

New Kingdom, New People

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[0 : 0 0] Right, good morning. Lovely to see you all. My name's James. I'm on staff team here. Welcome. If you're new here this morning, it's good to see you. Let me pray for us as we start.

So Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this wonderful picture of your spirit-empowered and new community. Please, can you work through us this morning by our spirit, through your word, to make us into this people like these. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Great. It'll be a big aid to me and probably a stir for you to keep the little green sheet in outlines. And you should find an outline there of where we're going in our talk this morning.

Now, I wonder if you've ever been to a bookstore. You've probably been to a bookstore at some point. See some nods. And you might have walked into the pop psychology section, the bit that I call the psycho-pseudo-bro science section of the bookshop.

And you'll see various books in there on how to be a better person, how to get the life that you really want. So if you're slightly older, you might remember Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

[1 : 1 4] Here's one that I read quite recently. I thought this was something that I needed. It was by Angela Duckworth called Grit. I wonder if you've read that. Anyone read that? About that? How to stick at stuff and how to keep at it, even when it gets really, really hard.

And invariably, these books will tell you to do something. So they might tell you to change your thinking. Or they might say, change your speaking. Change the words that you use. Use only positive words.

Or then they might say, change your habits. And then you'll be the person that you're meant to be. Or they might say something like, change your friends.

Get better friends. And then you'll be like them. And then you'll be a better person. And if you do these things, what these books tell you to do, then you'll become the best person that you can be.

And the person that you're meant to be. And what we see in our passage today, and what we saw in last week, is that if we want to be the people that God intends us to be, then we need to give up.

[2 : 1 9] And instead, we need to entrust ourselves to Him. And that He will change us by His Holy Spirit. So by way of context, last week we saw how the long-promised Holy Spirit had come down on Jesus' disciples at Pentecost.

And we remember how the Holy Spirit coming was the fulfillment of that verse, our strapline for the book of Acts that we've been going through, chapter 1, verse 8.

And I'll just read that verse for us again. But you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

And what we noticed last week was that the Spirit's coming announced that God's King had come and had been exalted. And then we announced that the Spirit's coming had announced that God's people had been restored from all Judea, from all Samaria.

And then finally, the Spirit's coming had announced that God's plan to bring people from all nations, from the ends of the earth, had begun. But why was this needed?

[3 : 32] Why did the Spirit have to come? Surely God had had a people already. Well, the issue was that God's people, the old people, had failed to be the people that God had wanted them to be.

So what do I mean? The old people, the old people of God that we read about in the Old Testament, they were meant to be a magnet, a great big magnet, that was drawing all people from all over the world towards God and to worship God in His temple in Jerusalem.

But what do we see? The old people had failed in this utterly. You see, rather than being a magnet, I wonder what your high school physics is like, they'd become like when you flip the magnet the other way, and what does the magnet do?

It pushes other magnets away. They'd pushed other people away, and they'd become repulsive to the nations around them.

And so God had sent His Spirit to change His people and to make them into new people, to be the people that He wanted them to be, to be God's Spirit-empowered new community.

[4 : 47] And what we see these people being like is these points that we see on this passage here. So we see God's Spirit-empowered new community being a learning church, and then we see them being a loving church, and then we see them being a worshipping church, and then we see them being evangelistic church.

So let's look at that first one there. God's Spirit-empowered new community is a learning church. And see, the problem with God's old people was His old community was that they had failed to listen to God.

So listen to God's verdict on His old community that He speaks about at the end of Acts, in Acts verse 28 to 25. I'll just read it for us.

Here's Luke quoting from the Old Testament to Isaiah. He said, See, God's old people had stopped listening to God and stopped obeying God's commandments.

But what do we read here? And what do we read about God's new Spirit-empowered community, the people that we aim to be as a church family on Sundays, is that they had devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching in verse 42.

[6 : 21] And what was that teaching they'd devoted themselves to? Well, it's what we looked at last week. We remember Peter's sermon. We remember how Peter had spoke so much about the risen, ascended Lord Jesus.

who had sent His Spirit into the world that people may trust in Him for the forgiveness of sins. I wonder if you found that surprising about how much Peter had spoken about Jesus in his sermon.

And what made the apostles witnesses is that they had lived with Jesus and they had seen His death, resurrection, and ascension. And we see that at the end of verse 32 in chapter 2.

God has raised this Jesus to life. And what do they say? We are witnesses of it. And then we see that this is shown that the apostles are God's spokesmen by the signs and wonders that they see.

Just look down at verse 33, 43 in our passage. What does it say? Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

[7 : 28] You see, just as God had been a witness of Jesus and of His ministry as God's Son, as God's spokesperson, so these signs and wonders are sent here to show that the apostles are God's spokesperson in the world.

And so what do we see? God's Spirit-empowered people, they see this, they interpret these signs correctly, and they listen to the apostles' teaching.

So what's it going to look like for us to be this kind of learning church, this church that listens to God's Word and takes it seriously? Well, we've been given the apostles' teaching in the New Testament.

And what makes us a Pentecostal and apostolic church is the nature of our devotion and faithfulness to the teaching of the New Testament.

You see, every New Testament book has at the heart of it the apostles' teaching, the apostles are either the author or the source of the teaching in every book.

[8 : 30] And we think about our churches today. Sometimes we're tempted to play down the specifics of what we believe. And what we see is that when we really clarify and sharpen up on what we believe, we find that it creates division.

And why is that? Because it reveals that some of us don't devote, some people don't devote themselves to the apostles' teaching.

Their beliefs about God and Jesus and the Bible are in fact their own. And their beliefs about Christian living have moved to follow culture rather than listen to what the Bible says, being obedient to what the Bible says.

But what do we see here in our passage this morning? The true Holy Spirit-led church is united in listening to the apostles' teaching and are devoted to it.

And the next thing that we see about God's new Spirit-empowered community is that it's a loving church. And that's verse 42 and verse 44 and 45 there. And the issue was that the Old Testament people, the old people of God, had failed to love others well.

[9 : 47] Well, what do I mean by that? How can I say that? Let me just read God's opinion of the old people from Isaiah 10, first two verses. I'll just read it for us there.

The Lord has sent a message against Jacob. It will fall on Israel. That's the old people of God. Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.

And it's not a very good report on the old people of God, is it? It's a really damning report on them, isn't it? You see, instead of living loving lives that were challenging and attractive to others, they pushed people away through their selfishness and living self-centered lives.

They had misused the gifts and abundance that God had given them to enrich themselves and they pushed other people down. See, rather than caring for others as God's image bearers, people throughout the world, they used those people and they abused them for their own purposes.

But what do we see in God's new spirit-empowered community? Just look how they behave and react and how we should behave and react in verse 44 and verse 45. All the believers were together and they held everything in common.

[11 : 19] They sold property and possessions and gave to anyone in need. And it's a wonderfully attractive picture, isn't it? It's a very generous picture and it's marked by a spontaneous, voluntary generosity.

You see, when Luke talks of fellowship in these verses, he's talking about this kind of sacrificial, caring, giving and sharing.

Often, we talk about fellowship as having a good meal with our friends, but Luke here means something a lot more harder, means caring for others even when it hurts us, even to our detriment.

And what do we notice? is that this generosity starts at church among God's people. But from there, it flows out into the surrounding people there.

So what does it say there? It says, they gave to anyone who had a need. And that could perhaps probably mean those outside of the Christian community.

[12 : 25] And the picture there is really of maybe like a chocolate fountain that flows out from the center, out, affecting others as an attractive picture.

And we think back to the plagues in the first century. And we remember how people fled Rome under Nero. And they fled the plagues at that time. And what do we read about?

That the Christians at that time flocked into the city to take care of the sick and the dying, even though it probably meant a death sentence for themselves.

And the first temptation that we face when we come to these verses, when we read these verses, and they are incredibly challenging, is that because we're so individualistic and because as a society we're so wealthy and all of us sitting here today are very wealthy by the world's standards, we like to play these teachings down and we make our wealth and our individualism a respectable sin and we forget the very poorest in the world and the hard-to-reach places, Christians who are suffering far away from us.

And the second temptation that we might face in these verses is that we become so concerned with people's temporal, physical well-being that we forget their eternal well-being.

[13 : 49] We care about the body but we forget about the spirit. So sometimes as Christians we talk about being the hands and feet of the gospel. Well the hands and feet always come in the glove and sock of the apostles' teaching and evangelism.

It's never without those whatever we do. So since coming to St. Silas I've been enormously encouraged by the generosity and care that we show as a church family and it's absolutely right that we do this.

So last Sunday we had Harvest Sunday and it was fantastic that we collected a lot of food for Rockhill Parish Church and that we collected school uniforms but could we also match that care for people's physical well-being with a spiritual burden for people and support for example that new church plant in Blahnik that we've heard about or Gospel Worker in Yoka Church from all the privileges that we enjoy in the West End here.

and next we see is that because the old people of God had failed to love people well and care for them well their worship of God had become hollow.

But the good news is that as God's Spirit empowered new community we've become a worshipping church. Just look down at verse 42 and verse 46 together.

[15 : 15] So verse 46 what do we read? Every day they continued to meet together in temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

And by worship here what we mean is we speak of really giving God what He is worth what God is due and what is it that we owe God? What is our due to God?

Well it's everything that we have. It's all of us. See God made us and He gave us everything. And the issue for the old people of God is that they weren't giving God His due.

They weren't worshipping God. See listen to Isaiah 29 verse 13 The Lord says these people come near to me with their mouth they honour me with their lips oh they said they were worshipping God they spoke as if they knew the religious language but what is it Isaiah goes on to say but their hearts that is everything that is within them everything that we rightly owe God we're far away.

Their worship Isaiah says God says through Isaiah is based on merely human rules that they have been taught. And their worship of God was hollow it was empty it wasn't sincere it wasn't heartfelt it's kind of the equivalent of a toddler saying sorry when their fingers are crossed behind their back both the adult and the toddler know that it isn't real that it isn't sincere but what what do we see the good news is that as we look we see God's spirit empowered new community how they're described in verse 46 well every day they meet together they're worshipping and they broke bread in one another's homes and what do we read with glad and sincere hearts so the first thing that we notice is there from these verses is that they made a priority of meeting together we heard about that from Emily earlier on they made a priority of meeting together what does it say every day they continue day after day after day and I wonder if this conversation that I sometimes hear sounds familiar to you guys sometimes a friend says to me

[17 : 43] James I'm a spiritual person I don't need to go to church I just worship God in my own way I'm free but here what do we see God's spirit empowered new community doing they make it a priority to meet together all the time no snow no sleet no rain no hail no storm would keep them from meeting together so sometimes we talk about John Patton and John Patton's father is a chap called James Patton and in 42 years he only missed church three times one when there was ice on the road and he couldn't physically walk there the second time he had flu and he was in his bed and he definitely couldn't work there and the third time I've forgotten but that's an incredibly wonderful picture of devotion to meeting together with God's people every Sunday day by day and continually and I wonder what the first century church the church that we're reading about in this passage would say about some of the reasons that might stop us meeting together we might have very good reasons for not meeting together but what do you think they might say about some of the reasons that we use for not meeting together and maybe today is the day for us to decide to make coming to church a priority to continue meeting together no matter what and one of the disadvantages that we have in living today is that we have so much choice in not coming to church there are many many distractions we've got many many opportunities it's very easy to get distracted from meeting together as God's people and the challenge in this passage is that we make it a priority to meet with others and what do we see here is where do they meet they meet in the temple courts the place where God dwelt with the old people of God the place where heaven touched earth but then look at where the disciples go to worship in verse 46 they met in the temple courts but then they go and they broke bread in their homes and they ate together so they meet in the temple and they walk straight out of it to their homes and they break bread there and they scatter throughout the city everywhere throughout the city and maybe even outside the city they scatter out and what do they do there in all those little places in all those scattered places they break bread together and why can they do this because God now dwells not in a building but in their hearts by the Holy Spirit you see they are God's new temple we as we sit here this morning are God's new dwelling place

God's new temple so wherever they went God's spirit is with them God is with them by his spirit and what do they do they don't sacrifice in the temple but they remember Christ's death for their behalf that one sacrifice for sins that cleaned us that made us pure that put us in right relationship with God and they remember Christ's resurrection and ascension and breaking bread there and so what it's really a picture of God's glory filling the countryside of his of him sending his son being remembered everywhere throughout the countryside everywhere and we see that in all our Sunday fellowships in Glasgow don't we wherever people are meeting this morning all over the city of Glasgow people are remembering Jesus' death resurrection and ascension and what do we notice the act of worship is

I wonder if you noticed what it was in this passage verse 46 comes right at the end it was their glad and sincere hearts you see they gave to God his worth their hearts that were devoted to him and delighted to him everything that was within them they brought in worship to God and that is what it is to be a worshipping church so can I ask you this morning are you worshipping is your heart happy in the Lord this morning is your heart delighting in Jesus this morning and then the last thing that we see that God's spirit and power new community is an evangelistic church verses 42 and 47 there so verse 47 praising God they enjoyed the favour of all the people and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved see the problem with the old people of God was that they had become blind to the Lord and who he was they were incapable of being a witness to the nations of God's glory listen to what Isaiah says in 42 verse 90

I'll just read it for us again there who is blind but my servants and deaf like the messenger I said and he's speaking about his old people there who is blind like the one in covenant with me that's God's old people blind like the servants of the Lord they had become totally and utterly blind you see they were meant to be a magnet drawing people from all the nations to worship God in the temple in Jerusalem they were meant to be able to see the Lord so clearly that they could show others the glory of God but what do we see here we see God's new community gathering in the temple honoring God through their joy and their conduct and so they enjoyed the favor of all the people and the Lord added to their number daily those who are being saved the people looked at them and they saw their joy and their delight in the Lord and they saw their hearts were devoted to God and they couldn't help but come to them and want to find out more they couldn't help but want to find out about this God who had changed them who had sent his spirit on them and so rather than being blind

God's new community could see clearly by God's Holy Spirit and they became a witness to the resurrected and ascended Jesus and so God blessed them by adding to their number daily so what might this look like for us this morning let me tell you about my friend David so David grew up incredibly poor he lived just down the road from me I met him when I was at university and I'd go to their house and their house was incredibly poor but their love for the Lord as a family was astonishing they'd made a priority of going to church daily the rule in their house was if you slept they're big lifesavers so if you slept you swam so you sleep you swim but the next thing that would happen is God David's dad would open up the Bible and share the Bible reading with everyone who came and visited that day and the picture there is of a family who were devoted to the Lord who loved the Lord and lived radical lives their house constantly had people wastes and strays who who don't feel comfortable going elsewhere they welcomed people and they cared for others they shared meals even though they're absolutely poor and broke and it's a wonderful picture of a family transformed and changed by God's Holy Spirit through the word and what might this look like for us this morning

[25 : 55] I don't know maybe you might like to take time after the service and just pray about that pray what it might look like for you to be changed into God's spirit empowered new person so as the proverb goes what the heart is full the mouth spills over with so what are our hearts filled with mourning this morning and what do we see there God added to their number daily and the point of Acts really in conclusion is not to rev us up to do more evangelism but the point of Acts is that if we see the glory of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus clearly if we rejoice in him if we praise in him if we care for his people if we hold to Jesus' teaching through the apostles then we can't help but be witnesses to the world around us if we delight in Jesus then that will look so radically different that others will not can't help themselves but ask why it is that we're living like that so let me ask us in closing how can we fix our eyes on Jesus more clearly how can we spur one another on in love and devotion for Jesus how can we become more like this picture of God's spirit empowered new community becoming a learning church a loving church a worshipping church and an evangelistic church this morning let me pray for us as we close so father we thank you so much for this picture of this church we pray that you'd make us into this church by your spirit through your word we pray that we'd learn to love the apostles teaching more we pray that we'd become more loving and caring for others we pray that we'd worship you truly with all our hearts and we would pray that we'd shine like a night to all the nations in Jesus name

Amen