

Lesson 3 (Acts 2:42-47)

Day by Day

Old photographs are precious to us. We hang on to them for years because they have the power to bring memories to mind, stir our hearts, and even inspire us for the future. Of the old photos we keep tucked away, few matter more to us than newborn photos. What has the power to fill us with more joy and hope than the first pictures of a newborn baby boy or girl?

Think of Acts 2:42-47 as the first picture, the newborn image our heavenly Father has provided of his church. What can we learn from those men and women who had been "born again" (John 3:3)?

New Birth, Right Before Our Eyes

A multitude of thousands had gathered at the sound of something like a mighty rushing wind. The visitors to Jerusalem were bewildered, looking for an explanation as they heard ordinary Galileans telling in their own native languages the mighty works of God. Peter, standing with the eleven, had led them to this critical conclusion: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36)

Cut to the heart, the burning question of the crowd was, "Brothers, what shall we do?" By God's grace, led by the Holy Spirit, Peter was able to respond, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." And about three thousand souls responded in submissive obedience. What now?

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe 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. (Acts 2:42-47)

The First Christians Were Devoted

To be devoted is to be zealous in attachment, loyalty, and affection. Clearly, baptism wasn't the "end of the road" for these believers—it was the very beginning of a new life. In accordance with his "great commission," these men and women had become disciples of the risen Christ.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matt 28:18-20)

These men and women had been buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4). They were newborns infants in Christ (1 Cor 3:1; 1 Thes 2:7; 1 Pet 2:2). How would they grow and sustain this new life? They devoted themselves (Acts 2:42):

=> To the apostles' teaching.

- What does this mean?
- How would it contribute to their spiritual growth?

=> To the fellowship.

- What does this mean?
- How would it contribute to their spiritual growth?

=> To the breaking of bread.

- What does this mean?
- How would it contribute to their spiritual growth?

=> To the prayers.

- What does this mean?
- How would it contribute to their spiritual growth?

The First Christians Were Full of Awe
Awesome is a word that gets thrown around far too flippantly and frequently. Almighty God, the Savior of mankind, is truly awesome.

- "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds?" (Exo 15:11)
- To Moses the LORD said, "Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation ... for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you." (Exo 34:10)
- The name of the LORD is "glorious and awesome." (Deut 28:58)
- Nehemiah prayed to "the great and awesome God ..." (Neh 1:5-6)
- "God is clothed with awesome majesty." Job 37:22)
- "By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation." (Psa 65:5)
- And so, we are encouraged, "Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man." (Psa 66:5) "Let them praise your great and awesome name!" (Psa 99:3)
Is it any wonder then that the first Christians were filled with awe as "many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles" (Acts 2:43)? Awe is an intense feeling of reverence, admiration, and fearful respect.

=> Why is it important that we, as children of God, have a healthy sense of awe?

=> Do disciples of Jesus get themselves into trouble when they don't feel the appropriate sense of awe? If so, can you think of some examples?

=> In what way is the root of ungodliness and unrighteousness a failure to honor God as awesome (Rom 1:18-21)?

=> If such is the case, how can we nurture and sustain a healthy sense of awe as modern disciples of Christ?

The First Christians Were Unselfish in Compassion
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. (Acts 2:44-45)

=> Remember the context of Acts 2. When the day of Pentecost arrived, "there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven" (2:5). How might this setting have amplified the need for unselfish sharing?

=> What is the difference between the loving concern these first Christians were exhibiting and the "dead" faith James warns about in James 2:14-18?

The First Christians Were United in Christ 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. (Acts 2:46=47a)

Ephesians 4:4-6 reveals that this unity of the Spirit is founded upon one body, one Spirit, one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

=> Can a 21st century group of disciples with different backgrounds, experiences, opinions, and ideas enjoy that same kind of unity? If so, what will it take?

=> What can we learn from the newborn image of these first disciples when it comes to unity?

The First Christians Began to Have an Impact
And the Lord added to their number day by day
those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47b)

When we are wholeheartedly devoted to a cause much larger than ourselves, the people around us will notice. Intense feelings of awe will have a practical effect on our everyday lives and interactions. Unselfish compassion will stand out in this dark world. Authentic unity is increasingly rare. These first Christians were the sort of people God could use as salt of the earth and light for the world (Matt 5:13-16). When Christ the Lord is genuinely honored in our hearts, we should be prepared to give an answer for our hope, because people will want to know the reason behind our manner of life.

=> THOUGHT QUESTION: "The Lord added to their number ... " What does this little phrase tell us about the Lord? And what is this "number"? Is the Lord still adding to this "number"? If so, in what way, and what part does he expect us to play?

A-C-T-S made personal
Based on my study of Acts 2:42-47

A - doration: God is worthy of my praise because...

C - aution: this section of Scripture reminded me to evaluate ...

T - rust: my faith in my Savior has grown because ...

S - trength: I was particularly helped and encouraged by ..