

Commentary

36 This is the last sentence of Peter's sermon. When the Holy Spirit came and gave the Christians the ability to speak in various languages, the people around thought they were drunk! So Peter explained that what was happening was the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy that in the last days all kinds of people would speak God's words so that anyone who called on God's name could be saved. He then showed from the Bible that Jesus was the promised saviour as proven by His resurrection. v36 sums it up to say Jesus is the Lord and the Christ... but *you listeners* just crucified Him!

37 They realise that they had rejected Jesus, the saviour they'd been waiting for. Recognising their sin, they cry out for help.

38 What should the people do to be saved? Repent and be baptised. Not the answer we'd normally give! We might say, 'repent and believe', but belief is implied here. This enables them to have their sins forgiven, and they too will get the Holy Spirit; the very action that began the whole episode. Presumably, therefore, the pattern is being set that receiving the Spirit enables a person to speak about Christ, which brings others to faith, who are given the Spirit to speak about Christ, which brings others to faith, etc. So the word spreads.

Since then, we have regularly inserted a period of time between conversion and baptism, which makes us wonder whether unbaptised Christians have the Spirit. They would have seen baptism as being so closely tied up with entry into God's people that it's almost synonymous with saying 'become a Christian, and get the Spirit.' (A side application: if you're not baptised yet, do it asap!)

39 The promise in view here is the promise of the Holy Spirit, as prophesied by Joel and now being poured out by Jesus (see v33). Just as the apostles were to be Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem then out to Judea then out to ends of the earth, so the promise of the Spirit is for you, your family and even the people you don't know yet; whoever God calls!

40-41 There wasn't anything specifically more crooked about that generation (although murdering Jesus is pretty bad), compared to ours or any other. Until Jesus returns, it will always be appropriate to speak of 'a sinful and crooked generation' that people need to be saved from. There is a call to be different from the world around, to be a distinctive community as seen in the next few verses. 'Save yourselves' is a figure of speech here; obviously it's God who saves people. But we must respond. And they do! 3000 of them!

42 The 'apostles' teaching' at this point is 'the gospel' which, according to Peter's sermon, is a Christ-centred way of understanding the Old Testament. The teaching of the apostles eventually was written up as the New Testament. So these earliest Christians were Bible people and gospel people.

They were also devoted to fellowship; i.e. to one another. As we see in the following verses, this was more than stopping to chat over a biscuit after the service! It was real devotion, which worked itself out in costly ways.

The breaking of bread may be a reference to taking communion, but is probably more emphasising the fact that they ate meals together, a sign of

being a family involved in one another's lives. And they prayed. Being devoted to 'the prayers' implies this at least included a formalised set of prayers - something which Jews would have had for centuries - now it's directed to Jesus!

43 What about these 'signs and wonders' in Acts? The book of Acts is describing what happened at a particular time as the gospel first began to spread. As with the events in other biblical narratives, not everything in there is meant to be normative for us today. The miracles are most commonly referred to as 'signs'. And signs are meant to point to something. In this case, the signs authenticate the apostles as truly being sent from God to continue Jesus' ministry. Those signs performed then still authenticate those apostles today so there is no need for signs and wonders to accompany the gospel message anymore. Having said this, God is God and can do what He likes, of course! He is able to heal and perform miracles today. But the norm (even the norm in Acts) is that Jesus' kingdom spreads by people believing in the good news as it is spoken to them. The focus here is on reverent awe towards God.

44-45 This first gospel community is thoroughly united. Having all things in common doesn't mean that they were all very similar. (We know there were people from all over the world present at Pentecost!) It means that they shared everything. Imagine the economic and social impact of a group of people living out v45. 'Are you struggling to pay your heating bills? Let me sell my TV so you can have the cash!' Even secular historians, and even those who hated Christians, are quoted as saying: 'See how they love each other.'

We need to apply here the same point (see note on verse 43) about 'signs and wonders': is this kind of social action/communal living normative for us today? For how both apply today, we need to look to the rest of Scripture. Do the epistles command us to sell our possessions? No. Do they command us to love each other in practical ways? Yes, and v44-45 is a very good example of how *those* Christians applied the principle of Spirit-empowered unselfishness; an example to be challenged by, rather than an explicit expectation upon each local church in every place and time. But don't let that lessen the impact!

46 Being based in Jerusalem, they continued to attend the temple for worship. Presumably, they no longer would have taken part in the sacrifices, for they now believed in the Jesus promised in the Old Testament - so their Torah lessons and Psalm singing would have suddenly taken on fresh significance and life! But as well as the big group together, they also met in homes eating with generosity and thankfulness. The first homegroups, I guess!

47 At least at first, people liked them. A group of passionate, loving, sharing, praise-filled, generous, glad people with good news to share. That would have been very attractive.

Jesus is the one acting in all of this. He is the one who brings in new believers every day. It would have been tempting for the original 120 to want to stay as they were, with John leading SLOBS, Peter doing men's ministry and Mary heading up the Sunday School. But 3000 are added. And v47 shows that this initial growth spurt was meant to continue. Acts is the story of an unstoppable gospel that spreads out in the power of the Spirit from Jerusalem out to the ends of the earth. This spread is happening every single day.

Group Study Outline

Acts 2:36-47 Theme Sentence

The gospel calls people to repentance and baptism into the Spirit-filled saved community.

Launching Question

If someone was to briefly sum up church life in the twenty-first century, what might they say? What are Christians devoted to? How do we interact? Why?

READ Acts 2:36-47

From v36, what has been the thrust of Peter's sermon?

How might you expect the crowd to react?

What is their response? Why?

What does Peter tell them to do?

Is this different from what we might tell people to do? How? Why?

What's being promised to people who repent and are baptised?

How is this promise for "your children & all who are far off"?

Why do you think Luke includes these statistical summaries (e.g. 2:41, 47; 4:4; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 13:49; 16:5; 19:20, etc.)?

Thinking it through

Have we recognised that it's our fault Jesus died? That we rejected Him?

What should we do?

Is our message the same as Peter's?

Re-READ Acts 2:42-47

Before we look at the details, how would you describe life in the early church?

In v42, what did these first Christians devote themselves to?

Where did they meet? What significance might this have?

What kind of relationships did they have with one another?

How did outsiders view this?

Thinking it through

What aspects of this kind of church life most appeal to you?

What aspects of this kind of church life might you struggle with?

In practical ways, how can we as a homegroup/church be more like the pattern presented here?

What impact might this have on the world around us?

Acts 2:36-47



Intro

If *Luke* was the story of what Jesus began to do and teach, *Acts* is what Jesus did next after He went back to heaven. In 1:8, He promises the apostles the Holy Spirit who will empower them to be His witnesses 'in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' The rest of the book shows the unstoppable progress of the gospel as it leaps over all kinds of hurdles to reach people at the ends of the earth.

At this stage in the story, there were only around 120 members of the worldwide church (1:15)!!! But God had plans to spread them out, and for thousands to become Christians. Pentecost is the event when the Holy Spirit came to Christians for the first time, and began this gospel spread beginning in Jerusalem.

There were people from all over the world in town that day and miraculously they heard the good news spoken in their own language. But people thought they must be drunk! So Peter explains what's going on. In doing so, he takes the opportunity to be a witness to the crucified, risen and ascended Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. But what will the religious people of Jerusalem make of the news? And for those who believed the message and joined the fledgling church, what was this new community like?

[NB]

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Application

- Repent and be baptised to receive the Holy Spirit and be saved.
- Devote yourself to what they devoted themselves to. Play your part in making Emmanuel a loving community created and shaped by the gospel message.