

DOING CHURCH RIGHT, part #2

Acts 2:40-47

When the church was born in Jerusalem, she was a living organism centered on the living Christ. But things began to change with the church fairly quickly. A few years ago someone observed that when the church's center moved from Jerusalem to Greece she was no longer an organism, but she became a philosophy. And then when she moved to Rome she became an institution. And when she moved to Europe she became a culture. And then the church moved to America, and when she did she became an enterprise. And though that would not be 100% correct, this opinion might not be as far off the mark as we would hope. Point of evidence #1: a few years ago a Christian book was published with the title, Marketing the Church. How much more enterprising can you get than that?

But God has a better way to build His church. It is found in Acts 2. And last week we saw the two foundation stones. All churches that serve God His way are churches that preach the same **saving message**, the message of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone. And they are churches which operate with the same **sanctifying methods**. They are churches that are built on the preaching and teaching of God's Word, that major on fellowship, that take seriously the observance of the Lord's Supper, and churches that know how to really pray. And churches that dare to do whatever it takes to fly by these two engines are guaranteed to soar like an eagle for the glory of God.

Well, when a church begins to do this, when it begins to really soar, what does it find way up in the stratosphere? Today we are going to find out. Turn in your Bibles, please, to Acts 2:40-47. In our text today we are going to see four blessings that God gave the church in Jerusalem because they operated the way He ordained. And the first thing we see about that church in Jerusalem is that **they were confounded by the power of God** (verse 43b). Miracles happened. Some theologians say that the signs and wonders ceased with the apostles. But I find no evidence in scripture that the age of miracles has ceased. And there are just too many accounts of God doing the miraculous for us to deny it. Let me give you just one example.

Rolland and Heidi Baker have been missionaries in Mozambique since 1995, where they founded Iris Ministries. They have touched literally thousands of people with the love of God and the gospel of Christ. Heidi appeared on the CBN's 700 Club some time ago and gave a fascinating testimony of the many miracles that God has performed for the people her and her husband work with. How once when they ran out of chicken for a festive meal they were preparing, God multiplied that chicken just like Jesus multiplied the five loaves and two fish. How one Christmas a group came in with bags full of gifts to give the girls in her orphanage. The girls wanted beads for

Christmas, but one of the men in the group told Heidi, “These bags are stuffed with stuffed animals”. Well, Heidi asked him to look in the bags for beads, anyway. And when he did, guess what he saw? Is that a little far-fetched to believe? Not if you believe that Jesus turned water into wine. There have even been creditable reports from that area that people have been raised from the dead. In fact, there have been so many miracles that Heidi confessed she had some reservations about sharing them with Western Christians, for fear they would be unbelieving and critical.

Heidi went on to say that the reason that miracles happen with the Mozambique people is because they are such desperate people. They are the 11th poorest nation in the world. Many are starving and they have little or no medical care. God is truly their only source of hope and healing. Now, does God heal everyone? No. Heidi says that some of their orphans die, that they have homes for the blind who aren’t healed, and that suffering continues in spite of prayer. But she openly says, “We operate Iris Ministries with the dependence on miracles as part of our means of support. If God doesn’t show up we will fail”.

Now, the question that automatically comes to most of our minds is, “Why don’t we see miracles like this happen in America?” Heidi says that if we get to the point of desperation like the Mozambique people, we would. You see, beloved, God is not in the dazzling business. Jesus refused to put on a miracle show just to entertain wicked King Herod, and He will not do it for us, either. And we won’t see chickens multiply like they did in Mozambique unless we need a food miracle like they did. But when you and I get desperate enough for God to save a poor lost neighbor, or for God to heal the marriage of a precious loved one, or for God to heal a body that is ravaged with cancer, or for God to bring us to the place of genuine repentance and revival - when we get desperate enough and we cry out to God for those needs, we will see God do things just as miraculous as He does any place on earth. But remember, the first church got to the place of seeing signs and wonders because of how they did church. They were committed to the Word, to fellowship, to the serious observance of the Lord’s Supper, and to desperate prayer. And they were continually confounded by God’s power.

But we see something else that happened in this first church at Jerusalem. They were not only **confounded by the power of God**, but they were **conscious of the presence of God**. The first part of verse 43 says that “fear came upon every soul”. Friends, when God started doing the miraculous in their midst, they were all stuck with a deep sense of awe. God became real!

May I say to you that this is the desire of every truly born again child of God – for God to be real to them. Moses cried out to God, “Show me Your glory!” Exodus 33:17. Job cried out, “Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to his seat! (Job 23:3). The psalmist declared, “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps. 42:2). Paul, who walked as close to God as any man who ever lived, still wanted to get closer. He said in Philippians 3

that he counted everything in this world as rubbish that he might know Christ. I promise you, if there is no desire for God in your life at all, then friend, you do not belong to God. David said, “O taste and see that the Lord is good...” (Ps. 34:8). And beloved, when you get a taste of Jesus, when you once know the joy of sins forgiven and His sweet, abiding presence in your life, after that you just can’t get enough! And when you come into the house of God to worship, you want to **experience** Him. You want to know His powerful presence.

Let me share with you some things that will happen when you know that you are in the presence of God. One thing is that you will **lose consciousness of everything else around you**. In Revelation 1 John had a vision of Jesus walking in the midst of seven local churches in Asia Minor, and He saw Jesus as the holy, ruling, King of Kings, whose head and hair were as wool, whose eyes were as a flame of fire, whose feet were as fine brass, out of whose mouth went a sharp, two-edged sword, and whose countenance was as the noon day sun. And when John saw Jesus he wrote that he fell at Jesus’ feet as a dead man. There was no thought of anything else in this world but of the holy, almighty Jesus in whose presence he lay. And beloved, would to God that this is the way it would be on Sunday mornings at Grant’s Creek! That when you and I begin to sing the praises of Jesus we would be so enraptured by His presence that nothing else in this world would be on our minds but Him! Not how good or bad someone’s hair looks that morning, not our Sunday dinner, not our Sunday afternoon activities, nothing but Him.

But when we are in God’s presence not only do we lose consciousness of everything else, but **we see our desperate need for His cleansing from our sin**. Beloved, please listen carefully. If you are saved, washed in Jesus’ blood, you are under no condemnation, heaven is your certain home, and you should be rejoicing every day for that blessed truth. But when you come into the presence of God, Who is Light, the Light exposes everything in your life that is dark and ugly, and you see how desperately you need to be cleansed. And beloved, don’t doubt it for a moment. We indeed need to be cleansed from daily sin. Isaiah writes that our righteousness, our very best good works, are as filthy rags in God’s sight, and that our iniquities separate us from our God, that our sins have hid His face, and that He will not hear us (Isaiah 59:1). And without cleansing from daily sin you are cut off from your birthright of peace and power for daily living. And just as tragic, Paul writes in Romans that without that cleansing you give cause for unbelievers to blaspheme the name of the Lord (2:24).

When Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on His throne he cried, “Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). And the very next moment a seraphim went to the altar, took a live coal, touched Isaiah’s lips with it and took away his sin.

But when we come into the presence of God we are not only made aware of our sin, but **we are also filled with joy**. Psalm 16:11, “**In Your presence** is fullness of joy, at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore”. And what other joy could ever compare with such joy as this? If you are saved, being in the presence of God means that your sins are forgiven and that you have eternal life. The President of the United States can't give you such joy. He can't give you peace in every trial and tribulation in life. He can't flood your soul with such intoxicating love that you can't describe it to anyone else. Because he doesn't have that kind of love for you, nor does he have that kind of power to give you. And neither can Nick Saban give you these things, or Lindsey Lohan, or Justin Bieber, or any other human being. Oh, many people scream and fall out when they see these type people, or they push and shove and trample on others to get their autographs, and they get themselves a real Rocky Mountain high for a short while. But if they could go home and spend six months 24/7 with Barak, Nick, Lindsey, or Justin, they would also have plenty of Sipsey Bottom lows, I can assure you.

And notice again what David wrote. He did not say that in God's presence was joy, but **fullness** of joy. And that word means “abundance”. Peter calls it inexpressible joy (1 Peter 1:8). It is joy that is so good you just have to experience it to understand it. And you only get it in God's presence.

There is one more thing that comes with being in God's presence that I want you to see. And that is, **you will not want to leave**. Do you remember what Peter said to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration? God took Peter, James, and John up on a mountain with Him one day, and they had an experience beyond their ability to describe. The Bible says that Elijah and Moses came down from Heaven and began talking with Jesus. And as they talked Jesus' countenance shone as bright as the sun. What happened was, for just a brief time God removed Jesus' fleshly cloak and allowed those three disciples to see all of His magnificent, divine glory that was wrapped up inside of Him. And in the presence of such glory Peter said, “Lord, why don't we just build You, Moses, and Elijah three tabernacles, and let's just stay here. Who cares about going back down the mountain to the old mundane world below?” (Matthew 17:1-4)

Beloved, that's what happens when you get in God's presence. It is so good you don't ever want to leave. Most of us have heard or read the testimony of someone who had a near death experience where they went to Heaven for a brief time. And there are no two stories exactly alike as to what they saw. Most see a brilliant light, some see relatives, some see friends. But there is one thing that every single one of them say, every single one. They all say, “I didn't want to come back”. Why? They were in the presence of God!! Oh, friends, may God help us to do more than to just come into the house of God on Sundays, but to come into His presence!! And when we do, we won't be troubled when our watch alarm goes off at 12, and be ready to rush home lest we turn into a pumpkin. We won't even have it on! Let the

worship go into overtime, let it go into double overtime. Who cares? Dinner and nap and the football game can wait.

Well, we've seen that when a church does church right that they are **confounded by the power of God**. God works miracles in that church. And as a result they are **conscious of the presence of God**. They know that God is real. But there is something else that happened in that first church in Acts. And that is, **they were committed to the people of God** (verse 44-46). The Jerusalem church was a multi-racial, multi-economic church. There were those from numerous countries who were saved at Pentecost who united with them, and there were rich people, poor people, all types of people in that church. And they considered themselves to be one, big spiritual family. When one had a need they all pitched in to meet that need. Now, they were not Communists, as some claim. Communism is a forced system, not voluntary. Communism forces the strong to sustain the weak whether they want to or not. But the first church met the needs of their poor brothers and sisters out of love. And Communism is permanent, not temporary, and it was temporary help that these Christians provided for one another. But the point is these believers loved each other so much that they said, "What's mine is yours if you need it more than I". Why, they even sold their possessions in order to meet the needs of the needy among them.

Beloved, that's a great example of what God's love is all about. Psalm 12:5: "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, says the Lord..." Proverbs 31:9 says, "Open your mouth...and plead the cause of the poor and needy". The Bible says of the godly woman in Proverbs 31:20, "She extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy". Beloved, God loves all of His children, rich or poor!

Think about it. Let's say that you have five grown children, four have good jobs and make good livings, but one, though he tries, just cannot seem to ever get on his feet. Do you love him any less? Of course not! And you do what you can to help him. And if you had a sibling in need you would do all that you can to help them, too. Well, it is no different with our spiritual family. In fact, if we don't help our brother in need, God says that we don't even love Him. 1 John 3:17 says, "Whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" And there was no doubt about the love that first church had for one another. Nobody did without.

But this church's commitment to one another went further than just meeting physical needs. They were committed to each other so much that they wanted to spend time with each other. Verse 46 says that every day they were in the temple in one accord, and that every day they were joyfully breaking bread and sharing their meals with one another in each other's homes. Let me try to give you the status of the first church in one statement: They were on mission. They were on mission. They knew that whoever they were, blacksmith, carpenter, farmer, shepherd, tax

collector, whatever their occupation – they were all yoked together for one purpose, and that was to encourage one another and advance God’s Kingdom. And that it was not just a one-day-a-week job. Every day they were together, encouraging one another and bearing witness for Christ. I want to pause and ask you, do you consider yourself to be on mission for Jesus Christ? And if you do, do you consider yourself to be on mission with your church?

Now, beloved, we all know that 2013 is a different world from AD 30. If I suggested to you that we meet seven days a week, the next headline you’d read in the Tuscaloosa News would be “Fosters pastor murdered by wife”. But even if Janice didn’t kill me and we began that schedule, we’d all be dead from exhaustion in a month. There’s no way we can meet every day. Oh, but do you know what we can do? We can spiritually come to church every day! Every day we can focus our minds upon the mission that God has given us as members of Grant’s Creek. Every day we can think of brothers or sisters that we know who are needy in some way. They may be sick, they may be lonely, they may have lost their job, they may have lost a loved one. Maybe they are just sin sick. They’ve let the world creep in and cause them to fall out of church. But in some way they all are hurting and they need encouragement. And every day we can go to God and intercede for them in prayer. And perhaps not every day, but at least once a week, maybe more, we can pick up the phone and call them, or text or email or Facebook them, but best of all, we can visit them with a cake or a plate of cookies, or with just a listening ear and a warm smile and hug.

Beloved, remember this! You may not be able to teach and they may beg you not to sing in the choir. You might not be good at jail visitation, and flipping grilled cheeses for Wednesday night suppers might really stretch your cooking skills. But do you know what you can do better than anyone else? You can love. And if you don’t do anything else right, your love can make a difference in somebody’s life.

Do you remember the miracles that God wrought through Heidi Baker? Well, listen to what someone else said about her. Heidi had visited an orphanage in Mozambique for the first time, and promised one of the girls there that she would return. The girls had heard that before from others who never showed up again and didn’t really expect to see Heidi again, either. But she did return. And one of the girls named Jacinto Maria Rageje said, "She was the one who led us to Jesus. The biggest thing was, she cared for every single one. We couldn't believe it. We didn't need people to bring stuff. We needed someone to pay attention to us." Beloved, that’s what the first church did! They cared for each other, and oh, what a difference it made in that church.

I want to issue all of you, including myself, a challenge this morning. I challenge every one of you to allow God to use you to reach out to at least one person every week in the name of Jesus in 2013. Some of you are already doing this, so you make it two. And if you are reaching out to two, then make it three. But

just begin to reach out! Encourage someone with a loving “Jesus touch”. Brothers and sisters, if we would all do this every week, we would be a different church.

We’ve seen that because the Jerusalem church did church the way God intended, they were **confounded by the power of God**, and they were **conscious of the presence of God**, and they were **committed to the people of God**. But there was one result I want you to notice, and that is, **they were consumed by the praises of God**. Verse 47 says that every day they were praising God. Every day they testified to God’s goodness. They couldn’t help it; it was the most natural thing in the world. Because God was so real and He had done such great things in their lives.

Now, when any church will begin to operate according to Acts 2, what is God’s ultimate end? When they begin to exalt the Word of God, when they make fellowship, and the correct observance of the Lord’s Supper, and prayer a priority, and then as a result they see the power of God fall, and they sense the mighty presence of God in their midst, and they commit themselves to one another in love, and the praises of God begin to flow every day – when all these things happen, then what?

Look again at verse 47. They had favor with all the people. People all around took notice, and they liked what they saw. Hey, who wouldn’t like a place where there was love like an ocean and joy like a fountain and peace like a river? People liked what they saw, and many said, “They have something that I need”, and they came to them and found it. And what was it? One word. They found Jesus! They found the Bread of Life and the Living Water. They found the Prince of Peace and the Mighty God. They found the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, they found the Light of the world, and they found the Friend of tax collectors and sinners. They found the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls, and they found the Sure Foundation. They found the Savior of the world. They found all of these in Jesus. And do you know what they said? They said, “He is enough. He is enough for my salvation. He is enough for my joy. I need nothing else and I want nothing else but Jesus”.