

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it –
but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

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Text

Acts 2:41-47

Topic

The believers were marked by having all things in common as three-thousand were added in one day, then more each subsequent day

Title

The Marks of Commonism

Acts 2:41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Acts 2:43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

Acts 2:44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,

Acts 2:45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

Acts 2:46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

Acts 2:47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Introduction

Church growth is a major emphasis in many Churches today; sometimes, it is THE major emphasis. Numbers and statistics become the measure of success.

On the other end of the spectrum are Christians who don't appreciate numerical growth. They criticize large Churches as mega-Churches that are unsatisfying and maybe unscriptural.

We just read the account of the first day and subsequent days of the Church Jesus founded. What did we see?

For one thing, **we saw that it became a mega-Church in less than a day!** Twice in the text we read the word **added** – in verse forty-one and then again in verse forty-seven. Three-thousand were **added** in one day; then more were **added** each subsequent day, continuing to the present. Jesus must not be opposed to Church growth.

But we also saw that the growth was **simple**. It wasn't due to the goal-setting of the apostles; it wasn't the result of any program. Church growth was the supernatural work of God, and the continued working of God supernaturally through His people.

Jesus definitely wants to add **souls** to His Church; but He wants it to proceed in a simple way.

Church growth should be by simple addition. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Follows A Simple Formula For Adding Souls To His Church, and #2 Follow Jesus- With A Simple Faithfulness And Souls Are Added To His Church.

- being changed to bring change -
#1 Jesus Follows A Simple Formula
For Adding Souls To His Church
(v41-42)

There really is a huge Church growth movement. Local Churches all over America are adopting the programs of one or two mega-Churches and hoping for similar results. I personally think it is sad when Church leaders would prefer to be led by other Church leaders rather than by the Holy Spirit.

Critics of the Church-growth movement call it "seeker-sensitive" to point out that often the participating Churches are adopting programs and methods whose main goal seems to be making unbelievers feel comfortable. In many cases the criticism is valid. A Church should make unbelievers feel physically welcome, but not spiritually

comfortable. After all, if you are explaining the Gospel, you've got to let people know they are sinners. There has to be conviction of sin in order for there to be conversion to Christ.

We don't need to adopt the programs of any other contemporary Church. We only need to follow the simple formula of the first Church.

Acts 2:41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added *to them*.

I commented on this verse last week, in the context of water baptism. I only repeat it this week because it introduces the life of the first Church.

Anyone who has a problem with large or mega-Churches has a problem with Jesus! He poured-out the Holy Spirit upon the one-hundred twenty; then upon **about three thousand** more.

There is no perfect, Scriptural size for a local Church. There is only the work God is doing in and through the local Church. If you had to choose, a large Church would be preferable **because more people were being added to it.**

Think of it this way: If I prefer a smaller Church, where my needs can be better met... *Where are folks who get saved supposed to go?*

- being changed to bring change -

For at least ten days, from the ascension of Jesus to the Day of Pentecost, the one-hundred twenty had been meeting together. Now they numbered three-thousand one-hundred twenty. How would the ministry change to accommodate the larger numbers?

In one sense – **the ministry did not change!** They did the same things in the larger group that they had been doing in the smaller group. They are the simple things that every Church should always be doing.

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

They **continued steadfastly**. The growth and development of their new spiritual life took priority over everything else.

How did they go about growing and developing? There are four factors in the Lord's formula. The first is **the apostles' doctrine**. The twelve men who had been with Jesus since the beginning of His ministry, and who were witnesses of His physical resurrection and ascension, taught the new believers everything they knew about the Lord.

You cannot and will not grow unless you are reading for yourself and hearing taught the Word of God. Thus Churches must emphasize the teaching of God's Word to believers for their edification. The best way to do that is to teach verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, book-by-book.

More than that: The teaching must emphasize the Person and work of Jesus. It must have a flavor of His grace, mercy, and love.

The second factor in the Lord's formula is **fellowship**. It is the English translation of the Greek word *koinonia*. It is a poor translation only because there is no English word that properly translates it. It is a deep, rich word that means because we share in the very nature of Jesus Christ as new creatures, we have a connection and unity with all other believers throughout the Church Age, and especially in a local gathering.

Koinonia is much more than gathering together. It means we have mutual responsibilities to encourage one another in our spiritual growth; it means we are supposed to stir-up one another to love and good works.

The third factor is **the breaking of bread** – with emphasis on a particular **bread**. Commentators and scholars almost universally agree that these words are referring to Communion, the Lord's Supper. Jesus gave it to us as an ordinance to follow as often as we like – *but often!* We read later on in the New Testament they shared Communion at least once a week, on Sunday, after a pot-luck meal called The Love Feast.

Believers should make every effort to share Communion with one another when it is offered.

The fourth factor is **prayers**. Since we're talking about the corporate gatherings, this reference to **prayers** means prayer meetings. It's great to be men and women who pray in our closets. We must come out of the closet! The Church must pray together.

That's it. That's the Lord's formula for the Church. Do it in a small Church; do it in a mega-Church. It worked for the one-hundred twenty; it worked for the three-thousand one-hundred twenty. It will work when five-thousand more are added in Acts 4:4. It went on working everywhere Churches were planted in the *Book of Acts*.

How are we doing?

Each of us must evaluate ourselves. Ask yourself, Am I a believer? If you are, then evaluate your steadfast continuance in the daily life of your Church.

As a Church, I'd give us good marks for teaching the Word. I'm not being prideful; and I'm not talking just about myself. We believe in the inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of the Word of God. We teach it verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, book-by-book. We teach it to children as well as adults. Our meetings are always Word-based.

As far as fellowship, we do a lot of it, and it is rich and meaningful. Again, on an individual basis, we need to evaluate whether or not we are stirring one-another up as we fellowship. Whenever we are together with other believers, we need to remember that Jesus is there with us. We should be open and ready to use the gifts He's given us. There are no purely 'social' gatherings among believers; we are spiritual first and foremost.

Communion is something we may need to do more of! Right now, we do it once a month. Nothing wrong with that... Except most of our people don't come out for it on the last Wednesday of the month. So we can pray about other times of offering it; and you can pray about coming when it is offered.

Prayers – as in prayer meetings – are always the lightest attended meetings. More of us should make an effort to pray before the Sunday morning services. Everyone with e-mail should be on the prayer chain. We should pack-out the place during our 24HRS of Prayer in August.

There is no better formula; no other program we should follow. We should be stirring-up each other to continue steadfast in these things – **which means we must first be doing them ourselves!**

#2 Follow Jesus With A Simple Faithfulness
And Souls Are Added To His Church
(v43-47)

These next verses reveal another extremely simple aspect of adding to the Church. As you grow in the Lord, be faithful, and others will be drawn to Him and get saved and **added** to the Church (and to Eternity!).

Acts 2:43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

The word for **fear** is better translated *awe*. The believers were in awe of the Lord working in and through them. One example of His working in and through them was that the **apostles** were performing **many wonders and signs**. We'll see one of them in chapter three as Peter and John heal the lame man.

The point being made is that the believers had a reverential **fear** of the Lord. They were in awe of His presence among them. I suggest to you that Churches lack power and influence today because believers often have no **fear** of the Lord. They disobey His clear commands, going their own way with their own plans.

Acts 2:44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,
Acts 2:45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

When reading this, remember their situation. The three-thousand who were saved included many from far away who were only visiting Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost. They had planned to

return to their homes immediately after the feast. But now, newly saved, they wanted to know more about the Lord. They had no local homes in Jerusalem; they had limited means to support themselves. All of them helped each of them to be able to stay as long as possible.

Communal living was suggested by their unique situation. I don't think Christians should establish communes. I think the Lord can, and does, establish them in certain unique situations.

Later on in *Acts* we'll see that there is no commandment for you to sell everything and help others. It's up to you how much you give to the Lord for the work of the Lord. But it's always good to evaluate your giving. The fact we are given freedom to determine our giving shouldn't lead us into the slavery of giving less and less, or even nothing, to the Lord.

Acts 2:46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, **Acts 2:47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

The **Temple** at Jerusalem was a huge facility with public access to many areas. They held **daily** meetings in the **Temple** that the believers attended. What did they do at those meetings? The apostles taught! Then they broke-up into smaller groups and went home with each other to talk about the things of the Lord over meals.

Luke emphasized three observable results of their faithful growth in the Lord: **gladness**, **simplicity of heart**, and **praising God**:

1. The word for **gladness** means *the demonstration of extreme joy*. There should be a joy about you that others can sense and feel.
2. **Simplicity of heart** doesn't sound like something that would be observable, but it is. The idea here is that you, as a believer, can put things into their proper spiritual perspective. When something happens – in the world in general, or to you or someone you know in particular – you see God at work in it. You understand events to their spiritual impact; and, in doing

- so, you invest them with their true meaning. In plain terms, people will look to you to put things into perspective for them!
3. **Praising God** is a catch-all phrase. It indicates you understand and communicate to others that all things work together for the good for those who love the Lord.

These personal qualities brought them **favor with all the people**. Persecution by the religious authorities was coming; but, for now, the common citizens of Jerusalem could see the positive overflow of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. They knew, from Scripture, that the baptism could only come from Heaven. Seeing the **gladness, simplicity of heart**, and praise in the daily lives of the believers, unbelievers were drawn to them. The believers then pointed them to the Baptizer, Jesus Christ – their rightful Messiah, Who was raised from the dead and reigning in Heaven.

It resulted in the **Lord [adding] to the church daily those who were being saved**. *Conversations were leading to conversions.*

Jesus' master-plan for evangelism is for each individual believer to live-out the Christian life in a context of unbelievers. It's the primary way He adds souls to the Church.

Applying God's Word...

Jesus hasn't given us hard things to do. **They are simple!** The hard thing is for us to continue in them faithfully. If we will, then He will do the addition that is appropriate for our Church.

