

The Four Devotions of the First Church

1. As we have been working our way through Acts 2...I have spent lots of time...looking at the issue of the heart
 - a. I started to wonder...if I was laboring over this point too long
 - b. Then I came to the conclusion...that every thing about our relationship with Christ...has to do with the condition of our heart
 - c. A vast majority of scripture has to do with...how God is working to redeem man kind
 - d. And how man's hearts condition determines whether or not man follows God or not
 - e. Last week we looked at the question...what do we do with Jesus
 - f. This week I want to look at the question...Why do Christians need church
 - g. As I was preparing...I asked the question...Can the study of the first church...apply to us today
 - h. I don't think it is a secrete...that many Christians today don't feel it is necessary to go to church
 - i. They will say...I don't need to go to church to be a Christian
 - j. I believe they say this...because they don't understand...God's purpose of the church...
 - k. If we came to the understanding of what the first church was like...and did what they did...would people desire church fellowship more

- l. I think the number one problem with churches today...The church has people in it
 - m. The problem is the church is full of sinful people who are hurting...who are coming to get...and not coming to worship...share...or serve
 - n. Even the apostles battled each other with their own agenda...and Jesus sums up the heart of ministry in a few verses
2. Mark 9:33-37, 33 After they arrived at Capernaum and settled in a house, Jesus asked his disciples, "What were you discussing out on the road?" 34 But they didn't answer, because they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve disciples over to him, and said, "Whoever wants to be first must take last place and be the servant of everyone else." 36 Then he put a little child among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Anyone who welcomes a little child like this on my behalf welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not only me but also my Father who sent me."
- a. I took a 2 credit class in Bible college to answer the question...what is pastoral ministry...and what does it look like
 - b. The world wants to get...and be served...a born again Christian should desire to give and serve others...without an agenda
 - c. The heart of a Christian desires to help hurting people...to find Jesus
 - d. Simply because they too were once lost
 - e. I am going to be honest...The problem is...many can't see past their own selfish needs...and expect the church to fill their needs

- f. If you want to grow in Christ...if you want true healing...it comes from helping each other...forgiving each other...loving each other
 - g. You can't do any of those things...if you don't attend church
 - h. People will come to church for many reasons...some want leadership roles...for many reasons...but very few want to be the servant of all
 - i. That is why being a shepherd for Christ is a calling...a Christian serves Jesus by serving others...which usually always involves surrender
 - j. It also involves a mindset...to come to the understanding your past and what Jesus has done for us...even though we didn't deserve it
 - k. These are things you learn in a church...that you cannot learn by staying at home
 - l. Let's quickly review what we have studied so far...of when Peter stands up and starts talking in Acts 2
 - m. Peter revealed prophetic scripture...to the people listening...about the truth of this Jesus is... who they crucified
 - n. I am in love with the idea that the words of Peter pieced their heart
 - o. They asked what should we do...Peter says repent...then be baptized...then be transformed...how...by receiving the Holy Spirit
 - p. Let's look at it again
3. Acts 2:38-39, 38 Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to show that you have received forgiveness for your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39

This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God."

- a. The promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit is for all of them...for their children...and even the gentiles
 - b. It is the same Holy Spirit...for everyone who have been called by God...which includes us today
 - c. It is the same working...of the same Holy Spirit that will start to transform us...into what Christ has planned for us long ago
 - d. It is the same Holy Spirit that will correct us...because He loves us
 - e. It is the Holy Spirit that will guide our path...by putting people in our lives that help us...and we help them...called the church body
 - f. It is the same Holy Spirit that will cause us to desire to gather...for many purposes I will explore in a moment
 - g. It is also the same working of the same Holy Spirit that is working through Peter...when Peter does this
4. Acts 2:40 Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!"
- a. Peter says save yourselves...meaning you have to do your part by responding to the Holy Spirit
 - b. It is the same Holy Spirit is urging us to salvation
 - c. It is the same Holy Spirit that asks us to get baptized
 - d. It is the same Holy Spirit that causes us to change our lives...to stop sinning...to turn from our selfishness

- e. It is the same Holy Spirit urging us to fellowship with Christ...and other Christians like us
 - f. It is the same Holy Spirit that causes us to worship God
5. Acts 2:41 Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.
- a. Again I want to point out...baptism is not required for salvation...the thief on the cross...next to Jesus...proves that
 - b. Baptism is a reflection...of what is happening inside our heart...as an outward act...many times our first act of obedience to the Holy Spirit
 - c. 3000 were added to the church that day...I like that...added to the church
 - d. We will notice the Holy Spirit doesn't take a vacation once people are saved...and neither did the apostles
 - e. Salvation is for more than just being saved...there is a transformation...from the old man...into the new man...as a new creation
 - f. How do we know that...3000 went from shouting crucify Jesus to worshiping the same Jesus as Lord
 - g. Paul went from wanting to kill Christians...to being the servant of Jesus and the gospel
 - h. Here is my point I am trying to make...when Jesus gives the parable of the 4 soils...the seed is the word of God...and that never changes
 - i. The soil is the heart of man...and there are 4 reactions in the heart of man when the word of God gets into the soil
 - j. Only 1 of the soils get salvation creating multiplication...the other 3 do not

- k. The book of Acts doesn't end here...at salvation...the New testament doesn't end here in Acts 2...there is more to being a Christian
- l. The first church committed themselves in 4 areas starting in verse 42
- 6. Acts 2:42 **All** the believers **devoted** themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.
 - a. Notice all...not some of the believers...but all...notice what they did...they devoted or committed themselves in 4 areas
 - b. They committed themselves to the apostles' teaching...to fellowship...to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper)...and to prayer
 - c. In verse 40...Peter says save yourselves from this crooked generation
 - d. In Peter's time...the enemy of the gospel did not want them to meet...arrested the disciples
 - e. The enemy was trying to stop the church from doing these 4 things
 - f. The enemy today is trying to also stop the church from doing these same things
 - g. These are the 4 priorities of the first church...study the word...fellowship ...sharing...praying together...this seems really simple enough
 - h. So why does the enemy want to stop Christians from this activity
 - i. Because there is incredible spiritual power when the church does these things
 - j. So why does the church struggle to do these things...because the enemy doesn't want us doing these things

- k. There is a problem in verse 42 however...the problem is with the words all and devoted...I used the word...committed
 - l. Notice they weren't committed to a building...a program...a human charismatic leader...a new age movement
 - m. Notice it says...all...all the believers...committed themselves in these 4 areas
7. Slide...The first area is...They were committed to the doctrinal teaching of the apostles
- a. There are some who say...it is all about Jesus...and not the doctrine
 - b. There are some...who selfishly change what the Bible actually says...in order to fit their own agenda
 - c. There are those who don't deal with certain aspects of the Bible
 - d. Because they don't want to do what it takes...to gain victory in that area...
 - e. It is challenging to teach the word without offending someone...and that will cause people to leave the building
 - f. This is why there are 1st 2nd and 3rd churches...across the street from each other...why there is several denominations...and many cults
 - g. There are those who water down the doctrine...to win people to themselves ... not to God...we call it the seeker friendly church
 - h. There are those churches that believe following the Spirit only...and then add a scripture out of context...the radical hyper spiritual churches
 - i. There are those churches that teach only the doctrine only...and kill what the Holy Spirit is doing because it makes them uncomfortable

8. Slide...To much doctrine you will dry up...to much Holy Spirit you will blow up...and just the right amount of each...you will grow up
 - a. It is the proper teaching of God's word that keeps the balance...when the teacher is afforded the opportunity to teach the true without fear
 - b. Jesus said to the pharisees...you are ignorant...because you don't know...or you understand the scriptures
 - c. Jesus said in John 8...they are seeds of Satan...rather than children of God
 - d. In Hosea is says...that God's people are being destroyed
 - e. Because they are not committed to the scriptures...to fellowship with God ...to sharing in meals at the tabernacle...and to prayer

9. Hos 4:6-9, 6 My people are being destroyed because they don't know me. Since you priests refuse to know me, I refuse to recognize you as my priests. Since you have forgotten the laws of your God, I will forget to bless your children.7 The more priests there are, the more they sin against me. (the 1st 2nd 3rd church) They have exchanged the glory of God for the shame of idols. 8 "When the people bring their sin offerings, the priests get fed. So the priests are glad when the people sin! 9 'And what the priests do, the people also do.' So now I will punish both priests and people for their wicked deeds.
 - a. How easily man can fall away from doctrine...fellowship...sharing meals...and praying...in exchange for what
 - b. The priest have refused to know God...for idols...man-made objects
 - c. They have caused the people to do the same

- d. Can the priorities of the first church...be the priorities of the church today...I say yes
- e. I don't want to be more concerned about the number of people in the door ...over telling the truth
- f. I am committed to scripture...and will use scripture to interpret scripture
- g. I am committed to teach verse by verse in order to get the whole council of God
- h. Next aspect of the first church

10. Slide...The 2nd area is...They were committed to fellowship

- a. When we read in verse 42 that the early believers devoted themselves to fellowship... what it's saying
- b. Relationships only happens when your relate...that is a deep truth
- c. When you relate with each other...you support each other...encourage each other...educate each other...help each other grow in faith...
- d. While the enemy knows there is power in fellowship...and wants to stop it
- e. The enemy works on us...to come up with some justifications...as to not desiring to go to church
- f. I'm too busy...to tired...I don't like that person...the church is not meeting my needs
- g. The enemy will cause members of the church...to be stand offish...in order to make a new person not feel welcome
- h. These things are an attack of the enemy to remove the power of the church for fellowship

- i. How serious is the attack of the enemy today...look at how many people are attending church over the internet...at home by themselves
- j. The greater the isolation from fellowship...the greater the danger
- k. People will ask the question...do I really need to have fellowship to be a Christian
- l. Do you need to ask this question...since Christians have been meeting for 2000 years
- m. Fellowship is so important to Christ...that He tore the veil so we could enter the most holy place...to have fellowship with the Father

11. Heb 10:20-25, 20 By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. 21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, 22 let **us** go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. 24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

12. Slide...The 3rd area is... They were committed to sharing meals, including the Lord's supper

- a. How many churches have kitchens...that are not being used anymore

- b. I believe the key word is...sharing...which I believe is show each other love...it is an action of ones heart...caring for others...by sharing
- c. Sharing food...creates family...creates trust...it causes us to serve each other...even the servant gets to accept service from each other
- d. It creates a bond...you don't ask your enemy to lunch...fellowship happens when eating together
- e. Studies have shown that a family that eats together...is less likely to have children who are rebellious
- f. There are so many examples of people eating together in the Bible
- g. But the one I want to point out...is the tabernacle...which was a place for worship...sacrifice...fellowship...prayer...and eating together

13. Slide...The 4th area is...They were committed to prayer

- a. Paul says to pray without ceasing
- b. The Bible gives us many examples of corporate prayer...praying together is very powerful...unity in prayer is more powerful than we think
- c. Witches and warlocks are afraid of a praying church
- d. The enemy works very hard on us...to get us to not desire to pray...why... because there is power in prayer
- e. Here is the results of the church doing these 4 things

14. Acts 2:43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.

- a. Notice it says...fear come over them...and then...the apostles preformed miracles

b. It wasn't the miracles that caused the awe...

15. Slide...Doing the 4 devotions of the church is what caused the awe

a. The togetherness of doing what God desired the church to do...caused the awe...not the other way around

b. According to verse 43...the power of the church doing these things...caused a reverent fear...

c. Tell me reverent fear isn't lacking in many churches today

d. I know miracle still happen...and I have seen what this kind of fellowship is capable of...the miracle of changed lives...forgiveness...and healings