



Expansion: The Story of the Early Church (Part 6) – The Early Church

Jason Harris – 12 September, 2021

Alright, good morning. Good to see everyone here. Hope you've had a good week. Let's go ahead and go to the Lord in prayer as we begin our time in the word.

Father, we come before you this morning in need of hearing your word. We come in need of the things that it does for us. We ask that, as we look carefully at it, that you will bring to life the fire of our love for you. That you will stir up in our hearts every good desire. We pray that you would make our church what it ought to be. That we would come to our text this morning seeking to learn what it is that we ought to be and to be transformed by it. We ask for your Holy Spirit's help now. We ask for his conviction. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Acts chapter 2. We're up to our sixth sermon in our series through Acts, and today, God willing, we'll finish up chapter 2 and move on next week. We're up to verse 42 in the text. Verse 42 through 47.

You'll remember we've just finished looking in chapter 2 at the day of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the beginning of the church's witness to the unbelievers in Jerusalem. And we see in verse 41 that the ministry on the day of Pentecost both in speaking in tongues and in Peter's preaching is very effective and thousands of people are added to the believers. Now, in our text today, we see a picture—sort of a summary picture—of the early church in its primitive form. And my goal this morning is really to do two things. First, I want to make an argument and then I want to give a vision. I want to make an argument about the picture that we see described in our text and then I want to give a vision of the early church to be emulated by the modern church. So those are the two things I'm hoping to do.

I'm starting out by making this argument because Acts is dangerous territory. Many people have smashed their boats on the rocks of Acts and come away with something other than healthy, biblical Christianity. And I want us as believers to be equipped to discern what is truly biblical and what is merely Biblicism. Biblicism is a cheap knock-off of what is truly biblical. So, I'm going to start with the argument and then moving from that, hopefully as we work through the text, after that you'll be able to kinda see the issues as they come up and it will be helpful to us.

So the argument comes in response to a question. The question that the text raises for me is—and this is big enough that I actually didn't preach on this text two weeks ago precisely because I wasn't... wrestled through it sufficiently at the stage—the question that this text raises for me is this: Is this—what's being described here in verse 42 that was just read out for us through to verse 47—is this the ideal form of the Christian church? Like, this is the template. This is the ideal. It's supposed to look like this and now look where we are and compare ourselves to it. Or is this the honeymoon phase of the church, so to speak? An understandable, but temporary high? I'll ask the question in another way: Is Acts 2 what the modern church should be? Or is Acts 2 what the early church was merely? Or we'll ask it another way: Is this normative? Or is this merely descriptive? "Normative" meaning what we should do and "descriptive" meaning just merely what is.

So why does this question matter so much? We won't go into great depth, but I'll point out just a few things quickly. The first is that getting this wrong breeds dangerous doctrines. Many dangerous cults rest on this text, today's text, for their claim to be Christian, and biblical, and superior to the way most Christians do Christianity. Many cults. I think of errors... I'm thinking of situations in Cairns right now... multiple situations in Cairns... where there are severe errors, dangerous errors that are rooted in this exact text. Grave oppression is taking place in God's name today, on the basis of this text, even in Cairns. So that's the first reason I want us to look at this so carefully, be able to clearly understand the issues.

And then secondly, Acts itself is a history book. So this issue becomes uniquely important in Acts as opposed to what much of the New Testament is: letters where you have commands. Here, we're dealing with a history book and it describes what happened. That's what a history book does, it gives you what happened, but it rarely, if ever, gives us commands. It's not an instruction manual, *per se*. And so this question is going to arise again and again and again throughout the book of Acts. And if we get it wrong, we could just misread the whole book of Acts. We could treat it like, "This is a description of how you should do church."

When it isn't. If... If it isn't. And that's the question we have to wrestle with. Is this something we have to imitate in order to be able to say we are "biblical"?

Alright, so in an attempt to answer this, I'm going to start out by just giving a few thoughts. And I just want you to just stick with me, work through these thoughts, and then we'll delve into the text soon.

First of all there are no commands in today's text. Okay, in some of Acts, you'll find sermons where commands are given. They are, for instance, in this chapter two, we have commands that are given to the Jewish people. So they're not commands to us. But someone in the story is commanding someone else. And we can sometimes infer what we ought to do from that. But in our text today, there's no command whatsoever. So there's nothing here that tells us, "You should do this, you should look like this."

Secondly, what we describe... see described here in this text is inherently temporary. Okay, so only so many people can fit into the temple court. Only while the church is solely in Jerusalem can the temple play any role in the worship. And we're gonna see in a moment what I mean when I talk about the temple playing a role. As long as the church is just one place, this works and to emulate it works. The moment it spreads, this doesn't work and we have to start adapting and changing. In fact, a few decades after these events, the temple itself is completely destroyed. So if any of it depends on the way they did it here in this text, clearly it can't work after 70AD. So that's an argument in favour of, no, this isn't actually exactly the way we should do it.

So third, the church cannot withstand success without adaptation. Church cannot withstand success. So day one, we've got three thousand people. Day one. We're gonna see here in verse 47, that daily people are being added to the church. And so if it continues to grow, people continue to hear the gospel and respond to the gospel in faith, adaptation will be necessary. And the adaptation, as we're going to see as we work through Acts, begins almost immediately. So within the first few chapters we're gonna find the appointment of the seven. And basically, what we have there is, the way we're doing church isn't working, problems come up. And the Church says, "Oh, no, no, we have to do it this way." No, they say, "Let's change things. How shall we do it? How shall we find a solution that will make this work?" So you have an administrative problem that's solved with an adaptation. Further, we find that that adaptation that happens not once or twice but constantly throughout the early church, does not weaken the church, but rather strengthens it. Adaptation in the early church

doesn't take away what was good about the church. It actually goes from strength to strength until it goes from being one hundred and twenty people in a room... one room... to covering the globe. The Roman Empire collapses before Christianity, the Emperor himself becomes a Christian, Christianity becomes the national religion of the Rome that was so powerful, Christianity dominates the Western world in the centuries that pass and spreads all over the known world.

So let me, let me propose an answer that's going to try to balance what I've just argued, and just put out there with, with what we normally think of, "Well, the Bible is God's word, and we ought to obey it." And try to balance that with a... with an answer.

So my first attempt at an answer would be this: We ought to be like the early church in substance, not merely external appearance. The substance of it we have to be like. The external appearance, the way it looks in a description, not necessarily. Or let me put it in another way, our goal is to truly emulate the early church, but not to cheaply imitate it. Or the spirit of the early church is ideal. But the form is not. Let me try to explain what I mean when I say that the form is not, but the Spirit is. When I talk about form, I'm talking about when, where, how, how often, who. The kind of stuff that is described, the exact liturgy... What exactly do we have to do in our gatherings? So example, what, when can we... can we meet indoors? Do we need a building? Are we allowed to have a building? Must we gather on a Sunday? May we pray in our own words? Does it have to be in an official prayer? Does it have to be Bible? Can we sing in our own words or sing in Scripture only? Can we sing at all? How long must our gathering be? And believe it or not, every single question I just raised, there are strong people on both sides... arguments on both sides in the Christian church. So that's, that's the form. And I'm saying I don't know that we need to emulate that really.

But by the spirit I mean, the nature of things, the motives for things, the attitudes and characteristics of the people, the gospel disciplines they engaged, the principles that they practice. So for instance, the growth was organic, there was unity, they were glad, they were generous. These sorts of things that we see described here, we would say, normative. We are supposed to be doing these things. Now, it's not always going to be clear which is which. But I want us to read Acts, realizing that not everything they did is what we must do. We are not superior for imitating them. Indeed, to imitate them cheaply while failing to understand and emulate the principles they lived out is to pervert the truth and misuse Scripture.

Alright, so there's a lot there. And I don't view that as like, the end. But more the beginning. I want us to be thinking about that, as we work through Acts. Are the forms things we should be doing? Because sometimes they are and sometimes they aren't. But what we must be getting is the substance beneath "Why, why did they do that? What is the principle that they're living out when they make this decision in the church?" If we get the principle and understand that, then we will have a clue as to whether we're obligated to do the thing they're doing.

So that leads us to the second half. And that is the vision, the vision of what the early church looks like. And hopefully with that argument in mind, we kind of get a vision of how the modern church is supposed to look in relation to how the early church here looked.

So let's begin by looking at the text, verse 42, that's where we're beginning, verse 42, the text says, "*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*" Four things listed out here that they devoted themselves to. That they, they were serious about these things in a long term sort of way. And first, well, I'll just list them out... we have the apostles' teaching, we have fellowship, we have the breaking of bread, and then we have the prayers. Let's just look through them one at a time. And you're gonna, you're gonna see now, I think, a little bit of what I mean when I talk about normative, "Is this the way we have to do?" There are many people who say, "Sunday morning should have these. This is your liturgy. For Sunday morning. Church, this is the four things you ought to be doing." And I'm not sure it is. And I think you're gonna see why it's so hard to wrestle with as I work through some of these.

Here we go, the apostles teaching. So the Christian faith was never merely existential. It's never been just about how we experience life. And the Christian faith has never been merely mystical... has never been just about how we feel in relation to God. Rather... and, and it is both of these things. But rather, it is it is not merely these things, rather, the Christian faith is built firmly on a set of teachings, doctrines, or dogmas that we hold to be true. Not that we hold to be, "this is what we think." But we believe they are true, independently, objectively true, rooted in reality, and therefore we are obligated to affirm them. We received these things from the apostles, who received them from God himself. They're described here as the apostles' teachings. The apostles got them from God the Son, while he was on Earth. They got them from God the Holy Spirit, through revelation, sometimes through inspiration. And God directed them, God the Father directed them, so we have God himself revealing his truth, not his opinions, but what is real, what is true, through the apostles, which has been

taught to the church and then... and then later we find Paul saying, "*the things you have learned, teach to godly men who will teach other men who will teach other men*" and so we have the teaching of the apostles': objective truth on which the church is based.

We therefore gladly rehearse these teachings to each other again and again. For we believe that in them the whole life of the Christian is supported in every level. Every... everything about the human existence is supported and explained by these truths: emotional, mental, intellectual, spiritual, all of it, science, history, all of it, you make sense of it around these truths, because these truths are true. They're not just guesses. This is the God who made it all, who was there in history, who made science, who made us. It explains all of it. So these truths, we rehearse them to each other when we get together as Christians, and they keep us rooted in reality, which is the Christian truth. And so the early church, devoted themselves to the apostles teaching.

And then we have the early church devoted themselves to the fellowship. I mean, I'm going to just rush over some of these even though there's much more we can talk about. The fellowship, notice, it's "the fellowship", it's not talking about a verb, this is a noun. This refers to an objective unity that exists around these truths. The truth—things that are actually real in the real world—which are, are stated in doctrines. There's one God. That is reality. And that's why we have to state it and hold it and preach it and believe it. The fellowship is a unity around these truths, the apostles teaching. Fellowship, again, not something that we do, it is something that we are. We are a fellowship of people who hold these truths to be true. And these people were devoted to that fellowship. They were serious about it in a long term way. There was a devotion to the fellowship that we have as people who affirm the truth. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus did die for our sins. Jesus did rise again. And Jesus is coming back to finish what he started.

Third, the early church devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. Now, this clearly refers to eating. When a meal started, you would break bread. That's the first step in, and it was almost a symbolic act, a little bit like sometimes we say grace or something, it was the breaking of bread. So clearly, we're talking about eating. What isn't entirely clear here is whether it refers to eating together... just tea... or whether it's talking about the Lord's Table. And the evidence to my mind suggests that it refers just to eating, just to meals. Eventually, the term comes to refer also to the Lord's Table. But probably not by now in the writing of this, probably, arguably, not even in Scripture times. Again, these are not hard and fast... We're not sure. But this—especially when we consider what he says in verse 46, where he

describes they clearly are getting together to eat their meals rather than having picnics at the temple—probably just talking about breaking bread, just getting together and eating meals. And the early church was devoted to that.

And then the fourth thing is, the early church was devoted to "the prayers". Again, "the", we have an article here, not just "prayer". There are even translations that just take out the "the" and just say, "devoted to prayer." But that's not what the text says. The text says, "the prayer" and it says, plural, "the prayers", which suggests that we're not just dealing here with praying *per se*, but that it's possible it refers to written prayers, prepared prayers of some sort. More likely the interpretation is that it refers to the regular hours of prayer in the Jewish Temple. The Jewish Temple had times of prayer, "the prayers", and we know multiple times throughout this text we're gonna see that they met at the temple. And so probably what this "the prayers" means is they kept going to the prayers like a devout Jew would. Only they met together as Christians in the courtyard and took part in the prayers, for the first time, genuinely understanding the substance that all of the pictures related to. All the pictures of the sacrifices, the Old Testament Temple, the veil, the Holy of Holies, all of the pictures, they went and they prayed, knowing that they could literally talk to the God in the Holy of Holies and thinking about that. So, certainly would involve praying, but probably is actually talking about they went to the temple, "the prayer" time.

And again, remember true Jews in the first century, true followers of Judaism, became Christians. Those who did not become Christians departed from true Judaism. They went from the true religion into a false religion, without changing religion, because they missed the point of their religion. And so here we have the early church sticking with the truth, and literally, they're comfortable to go to the temple and do their thing, there. That's what they did. And that's where they did it. But they filled it with reality, the truth behind it all, rather than the empty form that many had turned it into. That's verse 42.

Verse 43, text goes on, "*And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.*" The wonders and signs that were being done, were being done for the apostles, led to the sense of fear, dread, awe, reverence. And it's not entirely clear—it says every soul, every soul felt this awe—presumably both the believers and the unbelievers are living and it's a sense of they're living under this. There was this kind of a sense in Jerusalem, of, "Wow, some really intense things are happening here." And there's this fear of God or this respect and awe for him.

And then we go on in verse 44, and we'll put verse 44 and 45 together, as it kind of... kind of describes one thing. Verse 44 and 45, "*And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*" Now, some have seen in this a Christian endorsement of communism, that communism is Christian, because, "See, the early Christians were communists." But a careful look demonstrates that this is, in fact, something else entirely. I would describe it as a very, very loose form of voluntary, limited, communalism... a very loose form. And I'll explain in a moment why I say that. I'll just give three explanations as to why it seems to be that.

First of all, we found in verse 45 that private ownership was fully recognized. In verse 45, the text says, "*and they were selling their possessions and belongings.*" Now, they're selling them and they're giving them to the poor. But two... two words here are used that mean, "mine". Possess and belong. They're mine. And I'm choosing to sell them and give them to the poor. We're gonna see that enforced later in the text.

Secondly, we find in verse 46 that they did not live together. So it says they're together. And we're tempted to think, "Oh, they live, they live together." But clearly it says in verse 46, that "*day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes*", meaning they went to the temple to worship, and then they—you're not going to eat in the Temple courtyard, that wouldn't be respectful—and so they go home to their homes, and the implication is probably together. They took people home with them. We'll get to that in more detail in a minute, but they had homes and they lived in their own homes. And so this is not communalism in the sense of living together in a commune.

And then we find in Acts 5 that all the giving was purely voluntary in every sense. Acts 5 and verse 3, Peter said to Ananias... Ananias and Sapphira, they sell their property and then donate it to the church but they don't donate all of it. And the issue for Peter is not that they had to sell it, not that they had to donate all of it, but Peter says, "*Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit*—that's his issue, "you lied". Verse 4 he explains that—"*While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?*" It did. It was yours. Your property. Your own. "*And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?*" Nobody was told, "You have to sell your property. And if you do, you have to give the money to us." That's not what was happening and verse... chapter five makes that very clear. Rather, it was voluntary, it was optional. And so what we have here is not communism as a social or an economic ideology. Nor is it communalism where people go and live in a commune, and give

all their possessions to a collective ownership. That's not what was happening here. Rather, what we see here is extreme generosity. People are willingly giving up their possessions, like selling land, houses, significantly valuable things, willingly and giving it to the church and saying, "Use this to feed the poor." They were doing this often. And I say often, because the text describes this as a norm. It was a thing that was happening a lot. People stopped thinking about, "I'm going to accumulate wealth for my retirement," and started thinking, "How can I use my resources to look after the community?" That was just the way people thought and it was a radical way of thinking. And then of course, this was distributed by the church on the basis of need... at least over time it came that. At first it may have been sporadic—people giving things. And then what we see is the church slowly improving the way they handle this. So you see this at first, and then you see the seven are chosen because things are not being distributed well, certain racial boundaries, you know... are the Greek widows getting looked after as well as the Jewish widows? In Acts, sorry, in 1 Timothy five, verse 16, Paul instructs to have strict rules. He says, "Alright, you've got widows who are literally being fed by the church, and they shouldn't be. They should be going and getting married again, or getting a job." Like that's... he's saying, not just anyone should be able to sit on the generosity of the church. And so you have over time an adaptation and the systematic improvement of the way things are being done. But what we have at this early stage is just the generosity is there. Just give. Over time, we'll try to do it better. So that's what we're seeing there in verse 44 and verse 45.

Verse 46, the text goes on and says, "*And day by day [or daily], attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with gladness... [Sorry...] with glad and generous hearts.*" What we see here is not weekendly. It's daily. It happens here in verse 46, happens in verse 47. Day by day, or better translated, "daily". They go to the temple daily. This is for them a venue for a Christian gathering. Okay? This is not a continuation of Jewish religion. They're not just being good Jews. The early church's base is the temple. We find out a bit later. And we're going to see this even next Sunday, we're going to see this... that Peter and John come to the temple. That's where everyone got together. This is, this is... Listen to this statement carefully because it counters the common wisdom. The typical venue for the worship gatherings of the early church at the beginning was the temple. Not homes. Over and over again you hear people say, "Well, the early church met house to house so we should meet in house to house." The original venue for the worship gatherings of the early church was the temple, not the homes. They clearly got together in their homes a lot according to here in verse 26. There are meals, they're taken together in their homes daily. So we, we have the early church... they love to be together.

They meet up daily, not, not once a week, but daily. There, there is a collection at the temple. I'm quite sure not everyone could come every day. People had to work, people had families, people had lives. But there was a corner in Solomon's Colonnade at the temple where you could always find some Christians there during the day. Praying, singing, preaching, talking to people. This is, this is witness. It's a public location anyone could be walking through, it would be a little bit like a market square kind of a feel, except "the temple". And they have a place where they hang out there, but then they, at mealtimes, they go to their homes, and the implication is they probably did that together, like, went to each other's homes or took people who didn't have food and said, "Come eat with us." Basically, that the story here in this text is that they got up into each other's lives. They just got all involved in each other's lives daily, not weekly. This is the early church.

And then Luke gives us in verse 46 a summary of two dominant qualities of the early church: he says they had glad hearts and they had generous hearts. And "hearts" here emphasises that there's not a culture of control. This is not, "Well you have to be generous, you have to give, everyone sell your houses, this is the way it is if you want to be one of us." But it was right in the heart. The stuff was driven by what they loved, what they wanted to do. People weren't being pressured to be generous, it was coming straight from hearts of gladness. And of course, it says, around the meal and being with believers. And it's, it's not clear to what extent these, these qualities are just supposed to be general, or literally talking about how they felt about the meals. The Christian meals were a really significant part of the early church. They became called love feasts. And they were really, really significant. They made an impact on the culture around them with the way they did their gathering around meals.

But it's interesting to me that these two qualities fit perfectly into our understanding of the Christian faith. That, gladness, glad that... yes, gladness in each other, gladness in enjoying the fellowship, not the thing they were doing by eating together, but the fellowship they had around the truth. But gladness in the God who made the truths, gladness in the God who came to earth and became one of us, gladness in the God who died in our place, gladness in the God who rose and ascended and is coming back. Gladness characterized them, and then this generosity. "Generosity" is actually, if you have a translation other than the ESV, you may, you probably have a very different looking translation. But this, this is one of those ones that is quite tricky. We just don't know. It's a word that rarely shows up. And we're just not 100% sure what it means. In context, the "generosity" translation is quite likely considering the extreme generosity going on in this context. But what we're seeing even in that, even without being sure this translation is right, is that what the gospel did in the early

believers very quickly, and, and spontaneously, was to open their hands. To make them just want to give. Money, but also themselves. The meal thing, that's, that's a way of thinking that comes from, not "me and mine and my space and my comfort," but, "No, come on in." Generosity was a natural, spontaneous result of the thing that had happened in them when they were converted.

In verse 47, the text goes on and says, "*praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*" God got the glory for what he was doing. Peter didn't become a celebrity. God did. They praised God. That was a significant part of the early church's characteristic. If you had a few sentences to describe the early church, that would have to be in there and it is.

And then it says, "*having favour with all the people.*" The locals had a good opinion of the Christians and this, we find, is the norm for the early church. The locals had a good opinion of the early Christians. There was often persecution, and we're going to see that as we work through Acts. Severe persecution. It's coming, it's coming strong. But the norm for the early church was that they had good favour with the community. Not the religious authorities, not the vested interests. That's where the persecution came from. From, from vested interests for wealth, power. Or other religious leaders who violently disagreed, whether they were Judaistic Christians or Pharisees, persecution came from those quarters. But the community liked the Christians. We find this right across the Roman world of the early church that they found favour in the eyes of others. And the reason, I think, is because Christians love good, and do good, and are good. Okay? There is a thinking that if you're a Christian, people will hate you and that's just the way it is. And they're supposed to hate you and you kinda want them to hate you because if they don't hate you, well, you must not be being a good Christian. And there's a grain of truth in that because our message is offensive. Our message is violently offensive. It is, "You are a sinner." To the Jew, our message is, "You killed your Christ." And to the Gentile, our message is, "You're a sinner under the wrath of God." Not a popular message. Okay? And so those who have a strong interest that's threatened by us, or other religions that reject this truth, there will be pointed opposition. But in general, Christians are supposed to be so good, and love goodness, and do goodness so consistently and so pervasively in society that they are well thought of by the community. We must be very, very, very careful not to take the attitude that many Christians in our day take which is: "They're gonna hate us so let's just be obnoxious and anti-social and then when the blow-back comes, we'll just say, 'Oh, it's because I'm a Christian.'" No, it's because you're obnoxious. And you're anti-social. And you're doing it in God's name. Stop it. Okay?

The Christians weren't obnoxious. They weren't anti-social. They weren't harmful to the community. Everywhere they went, they did good. And we're going to see this literally next week. We're going to see poor people, beggars, sick people, got help from the Christians and that didn't stop in the early church. It went, to this very day, most of the hospitals in the third world were built by Christians. The orphanages... built by Christians. Because we do good to people. And that's why the community has a good favour towards us. Yes, there will be persecution. But it is not because of our manner, it is because of our message. And the persecution should look odd. People should look and say, "Why are they being persecuted? They're such good people. They're... they do so much good in our community. It doesn't really make sense that they're getting persecuted." It should look odd to the objective observer. If it doesn't, something is wrong in the way we're thinking. The early church found good favour in the community.

Then finally, verse 47, I want us to notice this really, really crucial point. I read commentaries that talk about the evangelistic efforts of the early church here in verse 47, but there aren't any. Okay? I am very sure that when they met in the temple, that they were doing evangelism. But the text here doesn't say anything about it. I have no doubt that they were doing evangelism. They were talking to people that passed by, they were answering questions, they were testifying, probably doing miracles, and potentially speaking in tongues, in the temple courtyard as they gathered daily. Probably that was happening. But this text doesn't say it. Here's what this text says, Verse 47: "*praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day [or again, that's daily] those who were being saved.*" Were they working? Were they evangelising? Yeah. But what does the text say? "They won people to Christ." No. God added people to the church. And the emphasis here... it's not a difference in reality, in fact, it's a difference in emphasis, it's a difference in perspective. Yes, we preach Christ. Yes, we spread it everywhere we go. We talk about Christ and explain what we've seen. We're witnesses. But it is God who builds his church. Not us. It is God who builds his church. It is God who is drawing people to himself through the preaching of his word. It is God who is bringing people into his assembly. It is God who builds his church. Not the apostles, not the believers, but God. And that is incredibly comforting to know that what we're doing... this isn't all on us. It's not all on our shoulders that we have to work harder and harder and harder to make God's church progress in the world. Because if we thought that were true, we would all quit about now, in our lifetime, like... the world's not looking great right now, right? But we're not building God's church. God's church in Afghanistan? God is building that church. God's church in Australia? God is building that church. God's church in America? God is building that church. God will

reprove that church. God is the one doing this thing. Our job is to obey, to cooperate, to testify, to glorify God. But God is building his church. And then we see that people were being saved. Daily. As God worked. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the way you have built your church. From that day until this, you have drawn countless millions from darkness into light, from rebellion into submission, from hatred into love, from despair into hope. We ask you today that in spite of the mess your church is in, that you would not abandon us. We ask that you would purify us, that you would judge us, that you would chasten us... But we ask that you would not abandon us. We ask that you would continue to build your church. We ask that we would be characterised by gladness in you and by generosity. We ask that we would emulate all that was good in this early church. That we would daily rehearse to each other the truths that have been passed to us from the apostles. That we would remember these truths. That we would challenge each other with these truths. That we would comfort each other with these truths. That we would be devoted to the fellowship that we have around these truths. That we would be devoted to systematic and regular prayer, and teaching, and worship, and praise. Protect us from looking at these sorts of texts on the surface and seeking to merely imitate what they did. Help us to dive into the substance beneath it so that we can adapt the substance to whatever circumstance we find ourselves in. Help us, even here in the midst of COVID as we find ourselves under quite unique circumstances, to take full advantage of every opportunity to adapt, to continue to testify, and to worship, and to be generous, and to enjoy the fellowship that we have around the truth even under these circumstances. And I pray that we would behave, even in these circumstances, in a way that gives us good favour with those that know us, that our offence toward others would be our message and not our manner. I pray that these things would be characteristic of CrossPoint, that we would be what we should be. We thank you that in, roughly, nineteen hundred and ninety years since this day of Pentecost and this pattern that emerged from it, that your church continues and that we continue to wait for your return. We ask that you would do it. Soon. Come. Redeem us. Rescue us. Glorify us. Sanctify us. Make us what you promised to make us. Do justice. In the name of Jesus, Amen.