

## THE CHARACTER OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Scripture: Acts 2:42 - 4:4.

Intro: The story of what was accomplished in Jerusalem in the days following the ascension of Christ is one of the most astounding stories on the pages of history.

Note Acts 5:28; 6:7; 7:41; 4:4. Later in Thessalonica see what was said about them (Acts 17:6).

Things started wonderfully well. ~~But~~ However, opposition from our old friends reappears in Acts 4. The religious leaders of Israel felt that they had put an end to the work of Jesus of Nazareth, but suddenly they realize that it is still going, and with greater force than ever before!

I want to examine the record with you tonight in an attempt to discover, if we can, what made the early church the mighty force that it was. The answer is not hard to find.

Quite obviously there are features about the early church which are not being repeated today. The church was in a transitional period. BUT THERE PRINCIPLES WHICH GIVE US THE SECRET OF THE CHURCH'S POWER.

Christians talk about the need for revival. How will it come?

I. The early church was a "continuing"

church. Cf. 2:42-47. What does this mean? Note the words, continued and continuing (vv. 42, 42) and daily (vv. 46, 47).

Is Luke trying to tell us that they all quit their jobs, became preachers, and completely changed their manner of life. No! what he does want us to know is that living for Jesus Christ was a matter that concerned them seven days out of every week. They continued in the Word, they continued in prayer. When they got together they had fellowship.

So that the first evidence of blessing is to be found in a people who continue to walk with the Lord each day! And this, too, is real evidence of the new birth. "And there were added . . . and they continued."

- II. They were a people detached from material possessions. Luke directed by the Holy Spirit makes quite a point of this. Cf. 2:44, 45; 4:32, 34, 35. How many times the Lord has spoken of this! Cf. Mt. 6:33; Luke 12:15. "The son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20).

Does the Lord want us to do this? There is no evidence in the Word that He does. This evidently was voluntary, spontaneous. But it does reflect an attitude. SOMETIMES MAKING

A LIVING GETS IN THE WAY OF LIFE.

Note one of Paul's warnings to Timothy in 1 Tim 6:10.

See what Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none" (Acts 3:6).

Money does not buy spiritual blessing. Cf. Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:18-21.

It is wonderful to have good buildings and adequate equipment, but they are not synonymous with blessing. Instead, our attitude toward them is.

- III. They were a self-abasing and Christ-exalting people. Cf. Acts 3:12. (Review the remarkable story of this miracle, evidently selected from many that the Apostles performed - Cf. Acts 2:43.)

See also Peter in Acts 10:26 when Cornelius tried to worship him.

Or Paul + Barnabas in Lystra (Acts 14:8-18).

Or John the Baptist (Jn. 3:27-30).

Or Paul in 2 Cor. 3:5; 4:5. Also see Phil. 1:20, 21.

How different from what we see in the ministry and among the people of God today!

Self-abasement alone is not enough; Christ also must be exalted!

When Christ is honored, there will be blessing.

- IV. It was a fearless, yet compassionate church (Acts 3:13-17).

Some times it is not easy to tell people what they need to hear. It must not have been easy for Peter.

But then we can be too severe.  
note the ~~severity~~ of Peter in v. 17.

See Stephen in Acts 7:60.

Our Lord on the cross said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:32).

Also in Luke 19:41 when He wept over Jerusalem, He said, "If thou hadst known..."

In 1 Cor. 2:8, "which none of the princes of this world knew, for..."

HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO KEEP A TENDER HEART TOWARD ALL WHO DO NOT KNOW THE SAVIOUR - EVEN TOWARD THOSE WHO OPPOSE THE GOSPEL!

- V. It was a Bible teaching church.

Look at the scripture that literally pours out of Peter's mouth in ch. 2.

Now in ch. 3 he is back at it again. He quotes Moses in vv. 22, 23. He repeats a promise God made to Abraham in v. 25. He is backing up all that he has to say with the scriptures. THE WORD OF GOD WAS HIS AUTHORITY.

Do you remember what is stated about the day when Samuel as a child assisted Eli in his priestly work?

"And the word of the Lord was precious" (rare) "in those days; there was no open" (frequent) "vision" (1 Sam 3:1). God wanted to speak, but he had no voice among men.

For the most part, what place is given to the preaching and teaching of the Bible as the Word of God in our day? The Church in forsaking the Bible has not only forsaken its authority; it has forsaken its power.

Men cannot be saved without the Word!

Christians will never grow without the Word!

No wonder Timothy was told by Paul to "preach the Word." Cf. 2 Tim. 4:2-4.

And it was their preaching that ~~done~~ disturbed the Jewish leaders.

Why? Because they were preaching the resurrection, <sup>(which meant he was alive)</sup> and the second coming, and then the Jews would face the same problem all over again. See their concern in Acts 5:28b.

Concl: Much more could be said, but this is sufficient.

The question is, on principle, how do we measure up? If we really long for blessing, not only for ourselves, but for people who are without Christ, then these are conditions the Spirit of God brought about and these are

the conditions He used.

It cannot be decided by a majority vote of the Church, but it is dependent upon the fact that as individuals we recognize our needs and open our hearts to Him!