



ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Bible Study

MAY

2011

MORNING & EVENING SERMONS

GOD'S YOUNG CHURCH

The book of Acts is entitled 'The Acts of the Apostles'. It could equally have been called 'The Acts of the Spirit' or 'The Acts of the Early Church'. Acts does not provide us with one form of church government or organisation, but it does show the moulding of God's young church and how God worked through the apostles and disciples to build it up and enable it to grow.

During May we shall look at the formulative commands and characteristics that moulded the young church. Through this we will hope to see how God can continue to mould our church today and to move it in the power of the Spirit.

Next month: During June we shall look at four great turning points in the life of the church, both individual and corporate. It will be a good time to look at the individual turning points in our lives and also in the history of ORPC.

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| 1 MAY 2011 | ACTS 1:1-8; 21-26 CALLED TO BE WITNESSES |
| 8 MAY 2011 | ACTS 2:42 CALLED TO BE DEVOTED |
| 15 MAY 2011 | ACTS 2:43-47 CALLED TO BE UNITED |
| 22 MAY 2011 | ACTS 6:1-7 CALLED TO BE LEADERS |

ACTS 1:1-8; 21-26: CALLED TO BE WITNESSES

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

INTRODUCTION

In these passages we see the mandate given by our Lord. It is to be His witnesses. Our witness is based on the experience of the Resurrection (1:1-3, 22) and the promise of the Holy Spirit (1:4-5). The authority and timing of witness comes from Jesus and the power to witness is given by the Spirit (1:6-7) and the extent of our witness is from the local to the worldwide (1:8 cf. Matthew's Great Commission). We are called to be witnesses, people with first-hand knowledge and experience, and people with courage to testify. The mission of God is both ongoing and outreaching. We tend to be fearful and intermittent in our witness. Why is this?

Acts 1:1-5 – The Basis of the Commission

- 1a. List what are mentioned in Acts (also written by Luke) 1:1-5 and his purpose in writing to Theophilus? Compare these with Luke's Gospel 1:3-4.

- 1b. What is the significance of Jesus' earthly life, death and resurrection? What do all these mean to the disciples then and to you now?

- 1c. What is God's promise to the disciples before the first Pentecost (cf. 2:1ff) and to you (vv4-5) after the first Pentecost? Compare these with Luke 24:46-49 and Matthew 28:19-20.

Acts 1:6-8 – The Power Comes with the Commission

2. The disciples constantly talk about the 'restoration of the kingdom', whereas Jesus redirects them to doing His work of discipleship.

What will the disciples receive when God the Holy Spirit comes upon them?

What does Jesus want them to do with the gift they received?

What has been distracting them? How is this different from God's intent?

Acts 1:21-26 – The Response to the Commission

3a. Why do the disciples need to find a replacement for Judas (v22)? Who has been chosen?

3b. Is there a change in the disciples' focus now? What can we learn from the disciples?

3c. How are you responding to Jesus' commission in v8 and how must you respond to it? What are the things that could distract us from what God has commanded all His disciples to do?

DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

Jesus "showed Himself... many convincing proofs" (v3) as His Resurrection appearances (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:5-7) confirmed the most important historical truth of His person and work which we are called upon to witness (v22).

While the promise of His Holy Spirit (vv4-5) was fulfilled at the first Pentecost, Jesus' power continues to touch, save and transform lives through the ages as Jesus' witnesses.

Our faith and call as Jesus' witnesses with our knowledge and experience of Him must never be secondhand. They must be focussed, in constant touch with the living Christ, in order they remain real, relevant and vibrant, continuing changing lives starting from ourselves.

FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

The disciples seemed distracted with other things rather than God's intended work. So can we. Discuss the cares which take you away from Him:

- Fears
- Worries
- Finance matters
- Children's matters
- Old age matters
- Discontentment
- Colleagues
- Employer
- Employment issues
- Enemies / rivalries
- Business matters
- Matters of integrity
- Spouse matters
- Health matters
- Your future
- Temptations
- Others

Read Psalm 37 responsively and meditate on it particularly vv1-11; 34-40. How would you surrender them to God? What gives you support in this passage? How does God treat those who love Him? How can you seek your family/small group's support in your concerns? How can you commit to live your life such that it reflects the well-known hymn: "To God be the Glory"? (You may want to get hold of the lyrics and sing it together.)

ACTS 2:42: CALLED TO BE DEVOTED

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

INTRODUCTION

In this verse we see four marks that characterised the early church, teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. These were the things that the believers devoted themselves to. We can be devoted in many ways. We can be devoted to our work, our interests and hobbies; we can be devoted to our families, we can be devoted to our I-pads and computers. We can even be devoted to our church in terms of giving time for committees and activities.

Acts here zeros in on our devotion to Christ, His teaching, His fellowship, His communion meal, and prayer. We are reminded of what makes us Christians. Two of the emphases, the Lord's supper and prayer, are possibly the most neglected emphases in our congregational life. Does the monthly holy communion service have the same centrality and meaning as the daily breaking of bread? And why is corporate prayer as a church more of an optional extra than the heartbeat of the church? (Explore the great prayer meetings of Acts!) This single verse is one of the most challenging verses in scripture to us as a church.

FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."
- Acts 2: 42

Apostles, Teaching

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching – not to anybody's teaching but to the apostles' teaching. What were the requirements for Apostleship? Was everybody who satisfied these requirements an Apostle? (Acts 1: 21- 26 – review May 1 lesson)

Can there be apostles in the Acts sense today? So where should we get our teaching from?
(Eph 4: 11- 14; 2 Tim 3: 14- 17)

Fellowship

Koinonia (koynohnee'ah) – "having much in common, sharing completely, partnership with."

This fellowship is not just about meeting together. Some examples of this fellowship in the scriptures are as follows:
Acts 2: 44- 45

1 John 1: 3- 10

Phil 1: 5; 2: 1- 4

2 Cor 8: 1- 5

Breaking of Bread

It was a common Jewish practice at Jesus' time for a meal to start with the head of the household taking a loaf of bread, saying a blessing, breaking it and distributing it (see Luke 24: 30). Jesus took this practice and made it the main element in the Lord's Supper.

In this passage, the early church “*broke bread*” together. We cannot be sure if Luke is referring to the Lord's Supper or to eating together or (most likely) to both (as it was normal at that time to have a meal together with the Lord's Supper [see 1 Cor 11: 20- 22]).

What is the purpose of communion? (1 Cor 11: 23-26)

What should our attitude be towards taking communion? Why? What can be the result of a wrong attitude? (1 Cor 11: 26- 34)

Prayer

The early church was a praying church (Acts 1: 23-24; 4: 23- 31; etc). It was something they did all the time. How should we pray? (Matthew 6: 5- 15)

Who should we be praying to? Who should we not consider when we pray? Does this mean we should not have group prayer? (Matthew 6: 5- 6, 9 (How is God addressed? – “____ *Father in heaven*”))

What should we remember about God? So as a result what should our prayers be like? (Matthew 6: 7-8)

What are the different parts of the Lord's Prayer? In what ways is this prayer different from our own prayers? In what ways are they the same? (Matthew 6: 9-15)

DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

Do we spend time learning about God? Do we devote time to this? The early church used to meet together each day (Acts 2:46) – yet many of us do not have time for a 5-minute private devotional at home each day.

Would Paul's complaint about the Corinthian Christians apply to us – “*I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready*” (1 Cor 3: 2)?

How is our fellowship (*koinonia*)? How are we as a congregation, small group, etc. doing? What would Luke (the author of Acts) say about us?

Is communion important to us (as individuals or as a congregation)? Do we consider communion as an important element in our proclamation of the gospel – “*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*” (1 Cor 11: 26)

Prayer is very important. Yet we often pray little. In times of busyness, it is easy to forget to pray. “*We have not joined in morning prayers*”, said I, “*We are only too ready, amid the cares and pleasures of this life, to forget the God to whom we owe all things.*” – main character in *Swiss Family Robinson* by Jean Rudolph Wyss

Let us not only pray regularly in private but let us also pray regularly together. The Lord's Prayer is not “*My Father in heaven*” but “*Our Father in heaven*”. How many of us have never attended the church prayer meeting? Let us make it a priority to come and pray together.

FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

In some ways, a Christian family or a small group is like a mini-church. So think about your family (if it is Christian) and/or your small group, how are you all doing in the following:

Knowing about God – Do we study the Bible together? Parents: remember you are to teach about God to your children. Fellowship – Do we do things together? Do we have things/ideas/attitudes in common?

Meals – Originally breaking of bread was the start signal for a meal. Do we have meals together – particularly with our family members? Do we consider our meal together part of our relationship with God?

Prayer – Do we pray together? Parents – Do you pray with your children?

ACTS 2:43-47: CALLED TO BE UNITED

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

INTRODUCTION

The unity of the early Christians is one of the most significant marks of God's young church. Notice the number of times the words 'all' and 'every' are used. They were united in reverence (v43), and united in their sharing of material blessings and in meeting need. This is not human communism but sharing in the light of the resurrection (cf. Acts 4:32-35). They were united in daily worship and home celebration (2:46), and they were united in their testimony to the world (2:47). And the natural result was daily conversions. The picture of the unity of Christians could hardly be more different from the church today, often divided, often reluctant to share God's blessings and wealth, and with a poor image and reputation in the world. Why has the church lost its original sense of unity and sharing? Is it just because of the different context of life today or are there deeper spiritual reasons?

FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

I. United in reverential fear in response to apostolic wonders and signs (v.43).

V43 literally reads, "Fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs came through the apostles."

In 5:5, 11 and 19:17, what negative events and results prompted the "fear" of those inside and outside the church? In 9:31, how did Luke positively describe the church's disposition towards God? All in all, what purpose does this "fear" serve for believers and unbelievers?

II. United in caring-giving in response to material needs (v.44-45).

From time to time, believers were moved to part with their possessions to benefit the needy. In such ways they showed their genuine love and devotion to the fellowship of Christ's body (v42). Luke emphasized it again in 4:32-37.

Describe the quality and depth of care-giving the early church experienced. What God-centred reasons or motives might underlie such giving from which we can learn today? (cf. Galatians 6:10; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 1 John 3:16-18)

From this passage and Acts 4:32-35, how is this sharing different from communism?

What initiatives can we take to employ God's blessings to meet the needy in the local church, in other churches, in para-church groups, and in the world around us?

III. United in corporate worship and home fellowship (v.46).

Luke describes the everyday nature of the church's meetings in the Temple and homes. In the Temple they probably gathered in larger groups for worship, fellowship, prayer and apostolic teaching. In their homes, they shared in regular, fellowship meals with joy and sincere, grateful hearts, praising God.

The early church was marked by joy that comes with faith, as they praised God and took sincere delight in each other. Why do you think joy is a characteristic of these believers? (e.g. Acts 5:41; 15:3; 16:34). To what extent is joy a characteristic of your walk with God and with fellow believers?

In a large church (the early church in Jerusalem was even bigger than ORPC!), it is very easy to get disconnected, get missed out, or do nothing without being noticed. How are you staying connected to God's people through the various avenues in the church – e.g. participating in a pastoral care group, a ministry that connects you to other believers, or in the corporate activities of the church (v42)?

IV. United in testimony to the world (v47).

“Two final statements reveal two significant results of the presence of this regularly meeting, money-sharing, miracle-working, Bible-studying, God-praising group: The watching community was favourably impressed.... The watching community was coming to faith.” (Life Application Bible Commentary : Acts)

How can you be nourished in your communal life in church to make an impactful and winsome witness outside?

DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

Acts 2:42 provides four marks that characterized the devotional unity of the early church. The practical outflow of that unity is expressed in mutual care-giving, worship and fellowship •all done in reverence, joy and sincerity. The impact? Society takes notice of the gospel and the transformation of those who proclaim it, and God, by His sovereign grace, is pleased to use this witness to add precious souls to His church.

“To take nothing for granted” is true but can easily become a Christian cliché taken for granted. Are we really taking nothing of our Christian faith for granted? When the church is struck with reverential fear at the God who is determined to gain and nurture a people for Himself, it is moved to take Christ and His people seriously, to seek His will as a united community in corporate worship, prayer and service.

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17, also Proverbs 18:24). How may we be that brother or sister that can be counted on this week?

In this season after Easter, it is good to look back again at the early church that Luke paints for us – a church that is exemplary, real, communal, relational and united for outreach. If you have not done so, you may consider participating in church camp, PACE trips, Small Group or prayer meeting.

FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

Today, we do not usually witness dramatic signs such as what the apostles had performed. Share some Bible passages we read or real-life experiences we encountered or witnessed that can inspire such reverential fear.

How close or far is the church's ministry compared to that of the early church highlighted in Acts 2:42-47? What areas do we do well and what areas need God's strength to improve? How has God called you to make that difference?

ACTS 6:1-7: CALLED TO BE LEADERS

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

INTRODUCTION

We sometimes have an idealised picture of the early church, especially after looking at Acts 2! But the young church had its problems from the start as we see from Paul's letters and this passage in Acts, which records the choice of the first deacons. There has never been a church without problems. What is important is how we identify problems and manage them in a Christ-like way. The problem in Acts was partly a language problem (one perhaps we can appreciate in Singapore) between two language groups of the same faith and race, with the Greek-speaking widows feeling they were being discriminated against. It was also a practical problem, a management problem that needed dealing with, because it was taking the leaders of the church, the apostles, away from their priorities of prayer and preaching (6:2). Are we in danger today of making the same mistakes and overburdening our leaders with management and organisational requirements? The solution proposed by the Apostles was to appoint deacons and it had the approval of the whole group (6:5). Can this teach us anything about our present day decision-making processes? And the deacons are chosen not for their management skills or financial expertise, but for their reputation, their faith, their wisdom and the evidence of the Spirit in their lives. When we are looking for new leaders, what do we look for in our deacons, remembering that in the Presbyterian system, elders have to have served at least three years as a deacon? Finally follow up on those who were appointed deacons (6:5) and notice that the leadership of the church is publicly affirmed in worship.

1. The Problem.

V1 describes a problem. What was the general condition of the church at that time?

How serious is the problem this presents to the community? What might happen if it's not resolved?

Do you think the complaint was justified (v2)?

Addressing the Problem

Who are the Twelve? (see 1:26 and 2:14)

How do they begin the process of tackling the problem (v2)?

What solution do the Twelve propose (v3)?

Seven men are put in charge of this duty. V3 mentions qualities these men must possess. Why is it so important that they must be (i) full of the Spirit and (ii) possess wisdom? How will these qualities help them carry out the distribution of food? Be specific.

What will the Twelve now be able to concentrate on? Do you think that they are being selfish, wanting to concentrate on what they are good at? Discuss.

Reactions

How did the community respond (v5)? How important is it that the entire community was able to approve this proposal?

The first named of those chosen – Stephen – is described with certain qualities? How important are these qualities for an admin job? How does this reinforce the truth that administration is equally “spiritual”? What was the significance of the laying on of hands? (v.6)

Outcome

What does the first word of verse 7 – ‘So’ – imply about the church growth described in the rest of the verse? What does the conversion of a large number of priests suggest?

DISCIPLESHIP POINTERS

Evangelical churches have sometimes been so keen to emphasise the importance of personal faith that the importance of the community of believers – the Church – has received little attention. This passage and others in Acts, help us to see the vital importance of the Christian community and our individual service to it.

This passage tells us that:

- We must work together despite differences such as ethnicity, language etc.
- Care for the weaker and poorer members of our congregation is a vital responsibility
- Leaders in all aspects of church life must be Spirit-led...
- ... and all who are Spirit-led have a duty to contribute leadership and service to the congregation.
The proper administration of “internal matters” enables the church to grow and continues its witness to the outside world.

FAMILY/GROUP MOMENTS

What talents/strengths/skills does each member of the family/group have? Talk about these. Make a list of things that members can do to serve God through serving the ORPC family of believers. Are you doing these things? Could you make a contribution to any of the following?

Ushers – greeting and serving Sunday worshippers
Outreach to the elderly
Visiting the sick or bereaved
Singing or playing a musical instrument
Involvement in missions and evangelism
Many other individual areas of service

If you're not making a practical contribution to ORPC at present talk to your group leader, or an Elder or Deacon to find out how you can get involved.