



SERMON NOTES: THE CHURCH BEYOND 2: BEYOND THE EARLY CHURCH (10/4/16)

SCRIPTURE

Acts 2:41-47

⁴¹ So those who accepted his message were baptised, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them. ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.

⁴³ Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. ⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. ⁴⁶ Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favour with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

KEY POINTS

- + Churches often look at this passage with a sense of idealistic longing to 'get back to' a picture of what the church looked like in these early days. We need to be aware of a few assumptions in this perspective:
 - + that a utopia uncorrupted by systems and authority is both possible and ideal
 - + that this model of meeting and sharing was unique and revolutionary in its day (other groups operating similarly existed at the time)
- + What did set the church apart was the cross, the understanding of God's kingdom, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Other groups faded away after a generation but the church continued to rapidly grow.
- + It's important to remember that verse 41 begins this picture—the early church was made up of thousands of people and experienced significant momentum. Without the early church going

'beyond itself', we would not have the church today.

- + This passage reveals four key markers of the early church that should characterise church today, too:
 - + **devotion to teaching**
 - + **fellowship** (different to community; involves the giving up of individual rights for the sake of the Kingdom)
 - + **breaking bread together** (Jesus being the centre of life)
 - + **prayer** (dependence on the Spirit)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- + Has this passage influenced your understanding of what church 'should look like'? What other parts of the bible help shape your view?
 - + What misconceptions might need to be challenged in our looking back to the early church as the blueprint for church today?
 - + What does the early church exemplify as core/non-negotiable things for us today?
- + Church growth raises creative tensions—how to foster relationships in small group settings as well as large gatherings; how to be open to all and manage a diverse community etc. What kind of tensions do you see arising as the church grows, and how can we move forward in the power of the Spirit?
- + Acts 2:41-47 and 4:32-37 talk about the sharing of possessions and the giving of land. Property was inherited through generations and was strongly tied to families' rights and identity. What compelled people to give this up for God's work through the church? Have you seen examples of this in the church today? How can we as a church be surrendering our rights and identity to the work of God's kingdom?

- + **What stuck out to you from the teaching?** Did God remind you of something, or reveal something new? Did the Spirit minister to you?
- + **Were any questions raised for you?** Did you get stuck on any scriptures or points? Anything you need clarity on?
- + **Where do we see Jesus Christ in this teaching?** Jesus is at the centre of everything in the Scriptures. It follows that he is at the centre of everything we understand about church, faith and the Kingdom. What in the teaching has helped you see more of Jesus and the cross, or moved you to love him more?
- + **How can you personally apply this teaching?** Identify and commit to something you sense the Spirit is leading you to do in obedient response. Make it actionable and personal. What is in place to help you stay accountable to this?
- + **What/with whom can you share from here?** Who in your life needs to know the truth you've discovered? How can you share it with them?