

The Amazing First-Century Church

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Date Preached: January 14, 2001

Main Scripture Text: Acts 2:22–26

“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.”

ACTS 2:22

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Introduction

Would you find Acts chapter 2, where we left off this morning, and we're talking tonight about The Amazing First-Century Church. And we are thinking about what kind of a church God wants Bellevue Baptist Church to be: a New Testament church. A Spirit-filled, Bible-believing, Christ-honoring church is a mighty weapon in the hands of a holy God. Again, I want to say, God's pattern is found right here in the book of Acts.

Do you have the feeling that God is giving the church one last mighty urge for the revival of all revivals before the night of all nights comes? I have that feeling. I also have a feeling that the world is looking at us one more time. They have tried everything—every form of government, every kind of leader, every excess of pleasure, everything that money can buy, that hearts desire, that minds can conceive—and they’ve found nothing satisfies. And they’re wondering one more time, do we have the answer? And the answer is, Yes! But, when they look at us, I wonder what they’re going to see.

Nietzsche—actually, Hitler was a disciple of Nietzsche—Nietzsche was a cynic, an atheist, an ungodly, lascivious man. He looked at the church; he considered Christianity. Do you know what he said? He said, If you want me to believe in your redeemer, you’re going to have to look a little more redeemed. Now, you think about it. This world gets their idea of Jesus Christ, not from us, not from the Word of God, because they don’t read it; they get that from us.

Now, I’m going to give you, now, a description of a church triumphant, and I’m going to ask God to make our church that kind of a church. I want to mention the three major purposes of Bellevue Baptist Church. Now, we know we have our mission statement: Bellevue Baptist Church exists for the purpose of magnifying Jesus through worship and the Word, and moving believers in Jesus toward maturity and ministry, and making Jesus known to our neighbors and the nations. And, this theme, living supernaturally, the overarching theme is, making Jesus known. But I want us to kind of put away our mission statement, and look at a different mission statement, in a sense, or just from a different perspective, found right here in the second chapter of the book of Acts. Now, if you were here this morning, you know we talked about the principles of power, and the Holy Spirit of God. But now, once we have that anointing, that power, what do we do? What is our purpose?

I. We Are to Exalt the Savior

Well, number one: we are to exalt the Savior. Now, begin now in verse 22 of this chapter. The day of Pentecost is come, all of these signs and wonders have been done, the Holy Spirit has come and baptized that motley crew into the body of Christ, and Peter stands up to preach the gospel, and here’s what he says, in verses 22 through 26: “Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know. Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death because it was not possible that he should behold him of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand that I should not be moved.

Therefore did my heart rejoice and my tongue was glad. Moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope.”

Now, Peter preached a message, and it was simple to see that it was a plain, Christ-centered gospel message. The church grew because they lifted up Jesus. Jesus said, “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.” No church, in my estimation, is going to be a growing vibrant church that does not exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. We at Bellevue Baptist Church have learned to make much of Jesus. I hope we will always do that. I tell our choirs and I tell our ministers of music, Don’t sing any songs that a Unitarian could enjoy. Glorify the Lord Jesus; magnify the Lord Jesus.

Some churches reserve Sunday morning for God the Father, Sunday night for God the Son, and Wednesday night for God the Spirit. Now, not really, but you know, there’s sort of an emphasis like that on Sunday morning—they just want to speak of God, and there’s nothing wrong with that. Of course, we should magnify God the Father, but every service—every service—must exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you believe that? I do, because He is the attracting power of the church. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.”

Now, notice the message that Peter preached concerning Jesus.

A. Peter Preached About the Manner of Jesus’ Life

First of all, he preached about the manner of His life. Look in verse 22. He says there that, “he was a man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him.” Somebody wrote this about the manner of Jesus’ life, and I love it. Said, I’m far within a mark when I say that all of the armies that ever marched, and all of the navies that ever were built, and all of the parliaments that ever have sat, and all of the kings that ever have reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as the one solitary life Jesus of Nazareth. Think about that. Here was a man born two thousand years ago, and tonight this building is filled with people who say, I love Him with all of my heart, including the man who is preaching. Jesus Christ is real to me.

B. Peter Preached About the Meaning of Jesus’ Death

And so, first of all, Peter preached about the manner of His life. And then, he preached about the meaning of His death. Look in verse 23: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, have ye taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Now, what’s he saying here? He’s saying that Jesus Christ’s death was not an accident, it was not an incident; it was planned before the foundation of the earth. The determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Nothing went wrong. God was not up there in heaven wringing His hands and saying, Oh, how terrible that this has come to pass. And the purpose of the cross, as we learn from this message, is

substitution—the just for the unjust, Christ died for us; He took our place.

And we must not only speak of His sinless, spotless life, but His vicarious death, that He died upon that cross to pay the sin debt. Take that message out, and forget the rest. And yet, there are many who want to take the message of the cross of Jesus Christ out. That's like taking water out of a well, blue out of the sky, notes out of music, and numbers out of mathematics. You don't have anything left, if you take the death of Jesus Christ for our sins out.

C. Peter Preached About the Miracle of Jesus' Resurrection

But not only as the exalted Savior did he speak of the manner of His life, and the meaning of His death, but he also spoke of the miracle of His resurrection. Continue, verse 24: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." Death cannot keep his prey. There's no way possible that death could keep Jesus in the grave.

I read years ago about a spider who saw a great massive lion with a great mane go into a cave to sleep. And the spider thought, I will imprison that lion in that cave. And so, he said, I will spin a web to keep the lion in the cave, and so he crisscrossed the mouth of that cave with his web, and he spun and he spun and he spun and he spun, almost spun himself away, and there was the spider's web. Then came the time when the old lion awoke from his nap and he gave a ROARRR that caused the mountains to tremble, shook the dust off his old mane, walked out of that cave, never knew the web was there. Friend, I thought of the resurrection of our Savior. And old death says, I'll keep Him in, we'll put Him there, and He will not rise; but up from the grave He rose, the mighty triumph o'er His foes.

D. Peter Preached About the Magnificence of Jesus' Reign

And what Peter preached on this day of Pentecost, anointed with the Holy Spirit, was Jesus, the manner of His life—signs, wonders, miracles; the meaning of His death—by the predetermine counsel of God; the miracle of His resurrection. And then, the magnificence of His reign. Look, if you will, in verse 33 now: "Therefore, being on the right hand of God, exalted and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, which he hath shed forth: this, which ye do now see and hear. For David has not ascended into the heavens, but he says himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool." Not if, when; or maybe, but until. Thank God for the until.

Where is Jesus right now? He has ascended the high hills of glory. Where is He? He is seated on the right hand of the majesty on high, and He is waiting till that time when God gives the signal, and He will step from His throne back down to this earth to rule and reign. But Peter preached on that day that Jesus is exalted, that He is Lord of lords

and King of kings. And I'm going to tell you something: you may not be a believer. Maybe you're listening through the radio tonight. You may not be a believer, but I can tell you with all of the authority of the Word of God, and unction and function and emotion of my soul: one day you will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. I don't care who you are? Saddam Hussein, if you get hold of this tape, you're going to confess it. I don't care who you are, where you are: "every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" to the glory of God the Father.

II. We Are to Evangelize the Sinner

And so, what do we do as a church? What is our duty? What is our privilege? What is our joy? What is our mandate? It is, first of all, to exalt the Savior. Now, until we do that, we have not done anything. But, secondly, not only must we exalt the Savior; secondly, we must evangelize the sinner. Now, continue to read now, and look, if you will, in verses 37 through 41 in this passage of Scripture: "Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do?" Let me tell you what true evangelism is. Let me tell you what true salvation is. Let me give you the marks of it. They're right here.

What are the steps in a true conversion?

A. They Must Be Convicted by the Lord

First of all, people must be convicted by the Spirit. Verse 37, do you hear this—do you see it? "When they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts." I've preached enough to know that there are services where there is no conviction. My heart grieves, and I wonder, Lord, is it me? Am I the one that has failed to pray and seek your face? Is there coldness? Have you been in a service when you just couldn't explain it, the people began to weep or tremble, and there's the moving of the Spirit of God? I think we sang tonight, All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down. Don't just saunter in here and sit down, and chatter a little bit, without praying and saying, O God, send your convicting power.

B. They Must Be Converted to the Lord

See, first of all, they must be convicted by the Lord, and then they're converted to the Lord. Look now in verse 38: "They said, What shall we do?" They said that because they were pricked in the heart. Now, verse 38: "Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." To repent means to change your mind. I've told you that this morning. It's a Greek word *metanoia*, which means a change of mind. To change your mind about what? Change your mind about sin. In my estimation, you've never been saved, if you've never changed your mind about sin. Jesus said, in Luke

13:3, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

But not only does it change your mind about sin; it’s a change of mind about self. You say, I can’t; I don’t have what it takes to overcome this sin, and you have completely no more confidence in the flesh. And not only is it a change of mind about sin, and a change of mind about self, but it’s a change of mind about Jesus Christ, about God himself. You’re saying, He is my only hope; I put my faith where God has put my sins, upon the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is a conversion. You say, Pastor Rogers, this verse doesn’t say anything about faith. No it doesn’t, but faith is there. Repentance and faith are the heads and tails of the same coin. Or you cannot turn to God without turning from sin. You cannot turn from sin truly without turning to God.

One time, I was preaching in the old building, and one of these Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary students came up to me—he hadn’t been a student very long, but he wanted to rebuke me a little bit. And he said, Now, you were telling people how to be saved, but he said, you never mentioned repentance. I said, Oh, that’s interesting. I said, Do you know what book in the Bible—the whole book—tells us how to be saved? What book is that? “These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ and believing you might have life through his name.” He wasn’t quite sure, so I told him. It’s the Gospel of John. I said, Now, son, go home and read the Gospel of John all the way through, and see if you can find the word repent one time. It’s not there, but how to be saved is there.

C. They Must Confess the Lord

Now, you cannot turn to God in faith without repenting. You cannot repent without turning to God in faith. But it is a conversion; it is a turning, coming to God. You must be convicted by the Lord; you must be converted to the Lord; and, thirdly, you must make a confession of the Lord. Look, if you will, in verse 38—he says, “Repent and be baptized,”—not some of you—“every one of you.”

Now, does baptism save you? No, but if you repent, and you’re truly saved, you ought to be baptized. Baptism is the outer expression of what takes place in your heart. I am not convinced that anybody is truly saved who says, I know I ought to be baptized, but I’m not going to. Jesus asked a good question. He said, Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not the thing that I say? How can you say that Christ is your Lord when He has commanded baptism, and you’re nonchalant or oblivious to it? His Great Commission says, “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever things I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.”

Do you know what New Testament confession of Jesus Christ was? Not coming down the carpeted aisle and shaking hands with a preacher—nothing wrong with that;

I'm going to ask you to do that tonight—but that is the precursor to the real confession of Christ, which is baptism. That is the confession of Christ. That—open, public baptism—is the way that you acknowledge and you confess the Lord Jesus Christ. You identify with Christ in the water of believer's baptism. By what right do you claim to be a disciple of Jesus Christ if you've not had believer's baptism? I didn't say sprinkling; I said baptism. Sprinkling is not baptism. And I said, believer's baptism—that happens after you have received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. If you were baptized before you're saved, that's like having your funeral before you die. You've gotten it backward. The Bible never says, be baptized and believe; it's always believe and be baptized. There is a confession of the Lord. It says, I belong to Him.

I read somewhere years ago about a little boy who got saved in the children's church—not the big worship service, but in the children's church service. The pastor of the children's church service said to the little fellow, Now, you need to go over and tell them over at big church that you've been saved, and you need to get baptized. Well, he didn't quite understand what we understand, so he went and told the pastor, I've been saved, and I need to get advertised. That's very true. Once you get saved, you get advertised. You're saying, Here, I belong to Jesus Christ. I want everybody who sees me to know that I have been buried with Him by baptism into death, and raised to walk in newness of life. I am identifying myself with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

D. They Must Yield to Control by the Lord

What is the evangelization of the sinner? Number one: it is the conviction by the Lord; it is conversion to the Lord; it is a confession of the Lord; and, it is control by the Lord. Look again in verse 38, if you will here: "And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." That is, he comes into you to control you. The Holy Spirit takes possession now of the person who has been bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Real salvation is not just to believe something, or to achieve something, but to receive someone. The Holy Spirit of God comes into you. Real salvation is not just going to heaven when you die—that's a byproduct. Salvation is not getting man out of earth into heaven; it is getting God out of heaven into man.

E. They Must Have a Continuance with the Lord

First of all, there's conviction, then there's conversion, then there's confession, and then there is control, and, finally, there is continuance. Look, if you will, in verses 41 and 42 of this same chapter: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls, and they continued steadfastly." As I told you the Sunday before last, Jesus did not call us to make decisions; he called us to make disciples. "They continued steadfastly"—a continuance

with the Lord.

Now, that's what we're about in evangelizing. That's why we preach, that's why we teach, that's why we have Faith, that's why we have E. E.: that people might be convicted, that they might be converted, that they might make a confession of Jesus, that they might be controlled by the Holy Spirit, and that they might go on and on with God in continuance, and continue steadfastly.

III. We Are to Enlist the Saints

Now, here's the third thing that we want to do: not only exalt the Savior, not only evangelize the sinner, but we want to enlist the saints. Once we get them saved, what do we do? Well, begin now in verse 42 again, and look: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." A little boy again didn't understand what the word doctrine meant. Somebody asked him, What is doctrine? He said, That's what folks need when they're sick. I said, Amen, we need a lot of it. Great churches are Bible-centered. They continued in the apostles' doctrine. That's just another way of saying they continued in the Word of God, because the Word of God came through these apostles.

A. We Enlist Them in Bible Study

And so, how do we enlist people here at Bellevue Baptist Church? Well, first of all, we get them in Bible study. Now, we do that here, what we call Bible Fellowship classes. How many of you are in a Bible fellowship class? Let me see your hands. All right, the rest of you, in about one or two nights, two in the morning, we're going to drive past your house real slow, and we're going to throw a brick through your living room window. And on that brick is going to be tied a dead duck and a note, and the note's going to say, This dead duck is you, if you don't get in a Bible Fellowship class. Folks, listen to me.

You are missing a major part of Bellevue, if you're not in a Bible Fellowship class. Believe me. You say, Well, Pastor Rogers, I just don't need it. Yes, you do. That's the little country church. That's how they know you by name. That's how they miss you when you're sick. That's how they pray for you when you're sick, and if you go to the hospital, come over and cut your grass, and minister you. That's where you have fellowship; that's for prayer, care, share—there in that class. And so, we're going to enlist people in Bible study.

B. We Enlist Them in Fellowship

But also, we're going to enlist them in fellowship. Notice, if you will, in verse 42 again: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine"—watch this—"and fellowship"—fellowship. We just dedicated a fellowship building. Now, there are some people that think that fellowship is incidental. No! Fellowship is absolutely fundamental. The Bible

does not teach a lone ranger Christianity. I need you. You need me.

I was reading this afternoon an interesting passage of Scripture concerning the apostle Paul. Do you think the mighty apostle Paul had such a walk with Jesus? Did he need fellowship? Listen to this verse. It's Acts 28 verse 15. Paul has been through a shipwreck. He's been trying to get to Rome. Finally, he lands on the shores of Italy, and this is what it says: "And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as the Appii forum and the three taverns, whom, when Paul saw"—now, when he saw these brethren—"whom when Paul saw he thanked God and took courage." I love that. Here's the mighty apostle Paul, these brothers go out and meet him now. He's tired, worn, bedraggled, and when he saw them, he said, Oh, thank God! And he took courage.

Hebrews chapter 10, verses 24 and 25, says, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more." We need fellowship. Why do we build a fellowship building? For this purpose: for fellowship. Now, that's not the only way to have fellowship, but I'm grateful for the building.

Do you know what our challenge here is at Bellevue Baptist Church because we're a large church? Our challenge is two-fold. Number one, to grow; and number two, to stay small. How many of you ever heard anybody say, I just determined I wasn't going to go to Bellevue because it's too big. How many have ever heard anybody say that? It's universal. I'm not going to Bellevue because it's too big, and then they say, But, I came. That was my first mistake. I came, and I got hooked.

Now, people say that big churches are cold. Well, be reasonable. If big churches are cold, how do they get to be big churches? No. Big churches don't have to be cold; big churches can be full of big love. But there's a danger with a big church. The danger is that we can have wonderful programs, and we can become program-centered rather than relationship-centered. Now, friendliness is a sine qua non, a prime requisite for any growing church, and I can't do that by myself. I can say with a full heart, You're so welcome here; but people—listen to me—it is up to you. If you're not friendly, this will not be a friendly church, and we have to grow in fellowship.

I was reading some statistics about what causes people to come to churches. What do you think causes people to come to churches? Well, here's what the statistics say. Nearly 50% of people who filled out these surveys said they went to this or that church, number one, because of friendliness. Number one, nearly 50%. Fifteen percent said they came because of programs. Twelve percent said location—12%. Well, let me ask you a question: Your friends that you choose—do you put a point on a map and then just kind of draw a circle around it, and then say, Well, I won't have any friends except in this circle? No. Not with the day of automobiles. People drive across town to

restaurants; they go to ballgames; they go here, there. People do not come to churches anymore because it happens to be in the neighborhood. A few may, but they do not come primarily because of location. Only 12% said location, and 12% said belief.

Now, you would think it would be different. You know, sometimes I'm amazed at people who move away from Bellevue Baptist Church, and they said, Pastor, we joined thus and such a church over in thus and such a town, and I said, Oh, good night, how could they do that? Don't they know what that church believes? Don't they know what those people practice? But, evidently, the nincompoops are oblivious. Doctrine doesn't seem to make them much difference. I'm not saying that it's not important; it's very important. I'm just saying, how do people's minds work, when they're looking for a church? Only 12% said belief, and 12% said location. Seven percent said denomination. Again, almost 50% said friendliness. That's just another way of saying fellowship. And let me tell you, folks, we need to work at this. When people come in here, they need a look, they need a nod, they need a word, they need a touch. They need this hands-on ministry. Those of you who are Bible Fellowship leaders and teachers—how many of you are Bible Fellowship teachers? Let me see your hands. All right, how many of you have another job in your Bible Fellowship—maybe you're a greeter, a leader, something?

All right now, listen. When those people come into that fellowship, and especially if they're here for the first time, they are very apprehensive. And especially if they are not Baptists, don't know anything about Baptists—you'd be surprised what people think about Baptists; really, you may not be surprised what some of them think about it. They think weird things. I've talked to a lady who believed that you had to take off all your clothes to get baptized. She believed it! It's amazing what people think.

Now, listen. Suppose you were invited, you had neighbors, and they invited you to a Buddhist temple; they're Buddhist, and they kept after you and after you, and after a while, you said, Well, honey, we've just got to go. So, we go. They say, Well, we'll pick you up. You said, Well, I'll tell you what: we'll just take our car. When you say that, why? Because you want to be able to leave when you want to leave, and so forth. And when you go there, you'll be wondering, Am I going to do something wrong? All these people looking at me—I wonder what they're thinking about me, what are they going to do next? Friend, fear is a terrible thing, and what we need to do is to reduce the fear element.

And every Bible Fellowship class needs to have some greeters. Now, a greeter doesn't wear a badge that says greeter, friendly person. No! Practice greeting people. Practice smiling. You know you have to practice smiling. Sometimes, when I have a guest preacher, I'll sit over there like Brother Mark, and afterward, people come up to me and say, Pastor, you don't feel good today, do you? What's the matter, Pastor—you

sick? Not sick, I just sit there. I'm not preaching, not animated, and I'm not aware that my countenance has fallen. I feel perfectly happy, joyful and everything else; I just don't want to sit up there with a gooney grin. Folks, the most attractive part of you is your smile. A smile is a passport to almost anywhere.

Get some greeters, informal, no badges, and then get some hosts and hostesses who wear a badge so they, if they want to go and ask a question, they can go. And I want to say a word of thanks to the ushers of Bellevue Baptist Church who do such a wonderful job every Sunday making people feel welcome. Now, we are to exalt the Savior; we are to evangelize the sinner; we are to enlist the saints.

C. We Enlist Them in Worship

We enlist them in Bible Study, we enlist them in fellowship, and we enlist them in worship. Look in verse 42: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and in breaking of bread and prayers." Now, most exegetes believe breaking of bread here refers to the Lord's Supper, and prayer obviously is worship, as they're praying together. We need to always maintain the worship service. That's the first point in our mission statement: magnifying Jesus through worship and the Word. I could say more there, but I'm going to move on.

D. We Enlist Them in Stewardship

We must enlist them also in stewardship. Look, if you will here, in verses 43 through 45: "And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles, and all that believed were together,"—now, watch this—"and had all things common and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need." Talk about Bible stewardship—there it is, folks. None of them said, What I have is mine. Lord, if you want it, you can have it. There was an emergency; there was persecution there.

Some people think this is talking about communism. It was not communism for a number of reasons. Number one: it was temporary. Number two: it was based on belief in God. Number three: it was church-controlled. And, number four: it was voluntary.

But the point is this: that everything that they owned was at the disposal of the Lord Jesus Christ. Is everything you own at the disposal of Jesus? I mean, honestly, if He asked for your last penny, would you give it to Him? I'm not saying He will, but if He did, you should. It all belongs to Him. That's the last thing that we want to release: our finances, our material possessions. It all belongs to God. Don't get the idea that one-tenth belongs to God and the rest is yours, for your pleasure, for your squandering. It all belongs to God. One-tenth is only a sign that it all belongs to God. Don't get the idea that one day belongs to God, and six are for you. Every day belongs to God, and He is to be the Lord over it all. And we're to teach this kind of stewardship.

So many of us are afraid that we're going to over-give. You can't out-give God. You shovel out, He shovels in; He's got a bigger shovel. Two men were talking. One said, Do you tithe before or after taxes? The other man said, I tithe before taxes. He said, Why is that? He says, God gets more that way. And I'll tell you something: I believe that man gets more also, because God loves the man who can trust Him with his finances.

Now, I'm not trying to tell you to give things God doesn't tell you to give—that's presumptuous. I'm just simply saying, Hey, you tell the Lord, Lord, whatever you want me to do. You know how we built the fellowship building? Let me tell you something, folks—and I give God the glory for this: that building is paid for. That building has been paid for by three ways. Number one: our people have over-given the budget. Number two: our staff has under-spent the budget. Number three: we take an annual Love Offering and put those things together. That has enabled us to do that. Isn't that wonderful?

And you know what I tell folks when we take the Love Offering? Pastors say, How do you raise this money? I say, I tell our people that what you do not willingly and joyfully give, God neither needs nor wants. We don't go around wringing people's arms and trying to make them give. Listen. You can't fall in love with Jesus and not want to give. I mean, you cannot love the Lord and not want to give. You cannot have the Christ that Peter was preaching about, when he said, exalt the Savior; you can't have that without wanting to give—to give. And so, we have to enlist people in stewardship. And we have to keep giving and keep giving. You say, Well, when we get our buildings built, then we can stop. No, that's when we'll really start, because now we're going to be reaching out and out and out and out, sharing Jesus Christ with this community, and sharing Jesus Christ with this state, and sharing Jesus Christ with this world, and we're going to be pouring more and more money into reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

E. We Enlist Them in Evangelism

So, that brings me to the next some. Not only do we enlist them in stewardship, but we enlist them in evangelism. Notice here again in verse 46, now: "And they continued daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house and did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people,"—now, watch this—"and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." This church was a growing church. There's nothing wrong with a small church, nothing wrong with a big church. There's something wrong with any church that's in an area where there are a lot of lost people, and the church is not growing. The church is to grow.

This early church was perhaps in size the greatest church in church history. Are you ready to do a little arithmetic? Let me show you something. You just get your Bibles now, lick your fingers—look in Acts chapter 1 and verse 15: "And in those days Peter

stood up in the midst of the disciples and said,”—now here’s a parenthesis in the Word of God—“the number of names together were about a hundred and twenty.” All right, so we start with 120. The 12 had become 120. Now, look in Acts 2, verse 41: “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” Pretty good church growth. Now, they’re 3,120.

But now go to Acts 2, verse 47. It speaks of them praising God, and having favor with all the people. “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Now, we don’t even know how many this was, but every day—every day—souls are getting saved. More every day, not just on Sunday. Now, go to Acts chapter 4, and look, if you will, in verse 4. And they had another service, and the Bible says here, “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed, and the number of men was about five thousand.” Now, it doesn’t say five thousand were saved; it says the number of men that were saved were five thousand. So let’s just give each man a wife and two children. That’s 20,000 right there, if the rest of the family came to the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, now the church that’s been growing every day takes this 3,120, plus those which came in every day, which probably now they have 20,000; we add another 20,000—that’s 45,000 members in just a few days.

And then, look, if you will now, in Acts chapter 5, and look, if you will now, in verse 28. They are rebuking the disciples for the preaching, and here’s what they said to them: “Did we not straightly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.” By the way, that’s what I’m calling the church to do, is to fill this city with the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is our Jerusalem. They said, You have filled this city. They literally saturated this city with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, look in Acts chapter 6 and verse 7: “And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.” Remember what I said there in Acts 2: “the Lord added to them daily such as should be saved.” No more addition now; now, it’s multiplication. The church is growing exponentially. B. H. Carroll, the founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, said that this church had a membership in excess of 65,000 members in the first six months—65,000 in the first six months. G. Campbell Morgan said, No, it was more like 250,000 in the first six months. Talk about big churches. Listen. Do you think God wants everybody to go to hell? Do you think God just doesn’t want people reached for Christ? We’re not going to get 250,000 in this building, but we can build some other buildings somewhere. We can help some other churches to grow. We can send some workers to other churches, if they’re not growing. And we can find places to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, if we will enlist the saints.

Conclusion

Now, here's what we exist to do: to exalt the Savior, evangelize the sinner, and enlist the saints. Not complicated, is it? Not complicated at all. Question: Does this excite you? Would you like to be a part of that? Or, do you just want to draw your breath, draw your salary, drag into heaven with a wasted life? All right, give God a hand, if you want to do what you ought to do.

And these days we're going to be talking about making Jesus known to our neighbors and the nations, and we're going to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Bellevue's not going to stop growing, and we're not going to do it all at one time, and we're not going to do it haphazardly. And don't get antsy, and say, Well, I don't see a whole lot happening. You know what we do around here? We lay a lot of groundwork, we make plans, we try to do it as strategically, but by God's grace, and by God's glory, we will do it. And we're going to be in the business of making Jesus known by living supernaturally. We cannot do it naturally, but friend, there's enough power in heaven, if we'll wait for the anointing, if we will learn the Word of God, if we will be obedient, we can see our city impacted for Jesus Christ.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Would you say, Lord, make me a part of that vision; Lord, I don't want to be just a drone; I don't want to be just a Sunday night bench warmer; I want to be a part of that vision; show me, Lord, what part I'm to have? And then, would you pray for the pastor? Would you say, God bless Pastor; give him wisdom; give him strength as he leads? Would you pray for the staff—God give them an anointing; give them strength; give them unity? Would you pray for our dear deacons—God keep them pure; help them to be men of God; help them to have truly a servant spirit? Would you pray for the leaders of our Bible Fellowship classes—O God, may they take their assignments seriously; may they care for those in their class? Pray for them. Father God, let your hand be upon this dear church, and Lord, give us a ministry that reaches out across denominational and racial barriers, against socioeconomic barriers, that reaches out over prejudice, and pride, and selfishness, to share Jesus. In His dear name we pray. Amen.