



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts: 4:23-27

Acts

"The Church United"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're in the book of Acts, as you know – unless you're visiting – and if you're visiting, we've been going through the book of Acts. We're in chapter 4; and last week, Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin, which is the high court, the supreme court of the Jews; and they were put through an inquest and inquiry as to what they had done in the temple. The man had been healed of his lameness and they were preaching the gospel, preaching the resurrection; and so they had been put through something of a trial there. And at the end of it all, the priests and the elders told them not to preach in the name of Christ again, and warned them not to do so, and then they were released. And now we pick up with that, with verse 23 of Acts 4.

When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is you who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ.' For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that your bond-servants may speak your word with all confidence, while you extend your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the feet of the apostles.

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this time that we have together this morning when we can gather around your Word, we can read it publically. What a privilege that is of itself to possess the inerrant Word of God and to read it. But we also thank you, Father, that we can take time to consider its meaning, seek to do so in some depth, and yet not do so in our own strength or with our own abilities which we lack; but do so through the guidance of the Holy Spirit whom you have given to every believer in Jesus Christ. We have him as our possession, he has sealed our hearts, and he is our teacher. And so we pray, Lord, that we would be made receptive to his ministry, that you would guide and direct all that we do, that the things that are said and what is heard would be said and heard in his guidance and direction.

We look to you to bless, Father, and build us up in the faith. We are a needy people. We look to you every moment for our spiritual life, and you are faithful to supply that. And we look to you for blessings in the material things of life as well, Father. We are greatly blessed. We live in an age of unimagined prosperity and we have much, and we must say, Father, that ultimately we have it all from your hand. You are a good and gracious God, and yet, Father, may our hearts not be taken captive by the things of this world. May we be a people like these men and women we study this morning in Acts 4 who did not hold onto their possessions, but gave them to your

service. May we be like that. May we use what we have for your good and your glory.

We thank you for what we have, Father. As I say, we have much and we have it because you're a gracious and good God. Oftentimes though, Father, we become so accustomed to having things and to enjoying health that we forget that it was all a gift. Sometimes that's taken from us; and when it is, it's taken by your sovereign hand for our good to cause us to draw nearer to the throne of grace and seek mercy and help in time of need. We do that for those who are sick and those who are in physical need, we pray for them. We pray your rich blessing upon them. We pray for those who are without employment. We pray that you would encourage them and open doors of employment for them. Thank you for what we have and pray that we would never lose sight of the fact that we have much because of your goodness to us.

Father, we pray for our country at this time. We are in that time of decision when votes are being cast, and we pray that you give great wisdom to the people of this land; and through this political process, you might raise up able leaders for us. Ultimately, you are the one that gives us government, so we pray for a wise government, good government, and we thank you for it.

Bless us this evening as we return to this place and we remember our Lord and remember his death for us, and remember that he is coming again as the angels told the apostles at the beginning of the book of Acts as they looked up into heaven. He's coming again in the same way to the same place, and that day may be soon. We pray that he would come soon. We look forward to that day. And may we live our lives in the meantime not for this present world. May we not be time servers, but may we look to the future and live for the future, live for the things that are eternal. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Down through the centuries, men have dreamed of utopia, of an ideal society; and some have tried to establish it either by gentle persuasion or by brute force, and without success. But it happened once in Jerusalem, and in Acts 4, Luke gives us a look at it in what was truly an amazing assembly in that city. It was a large church. You remember from the day of Pentecost, 3,000 were saved on that day, so it was born with a number of people. And over the days that followed, the Lord was adding to their number. And then at the beginning of chapter 4 of the book,

we learn of more coming to faith so that there were 5,000 men, not counting women or children.

So it was a large assembly, and yet, the believers are described as being of one mind, and of one heart and soul. We read of them sharing what they had with each other, selling their possessions in order to meet the needs of the congregation, and provide for the poor among them. It was a church united in faith and love, a new society, and truly great society which only God can make. What Luke describes here, what happened in Jerusalem is what the gospel produces.

There's not a perfect church. It had its problems, will see that in chapter 5. But it does give us a model of what can and should be true of us. Jesus told his disciples in the upper room after he had washed their feet that men would know them by their love for one another; and for a time, the world saw that there in Jerusalem. These people truly loved one another. It was to the church that Peter and John went immediately after being released by the Sanhedrin.

They had been through an inquisition. They had been questioned by the authorities about their preaching and warned with threats not to speak the name of Christ again. And so when they left, they went to the place they loved, to the people they loved. They went to the church. And Luke now gives us a very informative look at the life of this early church as it moves in three directions: upward in its prayer to God, outward in its witness to the world, and inward in its service to the saints. When the two apostles returned to the place where the other apostles and believers had gathered, they reported what had happened before the Sanhedrin.

What followed is significant. The people didn't listen with alarm. They didn't sit around and ring their hands with worry. They didn't debate policy and decide that, well, maybe should lie low for awhile and try to stay out of trouble. They didn't do that. They prayed and they were united in prayer. Luke writes in verse 24: "They lifted their voice to God with one accord," or, "with one mind."

That expression, that word in Greek occurs often in the book of Acts. It occurs, for example, in Acts 1:14 of the apostles continually devoting themselves to prayer with one mind. It speaks of unity. And here, of these Christians unity in prayer and in their knowledge of the God to whom they pray, we learn something of the structure of prayer from the way they prayed. It gives us a model for prayer, but it also gives us an understanding of their knowledge of God, of their knowledge of the

one to whom they pray. They began with praise for him, which expresses their great confidence in him: "O Lord," they say, which is not the usual word for Lord that we find in the New Testament, the word "Kyrios."

This is a different word. This is the word "Despota." We get our word "despot" from it. It's a word that was used of a slave owner and used of a ruler whose power was unchallengeable; one who had authority that could not be challenged. So it means something like "Sovereign Lord." But he was no Despot, he is no hard deity, he is a loving God and he is our Heavenly Father, merciful and kind; and that is what drew the people to him in prayer.

But since he is sovereign, you might wonder why they would pray. After all, if God is sovereign, what's the point of prayer, or what's the point of evangelism? That's a question that often comes up when we consider this issue of the sovereignty of God. I can remember asking questions like that some years – many years ago now. If he's omniscient, if he knows everything, why ask for his help? He knows what I need before I request it, and he certainly knows better how to meet my need than I could possibly imagine and suggest to him.

Well, we ask these questions because human beings cannot tolerate inconsistencies, and they must try to find an orderly explanation for things. We want to connect the dots. And when you get right down to it, we are all systematic theologians. We may not be very good ones, but it's within us to try to systematize things; and that's within our nature. So I don't doubt that the early church struggled with the same conundrum, the same kind of riddle. How they solved it we don't know. But we do know this: these early Christians believed in a big God, an absolutely sovereign God, and they were diligent in both prayer and evangelism. And if you think about it, prayer makes sense only if God is sovereign.

Bingham Hunter a few years ago wrote a very good book on prayer entitled *The God Who Hears* and he made this statement: "Obviously, it would be a waste of time to pray to a wimp." He puts it a rather startling way, but it's true. It's only because God is omniscient and omnipotent, all-knowing and all-powerful that we do pray to him, because only that kind of God can always answer our prayers; and these early Christians understood that. They trusted him as the Almighty, and that is why they were the active competent people that they were.

Their thoughts were directed to God as the Sovereign Lord, and they developed that description of him in three ways. They praised him as the creator of the world, the revealer of truth, and the governor of history; and they were unanimous in their confidence in God. They weren't divided in their ideas about God, they prayed with one accord, with one mind. He's, first of all, the God of creation. "It is you," they said, "who made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all that is in them."

Now in one sense, that is simply good form, to begin prayer by paying homage to God as creator, praising him for who he is and what he has done. But this is also appropriate to the problems that concern them. Their mission, the mission that Jesus Christ had given to them, was to be his witness and to be his witness everywhere. The authorities had warned them not to speak the name of Christ anywhere. But since God owns everything everywhere, it was his authority that would stand, not theirs. And the church began by confessing that it was confident that God would overrule the treats of men. Well that's how they began, with great confidence in God who is the creator of all, the owner of everything.

The second fact about God they acknowledge is that he is the God of revelation. The events that occurred in Jerusalem with the rejection of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, his crucifixion, and then his resurrection and his ascension to heaven, all of that was foretold by the Holy Spirit through David. And they cite that from Psalm 2 in verses 25 and 26: Why do the Gentiles rage and the peoples devise futile things. The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ.

The early Christians loved the psalms. Peter preached them on the day of Pentecost. And then when he stood before the Sanhedrin, he preached the psalms again. He preached Psalm 118:22. They loved the psalms because all through the psalms, they say Christ. Psalms gave prophecies and illustrations of him; and one of the favorite psalms of the church was Psalm 2. It sets forth in prophecy, the world's rebellion against the Lord God, against his anointed, against the Messiah, his rejection in Jerusalem, and his triumph over death and all of God's enemies.

If they were to have quoted the rest of the psalm or gone further into it, they would have quoted the nations and what they say: "Let us tear their fetters apart and cast their cords from us." The nations, the Gentiles, and the Jews alike join in this

rebellion against God. They will not have his Christ to rule over them. They'll break his chains; they'll go their own way. That's what they proclaim, but God laughs at them the psalmist says, and says, "I have installed my king upon Zion, my holy mountain."

Rebellion is futile, God is sovereign, and Christ is enthroned triumphant in heaven. God had revealed these things a thousand years before they had ever happened. It was a great encouragement to these believers who were facing the same hostility; because while that psalm was fulfilled in Jerusalem when our Lord was crucified and when he was resurrected and ascended into heaven. Nevertheless, the rebellion, the hostility continues against his church, the body of Christ.

But God was sovereign in all of this and these Christians explain that in verses 27 and 28 where they acknowledge the third fact about God, that he is the God of history: "For," they explain, "truly in this city, we're gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your purpose predestined to occur." So even in this, he was in control and caused even his enemies, Gentiles and Jews, to do what he had decided beforehand to happen; crucify his Son.

God's greatness is seen in many ways, but one of those ways is in his absolute control over the affairs of men so that he can even use his enemies to accomplish his purpose; and that Calvary, he accomplished his purpose of salvation in the sacrifice of his Son through the schemes of the enemy. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for our good; and he brought about his purpose, his perfect will through their rebellion. "He makes," as the psalmist said, "the wrath of man to praise him."

And the church marveled over it and took great encouragement in it as it should have, as we should had because what this meant is that those who follow Christ are on the winning side; and that ultimately means that the threats and the actions of men cannot frustrate the work of God. They can only further the work of the gospel; and so they rejoiced in all of this, and they gave great praise to God as the God of creation, the God of revelation, the God of history, the one who made and spoke and decided. He is the Sovereign Lord, he is the benign despot, he is God Almighty.

It is only after they have praised God, expressed their great confidence in him, that they then make their requests. They are three and they are significant. Verse 29,

they begin, "And now, Lord, take note of their threats." That's not a prayer for vengeance. They're not asking the Lord to destroy the enemy. It wasn't even a prayer that he would keep the church safe, just that he would take note of the threats that the authorities had made. Keep those threats in his mind.

Then they asked God to make them good witnesses for Christ. That's their second request: "Grant that your bond-servants may speak your Word with all confidence." So it wasn't a militant prayer and it wasn't a defensive prayer, it was a prayer that God would take note of the Sanhedrin's threat to intimidate, to shut them up, and answer it by giving the church courage to proclaim the gospel, to speak.

Their third request is given in verse 30, a prayer for miracles, that God would heal and do signs and wonders through the name of Jesus. So they wanted miracles, not for themselves, not so they would enjoy good health, but for the sake of the gospel, to confirm the truth of it, and help persuade others to believe.

They make three requests. They are not requests for their own comfort or necessarily for their own protection, but for their effective service, for boldness, for confidence in their witness. And they make their requests only after they have expressed their confidence in God's sovereignty. They begin their prayer with their minds united in a common interest, which is the work of the Lord, and in a common knowledge of God as great.

His sovereignty, his control of history and the affairs of men didn't frustrate their prayer life, it enhanced it, and it should do the same for us. They didn't begin their prayer by saying, "O Sovereign Lord," and then say, "well, what's the point of going on. We may as well stop here. He's sovereign and he controls everything." Not at all.

It emboldened them in prayer. It encouraged them in it. To be someone we can pray to, God must first be someone who has the power to answer our prayers. He must have the sovereignty over his creation to do what he wants to do; and convinced of God's greatness and authority, the church prayed.

There's probably no writer of Scripture that has as much to say about predestination, and divine election, and the providence of God than the apostle Paul; and, yet, he traveled the world preaching the gospel and praying. He was a man of diligent evangelism and earnest prayer. In Romans 10:1, he prayed for the salvation of Israel. Night and day, he prayed for the churches.

He prayed for individuals. He told Timothy, "I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day." Read through the letters of the apostle Paul. It's clear that he was a man of prodigious prayer. And it's clear from the Bible that God responds to our prayers and he blesses evangelism. The reason is, the God who ordains the end ordains the means to the end.

That's the rationale for why we pray, why we are responsible to evangelize when God is sovereign, because the God who ordains the end ordains the means to accomplishing it. He ordained that salvation would occur through the sacrifice of his Son, and he ordained that the means would be through wicked men and their schemes. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, and he brought about his perfect will and his perfect plan in that way. And he has ordained that he will accomplish the ends of our receiving blessings from him by means of prayer and our gaining souls for the kingdom by means of evangelism.

But we're still left with something of a paradox in this, and then so be it.

What is very clear to us is who God is and what we are to do. Read through the Bible from Genesis 1:1 all the way to the end and you will find an absolutely sovereign God proclaimed throughout: a God who cannot be frustrated, whose hand cannot be turned back; that's very clear. And it's equally clear that we are to be a people of prayer and evangelism.

Who God is and what we are to do is very clearly set forth in the Word of God. We have our responsibilities and we may not be able to systemize these things to our complete satisfaction, but that shouldn't surprise us. But we're thinking here, we're considering God Almighty, the infinite God, whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways are past finding out.

Now these Christians knew that, and yet they were not deterred at all. For them, that was not a problem. And so they confessed his complete supremacy and power, and they prayed to him for the courage to preach the gospel, and God responded in a very obvious way. He shook the place where they were gathered and filled them all with the Holy Spirit, and so they began to speak the Word of God with boldness. They prayed for boldness and God gave them boldness, and they went out evangelizing, ignoring the warning of the authorities.

When the church is spirit-filled, it speaks of Christ and it speaks with boldness. But it not only looks outward to the world, it also looks inward to itself. It serves the

saints. It is generous; it is loving. Christians care for one another, and that marked out this church. Verse 32: And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.

Back in chapter 2, Luke wrote in verse 44 that, "All those who believed were together." And then verse 46, "The church was with one mind." And here again, we read of how the church was united, how they loved each other and formed a closely-knit group of one heart and soul. They were united in their affection for one another, but also united in their understanding with a common commitment to the faith and the mission of the church.

This was the unity that Christ prayed for in his high priestly prayer in John 17:21, "That they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so that the world may believe that you sent me."

One of the greatest apologetics for the faith is the church living in unity. That's what our Lord says: "May they be one as we are one so that the world may believe that you sent me." Christians are to be united as the Father and the Son are, with unity in our thinking, in our love, and our goals, and our purpose.

The church had that in those early days. The Godhead gives us the ideal. The Trinity gives us the ideal for our unity. The reality is there are things that will divide us, separate us. We won't all attain to the same understanding of the Word of God. But we should still share a common concern and love for one another.

I've been reading through the Bible again this year and I finished the book of Judges the other day, and went from the last chapter of Judges to the first chapter of the book of Ruth; and as I did, I was struck by the contrast between the last chapter of the one book and the first chapter of the other. The book of judges ends with a terrible civil war that almost annihilated the tribe of Benjamin. The last statement of the book is the refrain, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

And follows, Ruth, chapter 1, which is the opposite. It begins with a family from Bethlehem moving to Moab where the sons marry Moabite women. Tragedy strikes the family. All the men die, leaving the women widows. There's a tearful departure as Naomi says goodbye to her daughters-in-law and returns to Bethlehem. Orpah kisses Naomi and returns to her people, but Ruth clung to her. Naomi urged

her to leave, to go back to her people. She said she could give her nothing: no husband, no security.

But Ruth refused to leave her. "Where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people; and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried." There was nothing of the war and division that comes with the selfish attitude of everyone doing what's right in his own eyes. Ruth cast her lot with Naomi regardless of what lay ahead because she loved her more than life itself.

And that was true of these early believers. They were not selfish; they were not divided. They were united with a common concern for one another that was expressed in their voluntary economic sharing. They shared everything that they had.

Now that doesn't mean that they formed a commune, and the lesson is not that we should renounce private property; they still owned things. That's clear from chapter 5 where Peter told Ananias that he didn't have to sell his property. It was his. He didn't have to give the proceeds to the church for that matter. The point here is their spirit of caring that moved them to place the welfare of their fellow believers above their own possessions, above their own comforts, above their own security.

That's what the gospel produces in people. Through faith in Christ, we become new creatures with new minds, with a new attitude. We have the mind of God, the mind of Christ. That's what happened to these people. They understood the grace of God. They understood what God and Christ had done for them, that he gave his only begotten Son for them. So they reasoned who were they to hold back what they had from those whom Christ loved, from those for whom Christ died.

Now this attitude is also the product of knowing that God is sovereign; that he is the one who made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and owns everything in this world and this universe. So they can let go of the things of this world because God owns it all anyway, and God will provide for all their needs as they walk by faith and trust in him.

It's been well said that the man who is sure of God can afford to hold very lightly the things of this world. That's what these early Christians did. They held lightly the things of this world because they were sure of God and they cared deeply for his people. Faith in the gospel makes a new society of brave and generous people.

Man cannot produce that. All the laws and bullets in the world cannot make a community of mutual love like this one.

The New Testament scholar J. Gresham made that point a generation ago when he wrote that in the Hellenistic Age, the Age of the Greeks, there were many wandering preachers who told people how they ought to live. "But," he writes, "such exhortation proved to be powerless. Although the ideals of the Cynic and Stoic preachers were high, these preachers never succeeded in transforming society. The strange thing about Christianity was that it adopted an entirely different method. It transformed the lives of men not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story; not by exhortation, but by the narration of an event."

The event of Calvary, the story of the gospel, which by the Spirit's power, produces faith and gives new life. It is the imperishable seed, Peter tells us; the seed, the word that God the Holy Spirit uses to quicken, to give life, and to change the will and change the man and the woman. It changes people fundamentally. It makes us new creatures; and that change is seen in society.

Well, those changes were seen in Jerusalem. People became different. They were united to one another and cared for one another. They didn't live only to themselves though. They didn't live only for themselves; they didn't establish a spiritual ghetto. That's the temptation sometimes that Christians have is to find a security from the world and build a kind of firewall and live unto themselves, and shield themselves from the influences without.

We live in a dangerous world and a threatening world, but that's not the way these early Christians lived. They lived for one another, but they were very much in the world, and very active in being Christ's witnesses in the world. They had an outward thrust to their life. Verse 33 states, "And with great power, the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all."

That's the message of the apostles. They preached a crucified Christ and a resurrected Christ, a living Savior; and the evidence that Christ has literally, bodily, physically risen from the dead was not only the many witnesses to the resurrection. Paul mentioned them.

First Corinthians 15, Peter gave testimony to the many witnesses to the resurrected Christ in his speech on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. But it's not only

that that gives great evidence of the resurrection. It was these people. It was the life that they lived, their changed lives. Their lives were an example of resurrection life, of supernatural life. They parted with their possessions and money.

How difficult it is for people to part with the treasures of this world, and yet, they did so gladly; willingly. It was evidence of a supernatural work in their life of resurrection life. They were witnesses by that of the resurrection. And they did that not because they were exhorted to do so. They parted with their money, and their land, and their houses, not because the church had a fund drive or a financial program. They did it naturally; voluntarily. Their response was the product of the Holy Spirit within them. It was an evidence of spiritual vitality.

It was natural for them to do what they did. And one person in particular is singled out for special mention: Barnabas. That was his nickname. His given name was Joseph. He was a Levite from the island of Cyprus whose name Barnabas means "son of encouragement." And he proved to be that on a number of occasions.

In chapter 9 after Paul's conversion, Barnabas lived up to his name when all in Jerusalem were afraid to associate with Paul because he had, as that rabbi saw, been a violent persecutor of the church, Barnabas befriended him and introduced Paul to the other apostles. It was a major turning point in Paul's life and ministry. After Mark's failure as a missionary, Barnabas took him under his wing, encouraged him, and was effective in helping Mark recover and become useful in the ministry.

Barnabas was a significant man, particularly in the early chapters of the book of Acts, and was an encouragement to the young church in Jerusalem. We're told that he owned a tract of land, and sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles feet. It's a very generous thing that Barnabas did. He's one of many that did it; and the church has had its Barnabases at other times.

Nikolaus von Zinzendorf was a man like that. He was a Count and owned an estate in Saxony, and used it for the Lord's service by making it a refuge for persecuted peoples. The Moravians settled there, and the Moravians went on to have a very significant missionary outreach. In fact, it was through their ministry that John Wesley came to faith. And John Wesley went on to preach the gospel to thousands and thousands of people, and multitudes came to faith through that ministry. And we can trace that back to the Moravians.

Well, they found a refuge there on von Zinzendorf's estate and they named it Hurrnhut, which means "the Lord's protection." It also became a shelter for Lutherans and Calvinists. These were people of different theological persuasions. But Zinzendorf loved them all as members of the same body of Christ and spent his fortune helping them. In the eyes of the world, that wasn't a very good investment. The investment that Barnabas made wasn't appreciated by the world either. But the bank of heaven gives a return on our investments that is far greater than any temporal treasure, and it can be enjoyed for eternity.

That's how Barnabas lived. He and the others in Jerusalem lived for the Lord; for his people; for his service. He invested his possessions. He invested his life for eternity, not because he was shrewd, but because he loved the Lord who sacrificed all for him and he wanted to serve him and serve the people that he loved.

That was the church of Jerusalem. It wasn't utopia, not really; it had its flaws. But in the things that did, it gives us a model. It was a church united. It was united in its understanding of God, in its understanding of its mission. That mission was more important to these people than their own security, than their own possessions. It was a church that was active in prayer, and evangelism, and serving the saints. And it is a model for us.

So may God make us like that. May he continue to develop us like that. May the Spirit of God continue to change us, transforming us from glory to glory into the image of Jesus Christ. That should be our prayer. That should be our aspiration. And if there is anyone here who does not know Christ, who has not believed in him; may God, the Holy Spirit alert you to your lost condition and bring you to faith in him. That's how we receive salvation, by believing in Jesus Christ as Savior, that's all.

Salvation is a free gift received by faith alone. It's not earned by law keeping. It's not even earned by doing some great act of charity like selling some land and giving a large gift to the church. That won't save your soul. There is nothing you can do to save yourself. Christ has done it all by dying in the place of sinners and bearing the guilt and punishment in their place; and that is for all who believe in him. Regardless of how great their sin is, regardless of who they are, it is for the believer. It is received through faith alone.

So wake up. Realize that you are in a desperate situation in need of salvation and look to the Savior. Trust in Christ and receive the free gift of his salvation. May

God help you to do that. May God help us who have believed to have that unity that Christ prayed for and the church of Jerusalem had which results in great service to him. May God produce that in us. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the record of this church in Jerusalem and these amazing events that took place; this selflessness of these people; this unity and love that they had; this unity in knowledge that they had of you as the Sovereign Lord, the God of creation, the God of revelation, the God of history. And may we have a greater understanding of who you are so that in knowing who you are, we may honor you as you should be honored, and we may have the trust in you that should be invested in you.

Father, as we know who you are, it should produce within us absolute confidence to go out and be like these people were, bold in what we do in our witness for you. Make us good and faithful witnesses, and give us the witness of unity and love for one another. May the world see that we are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ by our love for one another. So we look to you to bless. We thank you for your Son, for his death for us, and it's in his name we pray. Amen.