



Acts (Part 2) – The Church Is Born

Matt Chandler – February 9, 2014

If you have your Bible, go ahead and grab it. Acts, chapter 2, is where we're going to just camp out together today. Last week, we began a 12-week series on the book of Acts. We said last week the reason we were studying the book of Acts was to remind and reinforce our church that we are to be, by God's command and by God's lead, a church that is serious about multiplication, a church that doesn't just have its eyes on itself but rather has its eyes and its money and the talent God has brought to it and the opportunities God has brought to it in order to make something larger than itself give and live openhandedly for the glory of God.

We talked about being a church-planting church, a church that is open-handed with its resources. We want to give away money to other churches. We want to give away money to other ministries that are doing gospel work around the world. We want to have pathways for our best and brightest to leave The Village Church and go plant churches in other parts of the world. We want to send missionaries to the ends of the earth. We want to open campuses around the Metroplex.

In fact, some pretty big news for us this past week. After three years of aggressively praying and seeking a building in Plano, this past week we signed a contract on a building in central Plano on Independence Parkway. We should celebrate that. I mean, that's three years of praying and asking and seeking. This goes back to what I said last week that what we're doing here is not something new but something we have always done.

We haven't left old models to new models. We're just doing all we can to maximize the opportunities God has given us for the glory of his name and the building up of his kingdom. At this point, here's all the information I have. We have signed a contract on a building. We have 30 days for the inspection and all of that. We've already done some of that, but we have 30 days now to kind of do all that kind of due diligence.

Then from there, the elders have unanimously decided we will place in front of you in the weeks to come Hunter Hall as the campus pastor of the Plano Campus. Again, that's reason to celebrate. He has just so faithfully served the men and women out there. There will be more information that's coming over the next couple of weeks, but I just wanted to lay before you that we have signed that contract and we are looking to soft launch that and then hard launch that in this next year.

You can see even in that announcement the things we're saying we've historically done, we're still doing. Then in the middle of all of this, we're still praying about, considering, and walking alongside of the Denton Campus to roll off as an autonomous campus and be the first of our campuses to roll off and become autonomous.

As we're walking through the book of Acts, the thing I wanted to make clear very early on is, although we will study gospel-centered multiplication as seen in the book of Acts, our sermon series on Acts is not about the Denton roll off. It's not about the gifts of the Spirit, although they'll be there. It's not ultimately about prescriptive versus descriptive, although they both will be present in the text.

We have dove into the book of Acts for the purposes of watching what God has done from the beginning in regard to multiplication. We see that clearly in the verse we covered last week (Acts, chapter 1, verse 8). Here's what it says: **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."** Everything we're going to read in the book of Acts moving forward revolves around that.

What you're going to see over and over and over again is the Holy Spirit's power come on people. Those people become the witnesses of God for the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem first, then Judea, then Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth. The story, the narrative, in the book of Acts is that being fulfilled over and over and over again and the gospel multiplying and growing and spreading to the point that you and I are in this room.

With that said, here's what I want to answer this morning. How is it that God multiplies his gospel? That's my question I want to answer today. Acts, chapter 2, is an interesting chapter, and I'll tell you why. My experience (let me frame it that way) is that people love either the first 13 verses of Acts, chapter 2, or they love the last 4 verses of Acts, chapter 2. Few people spend their time on the middle of Acts, chapter 2, which is where we find out how God multiplies.

The first 13 verses of Acts, chapter 2, are kind of what we covered last week where the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples when they're up in the upper room praying. Tongues of fire appear and land on them. They begin to speak in other languages. The crowd thinks they're drunk out of their minds.

Then they begin to boldly witness about what Christ has done. People love that. I mean, they love the story of Pentecost. People get all caught up in, "Well, I haven't ever seen any tongues of fire. When is that going to happen? If this is prescriptive, should we all speak in tongues? What is 'tongues'?"

All this starts happening in Acts, chapter 2. We'll cover some of that but not a ton. In fact, I'll cover some of it right now. It's fairly simple. We looked at it last week. The Holy Spirit comes upon them in power, clothes them in power from on high, just like what was promised. The Bible says tongues of fire land on them, and they began to speak in tongues.

What is absolutely clear and undebatable in the text is these tongues are other languages people from other parts of the empire can understand. It's not a spiritual prayer language. It's not something just for them and God in their closet. It's not the Holy Spirit groaning. All right? Those are other texts you'd have to deal with around the idea of tongues.

In this instance, in Acts, chapter 2, they are speaking other languages that are understood by those who speak their languages. It would be the equivalent of the Holy Spirit falling upon me and me working flawless German in front of you this morning. There would be those of you in here who are like, "What? He speaks German?" Those of you who are German who hear it clearly, it's like, "Man, he doesn't even have that Texas accent along with his German."

In the end, that's what you see in Acts, chapter 2, verses 1 through 13. What I want to focus on is really the sermon Peter preaches to the crowd. In one sense, it's the most un-seeker-friendly sermon I've ever read, but then in another, 3,000 people come to know Christ because of it. There's something in there I think we need to look at.

We're not going to read the entire sermon, but I want to show you just really four things out of Peter's sermon that I think are imperative for us to understand how multiplication works, at least at

the micro level. With that, let's look at Acts, chapter 2. We're going to start in verse 14. Here's what the Bible says.

"But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them. 'Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.'" I love verse 15. "For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day."

Here's what's happened if you remember back to last week when we talked about the Holy Spirit clothing us with power from on high and the driving out of fear and doubt and any sort of, "I need to look cool. I need to look acceptable. I need to look like I'm all together," a melting away of all of that under the euphoria of knowing we are loved and forgiven and blood-bought by God Almighty. Later on, Paul would describe it this way: we then become *fools* for Christ's sake.

These men who were (if you know the New Testament) not known for their spines of steel all of a sudden are not afraid of anything, are boldly making much of Jesus in all these different languages. The crowd thinks they're drunk. You can't be this bold, you can't be this crazy, about something without being intoxicated. Peter is like, "Hey, man, it's not even lunchtime. Nobody is drunk here. What you're seeing is actually the fulfillment of the prophecy God gave us through the prophet Joel."

Here's what I want to point out about verses 14 and 15. Peter stood up at Pentecost. What we know about Jerusalem right now is that it is filled with devout Jews from all over the Roman Empire who have come to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. Let me tell you what Pentecost is. Pentecost is the celebration, the festival, that occurred post-barley harvest and pre-wheat harvest.

Before you would get back into your fields and begin to sow the wheat you would harvest months later, you would stop after the harvest of barley, and you would celebrate. What's happened in this text is Peter just stood up at basically Mardi Gras and begins to preach the first distinctively Christian message. Here's the first thing when we talk about gospel-centered multiplication.

1. *God meets us where we are.* He meets us where we are *physically*. That's just the truth. He meets us where we are physically. I'll take it a step further. He meets us where we are *spiritually*. He came and grabbed me at football practice. How many of you played sports in high school and were in locker rooms? I won't ask you how good you were because you probably think you were awesome, so go ahead and put your hands down.

In the end, the football locker room of the male persuasion with 15- to 18-year-olds is not known as fertile soil for what is moral and upright. Yet it was in that place that a peer of mine began to share the gospel with me. It was in that place God began to woo me, in that place God began to call me unto himself. I was not interested in following him. I was not a moral man. I was not interested in submitting my life to who God was. Yet God, not concerned with any of that, began to woo, began to call, began to pull me toward himself. God meets us where we are. It's just the truth.

The first Christian sermon is preached at a festival built around the harvest. I don't know how devout Jews partied, but they're not expecting this. I can guarantee you that! Nobody goes to Mardi Gras expecting to meet Jesus, despite the fact that also has roots in religious celebration. Yet here he stands up, and he begins to preach. Think about it. Where were you when the Lord came and found you if you're a believer?

I'm not talking about when you were 7 years old and got saved. I'm not saying that. I'm not taking anything away from that either, but there's a moment where the faith becomes yours and it's no longer Mom and Dad's. Are you tracking with me? There's a season in life in which your faith is deeply rooted in your parents if you grew up in church.

My children love Jesus and follow Jesus right now. The basis for that is Mom and Dad's faith. We're not forcing them to live life our way, but we're going to pray before our meals. We're going to give thanks to God for when he blesses us. We're going to live generously. The worldview my children know is the Christian worldview. It's what they've grown up with. It's all they know.

What's going to happen over the next decade or so is they're going to have friends who have different worldviews. They're going to have teachers who have different worldviews. They're going to begin to kind of hit against those edges. There will be a day that my children's faith, as sweet as it is right now, roots. It will no longer be predicated upon my love for the Lord and their mama's love for the Lord. It will be their own.

That moment. Where were you in that moment? Where were you when he found you? If I'm not speaking your language at all and you're like, "Man, I didn't even grow up in church. This is the first time I've ever been in church," where were you when he found you? Listen. Are you not a believer at all? I think you've been drawn into this place even today because the Lord has some intention of running you down.

Where were you physically? Football locker room Texas City, Texas, for me. Then where were you spiritually, morally? See, gospel-centered multiplication always begins with God meeting men where they are, meeting women where they are. What I mean by that... Let me dispel this myth, this insidious falsehood, that will enslave you if you're not careful. It is not the expectation of God that you clean yourself up before you come to him. Otherwise, God would not meet you where you are but rather demand you change some, and then he'd meet you in *that* spot.

That is not what has happened. No, Peter stood up at Pentecost and said, "Men, hear me." He met devoutly religious men at a festival in Jerusalem, not in Sunday school, not in a church service, not in an evangelistic rally. You know, Peter didn't take out a permit and have a stadium there. He just stood up in the midst of a crowd and began to preach. God meets men where they are.

Here's the second thing. We'll need to talk about this for just a bit. I want us to look at verse 23 really quickly. Here's what it says. Just scan down there to verse 23. "**...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.**" Scan on down and hit verse 36. Let's look at verse 36 together. It's important when a guy says the same thing twice in a sermon. That should always draw your attention to it.

Verse 36 says this: "**Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom...**" What? "**...you crucified.**" Twice now, Peter, in his sermon, says to this massive crowd 50-60 days after the crucifixion of Christ, "You killed Jesus! You killed Jesus!"

Here's the second thing about gospel-centered multiplication. Although I think this creates the most animosity toward God and toward Christians, it's also, I think (if we would reframe how we look at it), some of the best news we have ever heard. God not only meets us where we are, but...

2. *He tells us the truth about ourselves.* He tells us the truth about ourselves! This accusation is mind-blowing. There are thousands of people in this crowd. We know that because 3,000 of them are actually going to become believers at the end of this sermon. Who knows how big the actual crowd is? He says to this crowd, "You killed Jesus. You're responsible for the death of Jesus. You did this."

Here's what has to be true. This is conjecture, but surely it has to be true. Not everyone in that crowd was responsible for the death of Jesus physically or actively. In fact, it's not a stretch to the imagination to say some of them probably weren't even in town when Christ was crucified. We read last week in Acts, chapter 1, that Christ resurrected, and then he spent 40 days walking with his disciples, showing signs and wonders before the ascension. Then they went back to the room and began to pray before the Holy Spirit fell upon them or clothed them in power.

So 40-60 days. We're not sure how long the gap is, but yes, it has to be true that there are those in the crowd who in no way participated in the death of Jesus Christ. Listen. I wasn't there. I can tell you that right now! That was over 2,000 years ago. I wasn't there, and yet none of that seems to bother Peter at all. He says, "You killed him. In case you didn't hear me earlier, you killed him. If I didn't offend you the first time, let me just double down on this. You're the one who did this."

How can Peter say to this crowd, "You killed Jesus. This Jesus whom you have killed..."? Remember the whole descriptive/prescriptive conversation. Is it true that you and I have killed Jesus? In some sense, very much so. You and I are responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. In Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ*, the only scene Gibson is actually in is a picture of Gibson's hand clutching the hammer that drives the nail into the hands of Jesus Christ. It's the only place he wanted to be in the movie.

That's Gibson's understanding, "I have some responsibility in this." How can this possibly be true? How can this be true that we would be guilty of the murder of Jesus Christ the Son of God? Well, let me walk you through. If you have a church background, you'll know this. Let me start the Romans Road with you. In Romans, chapter 3, starting in verse 23, it says, "**...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...**"

If you want to really get down into the Koine Greek of that word, that *all* means *all*. Everyone is guilty. This becomes so important for you to get and grasp. The ground is level in this room. If you have led a life of drunken debauchery, the land is level. The ground is level. If you don't know anything but church life and being a good church kid, you have still fallen short of the glory of God. The ground is level.

It is madness for someone who is in Christ to ever (as though your position is superior because of something you did) lord that over someone else. Your heart should break for those stuck in sin. It shouldn't make you feel better about yourself. Your heart should grieve over the wickedness in the

hearts of others. It should not rejoice because it makes you look better or feel better about you. It's madness.

The ground is level. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. I think how we define sin would be helpful here. What we like to do is go to the kind of fruit of sin. "Well, adultery, drunkenness, debauchery...these are the kind of things that are sin." Sure, but those are fruit of a deeper root. Let's walk through the root of all sin and what we are all guilty of, regardless of how it shows itself in our lives.

The Bible would tell us everyone in this room, myself included, everyone in the rooms that are now watching, are guilty of these three things. We have all preferred creation to the Creator. We don't want God; we want his stuff. We don't want to worship the Lord; we want the things the Lord gave us in order to show us how great he is. Did you know that's what all good things were given for? So we might know there's a Provider who loves us, cares for us, and has engaged us.

Instead of having gratitude and desire to know the One who gave the gift, we just take the gift and run off like a spoiled, wicked Veruca Salt. That's from *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. The girl who wants the goose that lays the golden egg, if you don't remember. You can tell I have three children. Then from there, not only are we all guilty of that, but everyone in this room, according to Romans 1, believes the lie over the truth of God.

That lie is simply this: we are smarter than God. Nobody would ever say that with their mouth. No one I've met would dare say, "I just think I'm smarter than God." Over and over and over again we'll live that way. We love caveats. We love justifications for why we don't need to submit to the Word of God, we don't need to submit to the authorities the Word of God has put in place.

We like to play the game that if God really knew what our lives were like, what we were struggling with, what we were walking in, there's no way he would ask that of us, because what God wants more than anything is our happiness. (I don't know where you read that.) We want the caveat. We want the asterisk. We want the, "Not us." We want, "Yeah, this is true for most people, but I just think in my situation, I want..."

Do you know what you're doing in that moment? "I'm smarter than you. I know you're the whole Sovereign King of the universe and I failed the eighth grade and right now have a deficit in my

checking account because I don't know how to do a budget, but I really think I have this one down. I think I know what I'm doing here."

Then the last one is in Romans 1:28. We see not only has everyone in this room preferred creation to the Creator, not only has everyone in this room believed the lie that they're smarter than God, but everyone in this room has failed to acknowledge God as the giver of all good things. We fail to acknowledge him as the One who has wired us, gifted us, placed us so all we have and all of our abilities really have been given to us to make much of the Lord.

When we take those things and we glorify ourselves rather than glorify God, we become blasphemers. The illustration I've used for really the entire 11 years I've been pastor here is I just don't believe Shaquille O'Neal should have ever been able to dance around after he dunked a basketball. You're seven foot three...eleven one with your heads over your head. I don't know why you're celebrating dunking the ball. You were just born.

If you get around basketball circles, you'll hear, "You can't teach height." You can't teach height! You can't go, "Just be taller." You can't do that. Part of that is genetically how you were gifted and wired. Here's what I'd say. "Shaquille, make a free throw and then moonwalk up and down the court, brother. Until you can do that, quit dancing around like you accomplished some massive feat for being seven foot three."

This is a failure to acknowledge. This is a failure to acknowledge, "God did this. God gave me this. God created me like this. God gave me this aptitude. God gave me this passion, this zeal, this desire, this direction." We fail to acknowledge him. When you put all three of those together, you see a kind of depravity and wickedness that would spiral us into a cesspool of living a type of narcissistic, all about me, "I got this. I know what's best. Everyone is here for me."

When you walk in this, you roll yourself up to be your own deity. You are your own god, your own authority. You and you alone reign as sovereign over your life. This will destroy your relationship, shrivel up your soul, dry out your heart, and have you probably not even know it. "**...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...**" The text doesn't stop there. Let's keep going.

Verse 24: "**...and are justified...**" That's made right. "**...by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...**" That sentence is pregnant and could be a sermon in and of

itself. Here's what you have. You and I are completely guilty of falling short of the glory of God. All of us love creation rather than the Creator, think we are smarter, and fail to acknowledge him.

That's universally true, and yet God has, in the face of that, made us right. That's what *justified* means. He has done that via grace as a gift, which means we did not earn that justification. We did not earn being made right, but God has made us right in Christ through faith. How does that work? Well, the text tells us. Verse 25. This is what Jesus Christ did to justify us through grace by faith to redeem us from our rebellion. "**...whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.**"

Propitiation is an interesting word. What I mean by that is I'm guessing you haven't used it this week. I'm just guessing that didn't probably roll out in conversation with your wife about the kids' gymnastics or something like that this week. Let me define *propitiation* for you. I'll put it on the screen. *Propitiation* is pacifying wrath by taking care of the penalty for the offense that caused the wrath.

Let's read it again so it can kind of get into your soul. Propitiation is pacifying wrath by taking care of the penalty for the offense that caused the wrath. When God says you and I, despite falling short of the glory of God, are justified by God by grace as a gift through Jesus Christ giving himself as a propitiation, as the sacrifice in your place on the cross, Christ is absorbing God's wrath toward that glad rebellion you and I find ourselves in. We see we are most definitely responsible for the death of Jesus Christ.

You can see why this causes offense, but let me try to reframe it in a way I see it that I find it to be so profoundly beautiful. Remember what we're talking about here. God meets men and women where they are, and he tells them the truth about them. The truth about you and me is I am a sinner who has fallen short of the glory of God. Praise God that's what he said. Because if God looks into my soul, looks into my mind, and says, "Man, you're awesome!" then I'm going to be in trouble. I'm not going to be able to worship that God.

See, the freedom that is found when God tells you the truth about yourself is you already know those things to be true. Now you have a grid for what's gone wrong. See, I love that this is true about me, because I already know it's true. It helps me make sense of why my heart does what it does, why my mind drifts where it drifts. I know my tendency is selfishness. That's my tendency. What's

in me is not, "Serve your wife. Serve your children. Love people. Consider others better than yourself."

That's not in my heart. What's in my heart is, "Where's mine? Who is taking care of me? Who is going to give me what I'm owed?" That's my heart. I know that's there. I know I have a tendency to be materialistic. I know I have a tendency to lust after things I want, stuff I want, things I think I deserve. Thank God God says this about me! That means he knows what's actually going on in me, and it creates some hope in me that he actually knows and he loves me enough to point it out.

See, I couldn't worship a God who told me I'm awesome, because I know it... I know I'm not. I know I'm falling short. I can feel the weight of falling short that religion did not put on my shoulders. I felt it well before I had religious grids. I felt guilt, I felt shame, before anyone told me, "God says not to do that." See, this (God telling me the truth about me) makes me feel like I have someone I can trust. I know so many of you are not going to believe this, but I'm going to say it anyway. You are never freer than when you have no secrets.

You're just not. If you live your life in such a way that, if one of your friends or your spouse or your child could come to you and go, "Guess what I found?" and you got a bit of panic in you... If you're in here today and you're living a duplicitous life, then you understand the weight of keeping quiet about your sin, of trying to hide things that are true about you, of trying to pretend to be more than you are. God, save us in Dallas, Texas, from this weak evangelical veneer of, "I'm okay."

God saved us from that nonsense. God has outed us. He tells us the truth about us. That is, you have fallen short. You are broken. You are in trouble. You cannot fix you. Praise his name that he says that to us and doesn't say something other than that, because if he did, he wouldn't be God. Where would there be freedom in that?

God showing up and saying, "You're busted" offends people. The idea that you are a sinner offends people because their posture is, "No, I'm not. No, I'm not!" For those of us with softer hearts, we know, and this makes sense. Praise God he hasn't said something about me that I know isn't true in my heart.

Think of the carnage that would be created in those of us who are aware of our fallenness if God said, "There's nothing wrong with you." What do you do with your anxiety? What do you do with your fear? What do you do with your doubt? What do you do with your lust? What do you do with

your anger? What do you do with that if God is going, "It's not there! Don't worry about it"? What would you do? What kind of slavery would that be? It would be awful.

See, the hope is found in God being honest with us about us. "You're in a lot of trouble, son. You're in a lot of trouble, daughter." That's good news because not only does God meet us where we are and then tell us the truth about ourselves, but then from there, the gospel begins to cover what God has now said is true about us, namely that we have fallen short of the glory of God.

We are broken. We are busted. We are in rebellion. We are prone to wander. We are wicked. We are lustful. We are materialistic. We are self-seeking. We are self-centered. We do worship ourselves and creation more than the Creator. Then the gospel leans in. Let's read that now. Acts, chapter 2, starting in verse 29.

"Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses."

There are two things in this text that kind of enter into the truth about us that Peter has just laid out there, namely that our sin sent Christ to the cross as a propitiation for that sin. There are two pieces in here. Here are those two pieces. In Christ, his victory over hell becomes our victory. This is *Christus Victor*.

This is: the victory of Christ over hades is now our victory. Despite our rebellion and because the propitiation of Christ on the cross, we are now no longer doomed to hell and hades' eternal damnation away from our Creator despite our rebellion. Christ's victory over the grave is our victory over the grave.

Then the second thing to see here is there was no corruption found in the flesh of Christ. This gets us into what is imputed righteousness, that Christ's perfect obedience becomes our perfect obedience. Not only now does the cross of Christ absorb God's wrath, pacify the wrath of God toward our rebellion against him, but now you get the corrupt-less flesh of Christ imputed to us so that his deeds become our deeds. His righteousness becomes our righteousness.

We are justified before God by faith as a free gift of grace in the person and work of Jesus Christ. I think my favorite text (I think I've read it to you probably two to three thousand times over the last 10 years) is 2 Corinthians 5:21. **"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** God meets men where they are.

He tells them the truth about themselves, and then the gospel invades that truth and creates an alternate opportunity for those of us who are stuck in our sins, namely that we might be freed from those sins in Christ, we might be counted as righteous with Christ, and we might be fully forgiven and set free from our enslavement to sin.

Remember what we're talking about here is how multiplication works. Now hear me because I'm going to need to lean heavy here, and it's important that I do. Then where the gospel is proclaimed we *must* respond. Must! To not respond is actually to respond. Let me show you how they respond. Acts, chapter 2, verse 37. **"Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'"**

Do you see what happens there? Peter has aggressively said, "Men of Israel, men of Judea, listen to my words." He begins to unpack for them, "This is who Jesus is. This is what you have done. This is what Christ has opened up as a possibility to you." Their guilt coupled with the offer of forgiveness and grace, the Bible says, cuts them to the heart. They say, "What do we do? Okay, so what now? What are we supposed to do in light of these things?"

Where the gospel is preached, we must respond. Let's chat about this, because I get so fearful pastoring here because of this. You always respond to the preaching of the gospel. The Puritans would say it this way: the same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay. Do you hear what they're saying there?

Where the gospel is preached and we hear about our guilt and we hear about this great salvation and we go, "Okay, let me enter into that. Let me wrestle with that. Let me seek out counsel. Let me submit, get help, ferret this out, wrestle with this," then you move toward what Christ has offered to you.

Where you refuse to walk into that, you refuse to dig into that, you make yourself indifferent toward the preaching of it, you literally are taking steps toward a hardening of your own heart,

which makes frivolous, surface-level, evangelical weekend church attendance a terrifying thing because you're fiddling around with damnation. Are you tracking with me?

This little game we're playing of, "I go to church," and we show up completely unmoved, no real desire to submit our lives to the Lord, repeatedly hearing the gospel and doing nothing with it is literally taking steps toward the ongoing hardening of our hearts toward the things of God. It is a foolish game to play with your soul. Our God will not be mocked! He is not going to be mocked. You're not going to play games with him. He can't be deceived. You're not tricking anybody.

We don't think this way, but we're closer. We're an hour closer to that day. I don't know when that day comes. Here's what I can tell you. I have a funeral Thursday, and he wasn't 70. I know the funerals I've done this last year were predominantly for people whose average age was twenties and thirties. I don't know when my day comes to stand in front of the King of Glory and give an account. How many of you know people are going to die this year? Go ahead. Lift up your hands.

All right. Now how many of you think it's going to be you? Wow! Did you see that? Even those of you who checked that last box on the survey (there's not even an age demographic after the one we listed for you) didn't even raise your hand. No one thinks it's them. Cancer is this awful thing other people get, right? Heart attacks are this awful thing other people die of. Aneurysms and the like are awful things that happen to other people.

We minister to people in those things, but nobody thinks, "This is *my* year." As a pastor, let me love you. Some of you, this is your year. "Well, why would you sow that kind of fear into my life?" I'm not trying to sow fear into your life. I didn't tell you anything you didn't know. Right? You knew that, right? You could die. That one didn't sneak up on you, right? Surely I'm not blowing your mind right now with, "You mean I could die?" Yes!

Here's where I think the happy-clappy stuff when we gather has to be tempered at times. There are those of you in this room, those of you listening to me say this, who are actively hardening your heart toward the things of God, toward this glorious gospel. The gospel demands a response. To not respond is a response. It's a step toward the ongoing hardening of your heart and the eventual just, right judgment of God toward your rebellion.

It is *your* decision to take that step toward the hardening of your heart. The opportunity you have is to take a step toward the ongoing *softening* of your heart, the positioning yourself repeatedly under

the waterfall of God's grace, the ongoing confession of sin and repentance, the ongoing seeking out of community, the ongoing seeking out of those who would stir up and edify your pursuit of Christ and holiness.

The crowd says, "What do we do?" Peter answers them, "**Repent and be baptized...**" They repent of their sins. They are cut to the heart. They're aware of their sins. They're aware of what God has offered them in Christ. They move toward that in repentance. They turn from their sin and begin to seek out holiness, pursue holiness, live a transformed life through the ongoing ethics of confession and repentance and community with one another.

On that day, the Christian church is born. The church of Jerusalem, First Baptist Jerusalem, was born. What you see is this community is formed around it. Let's look in Acts, chapter 2, starting in verse 42. We'll end in verse 47. There are three characteristics of this new community of faith I want to point out. Things will get messier in Jerusalem as we go, but on this day, it's legit. So let's go.

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 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.

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." There are three traits here that I want to pull out.

One is *devotion*. These men and women are devoted. They're devoted to teaching. They're devoted to one another. So devoted to teaching and to one another are they that they're selling their possessions when they find out there's a need. When a brother or sister got themselves in a jam, it wasn't some sort of organizational structure that met that need, but the people themselves met that need. They sold stuff in order to free up capital in order to serve their brothers and sisters. That's a level of devotion the people of God were marked by in Acts, chapter 2.

The other two pieces here were in the same sentence. They were *glad* and *generous*. Now if you put these three things together, you're talking about a profoundly powerful force for the reflection of

the glory of God to the world around us. Devoted to God. Serious about holiness. Serious about the pursuit of righteousness. Serious about having our lives in glad submission to the teaching of the Word of God with glad hearts.

I mean, think how different you are if you're aware of all God has done on your behalf and all God has provided for you rather than being an expert on all you *don't* have and all you want that you are yet to possess. Think about how free and happy you are when you're living generously rather than wondering about who is going to give you what you deserve and what you're owed and where the gospel is responded to in glad submission.

Devotion takes root. Gladness takes root. Generosity takes root. In different seasons from various situations, fruit will grow riper and richer than in other seasons where our fruit will be smaller and not as sweet and rich. Ultimately, this is what God begins to do in the heart of his people. This is a beautiful picture of what God's people can be like.

What we're going to find in the church at Jerusalem is this is a really happy season. That season is going to give way from fighting inside and fighting from the outside and persecution from the outside, racism on the inside, church squabbles from the inside. It's going to get a bit messy, and yet the Lord is never going to leave them. I don't want to get ahead of myself. Those are sermons to come in our series.

For now, this is how the gospel multiplies. God meets men and women where they are. He tells them the truth about themselves. He offers them new life in the gospel that forces a response, and then he invites them into a new community of faith to encourage them along the way as they pursue with great devotion holiness, as they learn to live in gladness, and as they begin to walk in generosity. May the Holy Spirit all the more empower us to be this type of church. Let's pray.

Just with your heads bowed and eyes closed, I want to ask a quick question. One of the things that came out in the survey we did last year was that many of you, before you became Christians, actually attended The Village for years before you actually came to that spot where you said, "I want to give my life over to the Lord" and began to follow him. That stat from last year's survey I just found so interesting.

It's really changed kind of how I've prayed for us as we've gathered and thought through how I preach in a way that might be most easily understood for those who maybe don't have a church

background. I would like to just lay this before you, ask you a quick question as we begin to close here. I just have to believe there are those of you who are in here. Maybe you've been with us for a while. You've heard the gospel preached a bunch. You have a neighbor who brought you. They've been talking with you about the Lord.

You're just in that season where you do feel cut to the heart. You do feel the weight of what's going on, but you find yourself like these men in Jerusalem going, "Okay, what do I do?" If that's you and you're in a season of your life where you feel cut to the heart... You kind of understand what we're talking about now in the gospel, but you just aren't quite sure what to do next. You would say, "Matt, I know what you're saying now, but I just don't know what to do. I feel stuck. I'm not sure what's next for me."

If that's you, would you just lift your hand so I could see it? It's just you and me. Don't need to be embarrassed or ashamed. Just lift your hand. Say, "That's me." All right. Praise God. Okay. Why don't you put your hands down? Just so you don't feel alone, there were about 10 or 11 of you in this room who raised your hands (I don't know what happened at the other campuses) and said, "That's me right now."

Let me coach us through the rest of the service. I'm going to pray for us and then say, "Amen." When I say, "Amen," across all of our campuses, we're going to move into a time of celebrating the Lord's Supper. We're going to move into a time of Communion and response. What I mean by *response* is we're going to have some pastors, some men and women, who will be made available for you to pray with, just come up and talk to.

Here's how I want to encourage you. If you were one who lifted your hand or should have lifted your hand but decided not to at the last moment, I want to invite you to come grab the hand of a man or a woman and just go, "I don't know what to do next. I understand what he is saying. I'm just not sure what to do next." That at least is a step toward softening and not hardening. Let's take that step today. I'm going to pray for us. We'll begin to move toward Communion and response. For now, let me pray.

Father, thank you. Thank you that you have found us where we are. Thank you that you are telling us the truth about us. Thank you, Father, that you have provided an alternative. I pray you might grant us the grace to respond toward a softening of our hearts and not a hardening of our hearts. I

pray, Father, that you would invite us into that community of faith where we might, with devotion, gladness, and generosity walk with one another. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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