



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 2: 42-47

Acts

“The First Church”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are in the book of Acts. We're in chapter 2. We're going to finish up the chapter this morning with a rather brief passage, verses 42 through 47, but there's a great deal in these verses that I think will be helpful for us in understanding the ministry here at Believers Chapel. The day of Pentecost has happened. Many people have come to faith in Jesus Christ through the ministry of the word, the preaching of the Gospel, and we read in verse 42, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace. We thank You for this time together when we can open the word of God and we can read a text of scripture, and then, consider it in some depth. Pray You'd bless us as we do that. We thank you for the marvelous gift of possessing the Bible and for the opportunity to learn from it. We read how those early Christians sat at the feet of the apostles and were instructed by them and we might long for a day like that. Would it not be wonderful, we might think, to sit at the feet of Peter, or Matthew, or one of them, and hear them

tell us about Christ and the things that He said, and give us a thorough explanation of it. And that certainly would be a blessing, Father, but we don't lack anything because they have given us the deposit of their truth that is inerrant that was given through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and we possess it now, and it is ours to read and study today, and tomorrow, and every day of our lives. May we be men and women who do that diligently and may we be blessed by the Spirit this morning as we seek to understand the text that we have read.

Guide us in our thinking, and build us up in the faith, and give us a great appreciation for what we have in Jesus Christ. Give us a deep appreciation of Your love and Your grace, and may we communicate that to one another, and may the world look upon us and see something very different here. May it see the life that we have in Your son. So bless us to that end this morning, Father, as we study. Bless us spiritually, but we also pray for Your physical material blessings because we need those. We think of those who are sick. All those things are in Your hands, Father, and ultimately, we must look to you and know that You're a faithful and good God. We can see that in our lives daily, how you faithfully meet our needs, and we thank you for that.

We pray for our meeting this evening and pray You'd bless it, as we come together and gather around the Lord's table, we pray that You would enable us to focus our minds upon Him and be blessed as we do that. Bless those who will participate this evening. Bless those who will speak. Bless the hymns that we'll sing. Bless the entire meeting, and we pray that for our time together now. Bless our hymn that we will sing and prepare our hearts to study and to think together. We pray in Christ's name.

Amen.

[Message] In almost every city and town in this country, you can find somewhere in the center of the community a first church; a First Baptist Church, a First Methodist Church, a First Presbyterian Church. But when we come to Acts 2, we find the first of all the churches; the first church of Jerusalem. It was born on the day of Pentecost and it had an amazing growth. It started with 120 people at 9:00 in the morning and by the afternoon, its membership had increased to over 3,000, and all as a result of one sermon. Quite astounding. Any church today with that kind of growth would be the focus of all kinds of attention. Ministers would flock to it and want to

know what the secret of their success was and probably ask for a seminar on how to grow a church.

Well, if we want to know how the church is to grow God's way and how it is to function according to God's plan, then we should consider the church of Jerusalem a model. It was not a perfect church. It would later have the problems that all churches have. It was not a mature church. It had not yet developed a structure of leadership with elders and deacons, but still, this first church in its earliest stages teaches us the fundamentals of what a church should be, what church life should be in its simplicity, its devotion and energy, and it gives us a standard to strive for.

The key verse in the passage is verse 42 and it lays great stress on the importance of the word of God. The church began with the word of God. It began with a sermon. Peter preached. He preached scripture. He preached Christ. He preached with clarity and he preached with boldness. And the result was that people were pierced to the heart. They repented, they believed in Christ, and they were baptized that day, about 3,000 of them. What a sight that must've been.

There were a number of pools in and around Jerusalem. The pool of Bethesda is one that we're familiar with from John 5. And suddenly, these pools were filled with people being baptized. What a blessing that was, but with the blessing there came a problem. What were the apostles to do with all these people, these babes in the faith? The same thing we do with any newborn baby, feed it, feed it often, and that's what they began doing. We read in verse 42 they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching. This is the first in a list of activities that characterized the early church. They devoted themselves to receiving instruction, and as I indicated a moment ago, that indicates the importance of it.

Luke gives priority to this activity. He lists it first. Teaching or preaching God's word has been called the central gift of the Spirit given by Christ to the church. Once people are brought to faith, they must be built up in the faith. They must be nourished on the word of God. Later on, in chapter 20, Paul will speak to the Ephesian elders. They will be his parting words to them and in that conversation that he has with them, he'll remind them of his ministry, how he coveted nothing that they had, he devoted himself night and day to the ministry, and what he did as he ministered to them was proclaim to them the whole counsel of God. He gave to them the doctrines of the

word of God.

One of the problems that the churches had is they did not progress in the doctrines of the word of God. It was the problem with the Corinthian church. They had been given milk and they never developed beyond that. They could not handle strong meat. They had to continually be fed with milk and the author of Hebrews tells that church to which he wrote in Hebrews 5 that that was the same problem that they had. By now, they should've been teachers he said, but they still needed milk. It's a problem that the church has. It will not grow apart from the word of God, apart from the doctrines of the faith, the whole counsel of God, and whenever that is minimized, whenever the word of God is minimized, whenever the doctrines of scripture are minimized, the church grows weak.

There's no substitute for teaching and studying the Bible. It is living and active, the author of Hebrews says. And it is able to judge the thoughts and the intentions of the heart. It's like a person in a sense. In fact, the best friend that you and I can have is the word of God, getting to know it, spending time with it every day reading and studying the word of God. Peter will emphasize that later in his ministry in 1 Peter 2:2 he gives the exhortation, "Like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." Doesn't mean by that long for milk. The author of Hebrews and Paul have said you need more than milk. You need the basics, but you need to progress, and that's something Peter is saying as well, but he's says it in a different way.

What he's saying is you're to be like babes who long for milk and Peter was a family man. He no doubt saw all of this and saw how when a newborn baby is fed, it eagerly receives the milk that's given to it, and that's the kind of attitude, that's the kind of hunger that you and I are to have. And so, no doubt, obviously Peter had that in mind. He had this picture of infant receiving milk, but I wonder, and I can't help but believe that Peter, as he thought about that and thought of this great issue that must be true with every one of us, this hunger that we must have for the scriptures, that he must've thought of these early days of the church, when those many young believers eagerly crowded around the apostles to learn about their salvation, and the savior, and the things of God. And so, the first thing we learn about the early church is that it was a studying church.

These young believers had had an unusual experience on the day of Pentecost. They had spoken in tongues. Many of them had. We don't know that all that came to faith that day spoke in tongues, but certainly the 120 and the apostles were speaking in tongues. Great experience, but it wasn't experience that they were seeking. It was learning that they were pursuing. Experience has its place and there will be a variety of experiences in the spirit led Christian life. And I'm tempted to say that the Christian life when lived faithfully, when we walk by the spirit day by day, we are led into a rather adventurous life, and I think that's true in that we face problems that we can't solve and God solves them for us miraculously as we walk by the spirit, doors unexpectedly open for us. And so, there is an element of adventure in the Christian life as we walk by the spirit, but the fact remains as well that the Christian life in many ways is a daily routine. It is undertaking the daily responsibilities of life, but as we do that, we will have experiences in the Christian life of an amazing nature. But experience must always be subject to the scrutiny of scripture.

If we want to have the experiences of the early church, then we must measure our experiences by what the scriptures say. We cannot know if the word of God describes unless they measure up with the word of God. So that's what these early Christians were doing. This is their principal interest. It was in learning the word of God. It was in studying. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and they were doing that because the apostles were the men that the Lord had chosen to recall His ministry, to teach about it, to give the authoritative record of it. And it was authoritative because it was the teaching that the Lord communicated to them through the Holy Spirit.

In the upper room on the night of His betrayal, He gave that promise. In John 14:26, "The Lord promised to send the Holy Spirit," the helper, the paraclete, who would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all that He had said to them. And so, they were enabled by the Holy Spirit to remember all things, to teach them effectively and record them inerrantly. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit and their authority was substantiated by the miracles that they did. Verse 43, Luke writes that "Many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles."

In 2 Corinthians 12:12, Paul speaks of the signs of a true apostle, which were signs, and wonders, and miracles. Those powers were given to them by God in order to

supernaturally authenticate their ministry. People could know that they spoke the truth of God because they were doing the works of God and we have the product of that ministry in the record that they left; the New Testament. It is the written deposit of the apostolic teaching. It is composed of either their direct writings or the writings of those who had the apostolic blessing and it is the sole authority of our lives. The entire Bible is the authority of our lives. The writings of the apostles and the prophets, all 66 books, are our authority and we are to be in submission to it as these early believers were who were hungry to receive the apostles' instruction. Well, that involves effort, continuous effort.

Luke writes, "They were continually devoting themselves to study." Christian life calls for that. It calls for diligence. It calls for consistency. It calls for thought. It calls for discipline. It's not always easy to read the Bible and think carefully about it and study it. It takes diligence. It takes discipline. It takes effort. We are to be doing that though. We are to be reading our Bibles in order to cultivate a Christian mind, in order to learn to think Biblically. How else we will be a discerning people? We live in a world filled with error, a world filled with counterfeits. How are we going to know the genuine from the false if we don't know the genuine? How are we going to recognize truth or distinguish it from error if we don't know truth?

John Stott writing against a modern trend said, "Anti-intellectualism and the fullness of the spirit are mutually incompatible because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth." So we're to be interested in the truth. These early believers certainly were, and because of that, they are in that way a model for us. We are to be continually devoting ourselves to study. That is the evidence of a spirit guided church. Secondly, Luke writes that they were devoting themselves to fellowship. The Greek word here is *koinonia*, which is the word that means common and it expresses what we all hold in common, what we share together, which is a common life.

When these people were baptized with the Holy Spirit, they were placed into the body of Christ according to 1 Corinthians 12:12, and in that verse, we learn what Christ did, what happens to every believer. We are joined to Christ. We are joined to the Holy Spirit and we are united with one another. And so, it was natural that these believers who had been baptized with the spirit, who had been placed in the body of Christ would be together. They are one body. Together they share the life of God

through the Holy Spirit who lives in them.

In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul speaks of how the believer is baptized with or into the Spirit, and the sense of that is placed in the element of the Holy Spirit. So in that sense, we are all united in the same element, the same atmosphere of the spirit. And then, at the end, he says, "Made to drink of the same spirit." The Spirit of God indwells every believer. And so, as I say, it's natural that they would be together, they would share their lives together because of the common life that they have in the Lord.

1 John 1:3, the apostle writes, "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us." And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his son, Jesus Christ. A person enters into the life of God and fellowship with the Father and the son, and with the saints through faith in Jesus Christ. At that moment, the believer is adopted into the family of God. We are transferred from the kingdom or the domain of darkness and into the kingdom of light, and that has a very practical outworking in the Christian life and in the life of the church.

The early church was a real vital community. Christians were united in genuine love. They liked being together. They loved one another and they bore one another's burdens. They shared what they had with each other. In verse 44, we read that they were together and had all things in common. That word, common, is *koinonia*, and again, it speaks of the fellowship that they had. Where the Holy Spirit is working, there will be this kind of fellowship with love for one another, and it will be seen in one's generosity, which does not mean forfeiting all private possessions.

What happened in Jerusalem was not an early form of communism as it has sometimes been interpreted to have been. It was not that at all. This is not an endorsement of communism or socialism. *The Communist Manifesto* declared that the aim of communism could be summed up in a single sentence: "Abolition of private property." That didn't happen in the early church.

We read in verse 46 that these Christians were meeting together from house to house. So they still owned their houses. They still owned possessions. Socialism, unlike communism, allows for private property, but it tries to control the economy by means of taxation, and in so doing, redistribute the wealth. Churchill said the inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings. The inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries. I think that's true. It's a poor way to run an economy.

It undermines incentive. And both cases, communism and socialism, are forced sharing and have nothing to do with generosity.

What happened in Jerusalem was not that. It wasn't political. It was spiritual. It wasn't contrived. It wasn't forced. It was done willingly. The people shared their possessions because they wanted to. They came together, not with an attitude of what can I get out of it. Sometimes that's the way people choose a church in which to have their fellowship. What can I get out of it? What's it going to give me? That's not how these people came together. They came together wanted to know what can I give and that's what makes for a selfless, vibrant, generous church and ministry.

Now, in fairness, I must say that there is a sense in which we should ask, "What am I going to receive from this ministry?" We should ask am I going to receive the teaching of the apostles? Am I going to receive the fellowship that's described in the word of God; worship, as it should be done? Am I going to be involved in an assembly that is actively serving the Lord? Am I going to be able to be a part of that kind of ministry?

These are questions that we should ask. But what was at the heart of these people and their attitude was not what am I going to get from it, but what can I give? It was a selfless approach to the life of the church and that is the natural result of being in fellowship with the Lord, not the natural result of being a person. We do just the opposite, but this is the natural result of a supernatural relationship. Relationship with the Lord and one another, sharing in the common life of the triune God and having a mind of Christ, that's what we have in Jesus Christ. We have His mind. We think like Him. We have His affections and His desires. And so, they had this attitude of generosity.

As James Boice put it, they were generous because they had learned generosity from God. That's what grace teaches us. We see that so clearly in God's unconditional election of His people. He chose a people for Himself, for salvation through faith alone, and for an eternal inheritance of glory and joy unspeakable, and all of that at the cost of His only begotten son's infinite precious blood. Christ offered up His life for us who were completely undeserving. God didn't choose the good; He chose the bad. Christ didn't die for the righteous; he died for the unrighteous. Election was from the foundation of the world, apart from any work on our part, apart from foreseen faith, His



all of grace, unmerited, undeserved favor, and it is abundant. See that from the fact that in one day 3,000 people are brought to faith.

Go to the end of chapter 7 of the book of Revelation and you see this innumerable multitude that's filled heaven from the nations. God's grace is great. You can see the grace of God and His greatness in the numbers that are saved, but we see it most clearly in what He saved; an undeserving people and He chose them from the foundation of the world. Now, an understanding of that teaches generosity.

We had a lesson on unconditional election last Wednesday night and after our lessons on Wednesday night, we have been having a time of prayer for the past year or so, and it's a time of prayer for about, oh, 15, 20 minutes, and it's usually led by one of the elders, usually Jim Frasier. And when Jim came to the front this week, he reflected for a moment on the implications of unconditional election, and he said, "If God loves us that much, we should love each other." We certainly should, and the early church understood just that, and those first Christians loved one another and shared with each other from their possessions. They bore one another's burdens and supported the work of the ministry gladly, willingly, which is as it should be. God loves a cheerful giver. You can give an abundance of your wealth grudgingly and God is not one bit pleased with that. He loves the cheerful giver. He's far more satisfied and pleased with the widow who gives her two mites than with the millionaire who out of obligation gives of his wealth.

One of the finest examples of that in the Bible is the churches of Macedonia. Paul writes of them in 2 Corinthians 8. They were extremely poor. I guess they were the poorest of the churches of the ancient world, but they begged Paul to allow them to contribute to the support of the saints. They gave beyond their ability, he said, and of their own accord. They weren't under pressure to give. They didn't give out of a sense of obligation, but from joy and out of love for the Lord and His people.

One of the reasons that we don't have an offering in the morning service is we know that there may likely be visitors here and may be nonbelievers here, and we don't want them to feel pressure to give, and sometimes that's what's felt as a plate is coming down the row. That is the privilege of the saint and it's to be undertaken gladly and willingly, and so to avoid that situation, we take a collection only at the Sunday evening service and that's worked very well without making pleas for gifts and

offerings by simply passing the offering plate on Sunday evening, we have seen great generosity from the saints. Over the years, people of Believers Chapel have been very generous, support radio ministries across this country, have supported a vast tape ministry, goes throughout the world. I'm not bragging on us; I guess I'm bragging on the people here who give generously and have for many years. Well, that is what characterized the Macedonian churches. It is what characterized the first church of Jerusalem. It was a generous, giving church because it wanted to be.

Now, that is fellowship in its broad sense. It is sharing together in the life of God and sharing together in our own lives and of the possessions that we have in this life, but Luke has something more specific in mind when he speaks of this fellowship. The last two statements of the verse define what he meant by it. It is the breaking of bread and prayer. King James Version has the word "and" after fellowship; fellowship and the breaking of bread and prayer, as though these last two features are separate features from that of fellowship. But in the Greek text, there is no "and." So the last two words are not separate practices. They define fellowship, and what this refers to is the observance of the Lord's Supper.

Fellowship was this breaking of bread and prayer. It was worship together. Larger in the life of the early church was the preaching of the word of God and the observance of the Lord's Supper. That describes very simply the meeting of the church, and the early church from all indications from the book of Acts celebrated the Lord's Supper every Sunday. That seems very clearly indicated here and in other places, and that is the opinion of a number of students of the Bible. From a different variety of backgrounds and throughout different periods of history, it was the view, for example, of the Baptist Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon wrote, "Shame on the Christian church that she should put it off," – the Lord's Supper – "put it off to once a month. They who once know the sweetness of each Lord's day celebrating his Supper will not be content, I am sure, to put it off to less frequent seasons." Wesley, the Methodist, held the same view and Calvin the Presbyterian held it too.

John Calvin in *The Institutes* wrote that the Supper should be "set before the church very often, and at least once a week." So he advocated it once a week, if not more than that. Doing that is a sanctifying act. It produces spiritual growth because reflecting upon the elements of the bread and the wine recall to us or call to our minds

the Lord's body and blood, and His sacrifice for us. It's important to recall that frequently, so that we don't lose sight of it, so that we don't forget about what He has done for us. Reflecting on His death leads to a deeper understanding of His sacrifice for us and it produces or it should produce, if we understand it well and we think deeply on it, it should produce within us hearts of gratitude.

It certainly honors Him. It's what He requested of His disciples, one of the last requests that He made when He said, "This do in remembrance of me." And so, it's only natural to do that when we come together in the meeting of the church. We gather on Sundays to learn about the Lord and remember Him, and that is how He requested that we do it. The early church did it continually. They did it regularly. They did it weekly. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Prayer, too, was a vital part of the meeting of the church. We don't have the substance of their prayer.

We're not told what they prayed, but we have many prayers in the New Testament and in the Old Testament as well, we have the Psalms, and a variety of prayers, and we can know that they prayed in the same way. They praised God for His character, praised His person, praised His work, thanked Him for His grace, and no doubt asked Him for His blessing on their meetings, and on their lives, and on their service to Him. They met frequently.

Verse 46, "Day by continuing with one mind in the temple." These people were genuinely excited about the faith. The Lord was their first love, and so, they met often to remember Him, and to learn about Him, and the central meeting place at this time was the temple. It was a logical place to meet. It was where it all began with Peter's first sermon. It was historically the center of worship for the Jewish people and the place that Jesus called His Father's house.

The first church was a Jewish church and would only gradually break with the former life, the life under the old covenant. In part, the book of Acts is about that. It is about the transition of the people of God from the ways of the old covenant to life in the new covenant. So it was natural for these new converts to continue in the ways that were familiar to them and only gradually do they move away from that. But there's also a practical reason for meeting in the temple. It was the only place in Jerusalem that could accommodate such a large crowd. They have over 3,000 people to begin

with, and then, they have people daily being added to the church, and so, that's where they met. It was natural because they liked being together, so they found this common place where they could all meet, and they did so regularly there at the temple, but also in smaller groups. "Breaking bread from house to house," Luke writes, "they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart."

Nothing is said in all of this about music, but they surely sang hymns, most likely the Psalms, which they already had. That was Jewish custom. Eventually new hymns were composed, what we would call Christian hymns. We know that from Ephesians 5:18 and 19 where Paul writes, "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord."

Paul, in that passage, was addressing the meeting of the church and he was saying that a Spirit filled church is a singing church. And when these early Christians met in the temple and in their homes with gladness and sincerity of heart, with joy, they couldn't help but sing. So we can be sure there were hymns and there was singing. And you can just imagine how people would be walking down the streets of Jerusalem by some of these houses and hear the singing of hymns come out, the Psalms being sung, and they'd hear these hymns being sung every day in the temple. A Spirit filled church is a singing church. They couldn't help, but do that, and they could not help, but tell others about the saving grace of God in His son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the next characteristic of this model church.

It was an evangelistic church. We read in verse 47, "And the Lord was adding to their numbers day by those who were being saved." The church of Jerusalem was not just a learning church so preoccupied with study and worship that it forgot the mission of being Christ's witnesses. These people had a concern for the lost. They went out daily and proclaimed the Gospel, and as they did, the Lord blessed them by adding to their numbers. The early church was a missionary church, an ever-expanding church, and it was remarkably successful because the Lord was adding to their numbers day by day.

We sometimes hear Christians in their zeal say things like, "We're going to win this city for Christ," and in so doing, talk about evangelism like it's their work and their triumph. We don't win anyone to Christ. We don't convince anyone of the truth of the

Gospel. We present the Gospel to people. It's our responsibility to do that. It ought to be our great desire to do that. We reason with them. We are to be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks us to give an account for the hope that's in us. That's why it's important to, first of all, be a learning church.

We need to know what we believe. We need to know why we believe it, but even when we do, even when we accumulate a great deal of knowledge and we accumulate skill in giving the Gospel, and that comes by doing it, even then it is still the Lord who gives success. Peter made that plain in his sermon on Pentecost. He told people to repent, and then, said in verse 39, "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." Notice, "as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." It's His prerogative. It's His grace. It is sovereign and it is free. He does it. He does it all. And He does it a lot. Calls all kinds of people; those who are near and those who are far off, and day by day He was adding to their number.

Now, that should give us a great deal of encouragement, as well as incentive to do what we are to do in preaching the Gospel. We are not out there on our own. We have not been saddled with a huge task of winning the lost as though the eternal destinies depend upon how skillful we are in debating and convincing people to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Who is sufficient for that? None of us is.

We are to be out there in the world calling the lost to Christ, and through our call, Christ calls effectively and brings to faith as many as He chooses. That's sovereign grace. It's His work. He said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." Each soul, each stone, is added to the building by Jesus Christ, and nothing can take those stones away. Nothing can pluck them out of the building. He is the master builder. He does all things well and He has included us in His work, and these early Christians were eager to be a part of it. They were full of joy, gladness, and sincerity of heart. That's the fruit of the Spirit. And so, naturally, they spoke to those around them of the forgiveness that is in Jesus Christ. They couldn't help themselves. They have been blessed with new life and they wanted to tell other people about it. And so, before long, Jerusalem was filled with the sound of the Gospel, of joyful people telling others about Jesus Christ with amazing results.

We need to be a people like that. We need to be a people proclaiming the

Gospel. At work, at home, wherever we are, we are all missionaries and we need to have a sense of the urgency of evangelism.

First and foremost, that means telling people about Christ. It means speaking about God's grace, speaking of salvation, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, but it requires that we also live a life that is consistent with our profession of faith, and these new believers did that. They had that kind of life. Verse 47 describes them as "having favor with all the people," and I take that to mean, not all the people in the congregation, though there was that certainly – they were in harmony with one another – but they were in favor with the people outside the church with the citizens of Jerusalem, just like our Lord, who grew in knowledge and in favor with men. When we think of the day of Pentecost, we think of the miracle of tongues, the wonders of wind and fire, and of foreign languages that were spoken. It was a supernatural event, but it was not the greatest miracle that day.

The greatest miracle on the day of Pentecost and on the day of every person's conversion is salvation and the changed life. Three thousand people became new creatures in Christ that day and many more in the days that followed, and the people around them could see the difference. These new believers became good neighbors, honest merchants, loving husbands, caring parents, kind people. They did what our Lord did, who is described as having gone about doing good. That's what they did. They lived peaceably and productively with those around them. They were witnesses, not only in word, but in deed, and that's what we are to be. The church in Jerusalem was doing that and all of this was the natural result of the new life and the life they had in the Spirit of God.

One of the characteristics of this first church was its simplicity and I think that's one of its strengths. It wasn't overloaded with programs and with a big budget. It wasn't run by professional clergy. It was an every member ministry. People were eager to study and learn. They enthusiastically gathered to worship together and they were glad to give of what they had. It wasn't a church that was encrusted with traditions and in the rut of formalism. It was a church characterized by simplicity and governed by the Holy Spirit who ministered through the word of God, through the teaching of the apostles. There was a freedom to be moved and directed by the Spirit. And so, these people responded in that way. They were a joyful people praising God.

Each of these qualities – a learning church, a worshipping church, a giving and joyful church – are signs of a Spirit guided church.

The sad fact is that churches often begin that way, begin with joy and enthusiasm, but then, over time, they grow cold, much like the Church of Ephesus. We read of the Church of Ephesus in Revelation 2 and there are a number of good qualities about that church. You read the first, you think, "What a perfect church this is." It was active in orthodox, but in Revelation 2:4 Christ said, "I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

If that is true of us, and it can easily become true of us, but if it is, if a coldness has set in, may the Lord convict us of it. When we have begun to drift, if that is the case, may the Lord bring us back, rekindle our original enthusiasm, so that we will not leave or we will come back to our first love. May He give us a love for His word and His people, and an earnestness about the work that He has given to us. We might be like this early church, this first church of Jerusalem. And if there is anyone here this morning in unbelief, who has not trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, may God convict you of that, convict you of your sin because you are a sinner. We're all sinners. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and may He convict you of your need of the savior. You are lost, and in your lost condition, you are headed for judgment, but there is salvation in Christ. He died for sinners to deliver them from judgment, free them from enslavement to sin, to live a holy life, and to have eternal life. All of that is for believers.

So believe in Him, trust in Jesus Christ, and be saved, and may God help all of us who know Him as our savior to rejoice in what we have, rejoice in the life that's ours. May we have the gladness, the sincerity of heart that these early Christians had. May we be a people known for praising God and being in favor with those around us. God help us to do that. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace, and we look at this first church, the church of Jerusalem, and we see the life that was there, the vitality that was there, the earnestness of these early Christians, how they longed to know the truth of Your word, to be taught, to be instructed, to be built up in the faith, and they eagerly went forth to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Bless us with that same characteristic, those characteristics of this early church. May we be like it.

May we long for the pure milk of the word. May we study. And may we live lives that are consistent with it. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.