe for us as a church that all we need to do is to enjoy Jesus, enjoy our fellowship with each other and share the good news readily and the Lord will add to our number. We don't need to focus on the numbers, he will do it. What we need to do is make sure that we care for the people he sends us and I have got to say to all of you, keep doing what you're doing because you are making a difference in this respect.