
The World We All Want - Preview

Acts 2:41-47

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A simple way of saying what the Bible is about is to simply say that the Bible is about God going about keeping his promise. His promise is salvation that is found in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. And the Bible unfolds this story as one picks up the Bible and begins reading in Genesis chapter one.

In Genesis you will find the creation account of how and why God created the world. It is a beautiful place with beautiful people happily living under the righteous rule of God. All is well. All is wonderful. All stays in this perfect state until...

As you continue to read the Bible you come across something awful. Something so dreadful happened that people now are rebellious and the world is under His curse. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God and sin came into the world we now see in distorted ways, we act in deceiving ways and it all ushers us to destruction and death.

Left here, there would be no hope. But the story of the Bible continues to unfold as we notice God going about keeping his promise; a promise to rescue his groaning creation from his ghastly judgment and bring his creation safely to his glorious Son; to the praise of His grace and the good of his people. This is what the Bible is about.

Throughout the month of November, we have sat under the series called *The World We All Want*. This series was designed to give you a sense of what the Bible is about. It also was preached not just to grasp the storyline but to be grasped by the Author of the Bible. The first message took us into Revelation 21 to gaze at how the Bible ends. We saw the world we all want in perfection. We took in the beauty of this place – a place of perfect peace, a place of no more threat, a place of budding beauty that never fades or fails – a place of love. And we saw that in this perfect place there were perfected people living together – people who sinned no longer, who wanted to be around each other, people without tears of sorrow, people with unaffected joy forever – people for whom Christ died. God's people in God's place under God's rule gladly. This is what we saw the first week.

The next week in our series took us into the devastation of sin. In Genesis 3 we noticed why the world we all want is not the world we all experience. When man turned from God and began trusting in himself he stepped out from under God's rule and wanted to rule. Sin is the basic and profound problem in the world. And the penalty for sin is death.

But there is a solution to this problem. Last week we lingered over God's provision for our plight. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. Jesus came to die on behalf of God's people so that they could be forgiven and freed from the law, freed from guilt, freed from the tyranny of sin and Satan. This was the note of hope! This is the turn in the story of the Bible, the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ on behalf of all He calls to Himself – all who cry out for mercy, who come to Christ for mercy and who carry on with Christ in joy.

Today is our fourth and final message in this series. Today we look at how we are to live after He calls us to himself. Today we look at the local church. If the Bible is about God going about keeping His promise, and if we saw that His promise was fulfilled in Christ to rescue His people from judgment and set them in a place under His rule then what is this place?

If our first message was about the perfect place in which his perfected people lived happily under his perfect rule, then today's message could be viewed as a preview (think: foretaste or example or indicator) of that future place. Jesus Christ suffered, died and was buried. In three days he was raised from the dead and

ascended to heaven. He poured out the promised Holy Spirit to (re)create a new people in a new place under His righteous rule who are led to the future place of perfection. This place we are talking about today is the preview of *the world we all want*. This place we are talking about today is called the local church. In other words, local church living is a foretaste of the world we all want. And so the question for us today is, “What does local church living look like”? Open your Bibles to Acts 2:42-47 where we pick up the storyline of the Bible to notice how we are to live after he calls us to himself. <pray & read passage>

Local church living is characterized by four distinct activities. These four activities are packed into one verse as seen in v42. Then, Luke (the writer of Acts), unpacks this loaded verse in v43-47 to make plain what local church living looks like. Let’s start by simply noticing the four activities of a local church in v42.

Outlining the characteristics

v42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

In this loaded sentence found in v42, we come across four characteristics of the new community; the local church. We see how they are devoted to the apostle’s teaching. We see how they are devoted to the fellowship. We see how they are devoted to the breaking of bread. And lastly, we see how they are devoted to the prayers.

Why were they so devoted to all this? How did all this come about?

In Acts 2:1ff we read about the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit at Pentecost (an annual Jewish harvest festival that came 50 days after Passover). The mighty rushing wind, the divided tongues of fire, the filling of the Holy Spirit, the speaking in other tongues – all of this amazing phenomenon read about in Acts 2 prompts the apostle Peter to stand up and preach the gospel. And preach he did. After preaching the gospel many who listened were “cut to the heart” and cried out ‘what must we do to be saved’. Peter said to them, ‘repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’.

People who are “cut to the heart” by hearing the gospel preached cry out for mercy. People who cry out for mercy to God are to hear the words “repent and be baptized” – turn from your sins and trust what Christ has done on the Cross for you. Realize that belonging to Jesus means belonging to His community. Go public with your confession and be baptized through immersion in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As 3,000 people responded to the gospel call they came together and began experiencing local church living.

This new family (i.e. society, community, generation, humanity) called the local church lived together under the power and reign of the Holy Spirit. Verse 42 is a portrait of the world we all want in preview.

Explaining the characteristics

v43-47

Now, in v43-47 Luke explains this verse for his readers to get a better sense of these four characteristics. In other words, the first activity in v42 is seen in v43. The second activity in v42 is noticed in v.44-45. And the 3rd activity in v42 can be seen in v46. And the last activity of v42 is noticed in v.47. Let’s unpack v42 by first noticing v43.

Teaching & Learning

v43

The first ministry in the list found in v.42 can be viewed as a learning ministry. These new believers in Jesus devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. The apostles, by implication, saw their primary task as one of teaching. The new believers needed to understand how the O.T. related to the Christ. They needed clarification of the gospel and its multi-faceted implications. They needed to see the Christ in the Scriptures because Jesus had gone to heaven. They needed to know how to live, how to love, how to hope in the second coming of Jesus Christ. The apostles tirelessly worked at feeding these hungry souls with the Truth of the gospel. How did the church learn from the apostles?

It is passionate

A trait of this ministry can be seen first as "intense". They were "devoted" to this ministry. There was a high commitment level to this learning. Notice in this passage that you do not find this "Spirit-filled Christianity" set over against the intellect. Some in today's church almost come across as anti-intellectual followers of Christ. We do not see that in the description of v42,43. On the contrary these learners were intent on education. They wanted to understand.

And this education was not lifeless. It reached the heart. Notice how v43 begins. In fear, reverence, awe – they were marveling at what they were learning.

It is centered on apostolic teaching

Another trait of this ministry is seen in its focus. They were devoted to the apostles' teaching. Not any teaching would do. No mere general teaching or philosophic musing is in view. Rather, this truth was God's revelation coming to His people through His apostles. Today this would mean the Scriptures. Living life together as a local church means people are intensely interested in the Holy Scriptures.

And this apostolic teaching was entrusted to biblically qualified men who were ordained as elders. These elders preserved and promoted this truth in thorough and steady teaching of the Scripture. What we see in the first century were men appointed as Elders giving themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer. And as they preached and taught and provided answers to the implications of the gospel, everyone else worked to understand and apply the Bible.

It includes evidence for believing

The next trait is less noticeable. But if we see v43 as a way of unpacking the first part of v42, we can see a feature of this learning. The first believers of the church were not taught merely what to believe. They were given evidence to believe it. The link between the first part of v42 and v43 is the apostles. They were the 12 who were tasked to proclaim the truth and some of them were revelatory agents of truth (i.e. they wrote scripture). This truth was breaking in to Jerusalem in the early 30's and needed proof of its authenticity. God worked miracles through the apostles not merely to lessen misery but to demonstrate that this teaching is from God. We see this in other areas of the Bible like Acts 14:3 that says, "So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord who bore witness to the word of his grace granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands". Or in Hebrews 2:2 we find the same teaching on apostolic miracles. The point is that when God sent new messengers into the world with new revelation He generally accompanied them with his miracles to attest to the truth. Since there are no longer any apostles today, we can glean a principle that evidence for the truth is important. Teaching and learning devote themselves to understand both the "whats and whys" of truth.

Fellowshipping

v44-45

The second ministry/activity in the list found in v.42 can be viewed as a fellowship ministry. These new believers following Jesus devoted themselves not only to the apostles' teaching, they devoted themselves to the fellowship.

This fellowship according to v44-45 also has some traits.

It is passionate

As the first activity was engaged intensely so also was this one. The phrase "they devoted themselves to..." applies to each of the following ministries. They were passionate about the fellowship. It was not casual. It was not optional. They saw it both as a privilege and as a necessity. They were not the ones who would give up meeting together as some did. Rather, they understood local church living in household terms. This was their new community. This was their new family. They found their identity not in individualism but in togetherness.

It is for believers

The next observation related to describing this fellowship is seen in the phrase "all who believed". This does not mean that unbelievers should not be around when believers are "fellowshipping". But it does draw out the truth that true fellowship is a partnership with other believers. You must be born again in order to be in the Fellowship. Fellowship in the truest sense can occur only between believers.

It is mutual

The third mark of this activity called fellowship is seen in the word "together". It was mutual. They were together doing this thing called fellowship. It was a community. It was reciprocal. They sensed the responsibility to watch out for each other and care for one another. They wanted to be together. Fellowship (seems funny to even say it) is found in community because it is by definition community. You cannot fellowship alone.

It is tangible

The fourth mark of this activity known as fellowship is that it expresses love tangibly. We live in a physical world with physical bodies and physical needs. Fellowship concerns itself with sharing real things with real people. The people of the Fellowship recognized that brothers and sisters have access to each other's time, talents and treasures. There was compassion in the local church that really wanted to meet needs. And notice too that when they did not have the resources to meet some needs they would find a way to participate in giving. They would do a yard sale (of some sort) to free up some money for those who needed it. What a local church we see in these verses!

Worshipping

v46

The third ministry/activity in the list found in v.42 can be seen in the phrase "the breaking of bread". We take this phrase to be more of a technical phrase than simply eating for a couple of reasons. First, the phrase "breaking bread" is found between fellowship and prayers. This suggests that it is more than merely eating. Also, in v46 Luke separates the breaking of bread from the meal they enjoyed signifying a difference between the two. In addition to these observations, we see this phrase when Jesus was at the last supper and the tradition he passed on to the church (cf. 1Cor.11:24) In other words, these new believers in Jesus devoted themselves not only to the apostles' teaching and to one another in fellowship, they longed for Jesus. They worship the Lord by remembering the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

It is passionate

Again I point out how they were continually devoting themselves to these activities. That description of their intensity describes also their worship. They were deeply Godward and Christ-centered in their activities together. They regularly and intensely enjoyed the Lord's Supper together.

It is found both in public and private sites

If v46 helps to unpack the third activity in the list of v42, we see the setting of worship as both large gatherings and intimate ones. That is, they regularly went to the temple and they regularly went to homes. The temple area was likely the portico called Solomon's (see v11; 5:12). This would have been a place on the east side of the courtyard where the apostles would teach the many. They perhaps would break bread in this setting. Whether or not "bread breaking" in v46 relates to the temple or just in their homes we see believers gather for worship through teaching and breaking of bread; both at large and small venues.

It is intimate

They would likely have meals around the Lord's Supper. This was a warm and sharing environment in which they remembered Jesus. This personal and close setting was found in their homes eating meals with each other with much joy as they waited for the Lord's return.

Praying

v47a

The fourth ministry/activity in the list found in v.42 can be seen in the phrase "praising God". The prayers of v42 were likely planned times in the day. It was a type of liturgy that they devoted themselves to. Without a doubt this organized way of relating to God had confessions of their sins, had thanksgiving for all His blessings, had petitions to the kind and sovereign God on behalf of their new brothers and sisters. V42 makes clear that local church living understood that if God does not give his people do not receive. They freely demonstrated that their hope was in nothing/no one else but God through Jesus Christ their Lord.

And as we allow v47 to shape our understanding of v42, we can see this type of praying was a demonstration also of praising God.

It is passionate

(see above rationale for this observation)

It is regular

This praising/praying together was so much their lives that "day by day" they would praise God. This is truly a characteristic of the activity of the Spirit. They were loving the Lord and delighting in him to the degree that they needed to tell him all about it. Their praise not only expressed their enjoyment but it completed it. They could not help but praise the Lord regularly as they gathered together.

Witnessing

v47b

These are the four characteristics we see in v42 – teaching/learning, fellowship, worship and prayer. These could function somewhat as four vital signs of a local church. Without these characteristics, the church is weak at best. With these four characteristics, we get a foretaste of the world we all want.

But as we noticed the local church enjoying these four ministries, we also see how it impacts people outside the church. There is one more activity we notice in this new community. Though it is not listed in v42, it is everywhere in the immediate context as well as throughout the book of Acts as well as throughout the entire Bible. We will call this the ministry of witness.

Local church living in the midst of a crooked generation was irresistible to outside observers as seen in v47b. This does not mean that everyone enjoyed the church and all were saved. There was and is plenty of persecution damaging and attempting to destroy the local church throughout the world. But this does mean that the love for the Lord, the love for each other, the dedication to learn and grow, the outflow of praise daily to the invisible God was highly attractive to “all the people” (v47).

If I did not separate this activity out from the other four, it likely would be found in the first ministry we noticed – teaching/learning. The believers saw a responsibility to learn. And they loved to learn. They longed to hear the teaching again and again and again. They undoubtedly talked much to each other and to the unsaved about what they were learning. This talk about the gospel over what it is and what it does in them reached the outsiders. They were learning that this new community created by the Word and Spirit was to spread throughout the world. It was to create other new communities of believers organized into local churches who have elders caring for and teaching them. These pockets of new societies were to demonstrate what life is like inside Christ and under His rule. Local church living was/is to be an alternative to this crooked generation (cf.v40). It was/is to be *The World We All Want in preview*.

This morning, in just a few verses, we have been given insight into the Lord’s master plan of how he rescues His people from His judgment and their sin and delivers them to the world we all want. We saw that the Lord reverses the curse of Gen.3 through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection as He creates a new humanity called the local church that lives happily in community life. This community is radically different from its society as witnessed by people living together selflessly, joyfully, reverently, patiently, courageously and worshipfully. This life transforming effect of God’s Spirit and Word piqued many unbelievers’ interest. And the Lord was adding to their number those who were being saved. What a passage in the Bible.

How can this teaching this morning function as a conclusion to our series this month?

Christians are people¹ who are committed to one another, share together and love one another as Jesus has loved us. This means Clearcreek Chapel is a preview/indicator of *the world we all want*. Just as Jesus gave us a glimpse of that world in his life as seen in the Gospels so we together are a foretaste of what is to come.

We are:

1. A waiting community.
 - a. Talk about worship & hope.
2. A proclaiming community.
 - a. Talk about preaching & evangelism.
3. A loving community.
 - a. Talk about fellowship as partnership

Let us together ask God for much grace in these areas. Let us enjoy the riches of being ruled by Christ. Let us spur one another on in these areas. Let us freely serve one another and freely praise His great and awesome Name. And as we do this more and more He will be seen more as He is and we will receive more as He gives. This is the *World We All Want in preview*.

¹ This paragraph was taken from the booklet *The World We All Want*, p.73,



Title
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The Chapel Pulpit • <date> Sunday Morning

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