

Good evening, everybody. Well, let's open up to Acts chapter 2 as we're continuing our study through the book of Acts. And we're at the end of the chapter in verses 42 through 47. So let me read that quick and we'll talk about it. This is the word of the Lord. It says, 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. Well, when we read the book of Acts, particularly with respect to the life of the early church, I think you know, we tend to read it and kind of view it like a Norman Rockwell painting, in a sense, right? And I'm sure you guys all remember, right, the famous Rockwell painting of the freedom from want, the families gathered around the table for Thanksgiving. The table, of course, is flawlessly set, everyone's smiling, Grandma's serving up this plump, perfectly roasted turkey that everyone is set and sure to enjoy, right? And it pictures that American ideal that sort of we all want, but from experience know doesn't actually exist in reality. At least not in my reality, maybe it does in yours, but in a similar vein, right, I think when we read the book of Acts, right, we have that same perspective on what is described in these texts, right? We read the description of what the church looked like, how it functioned, and we determined, well, this is really an idealistic view of things from the first century that is completely unrealistic for how the church actually functions. And maybe because of that, we conclude that we should merely, or look at this merely as a description of what was, but could, can never actually exist again. That it's totally unrealistic for the church today. I mean, listen to the description that's given, right? It says, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. All who believed were together and had all things in common. Day by day they were attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. It's a pretty amazing description of the church and how it was functioning in those—those early days. And admittedly, right, there's some elements of what is described here that would be difficult to replicate in our day and age. But the love and unity that we see described in these verses that existed in those early days of the New Testament church is something that ought to exist in every age of the church. Now, certainly, right, we, it is important we not have an overly romantic view, let's say, of the early church, right, to assume that everything just ran perfectly in the early church, there were never any problems, right, everything was the way it was supposed to be. I mean, the reality is, right, we wouldn't have a good portion of the New Testament if that were the case. Since Paul's letters and the writings that we have there were addressing problems that existed in the church. So we know that the church in every age has had its problems, but there are things that we ought to glean from the way the early church functioned. And here in Acts chapter two, verses 42 to 47, we have really a picture a beautiful picture of the church functioning as it should. And Boyce, actually, in his commentary, titles his chapter on this passage, A Model Church. And there's four things that we're gonna look at from this description of the model church. First, the devotion to the apostles' teaching. Secondly, fellowship.

Third, the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fourthly, the Lord adding to their numbers daily those who were being saved. The devotion to the apostles' teaching. And again, it's important, right, to remember the context of the story that we're looking at. Right, chapter 2 begins the description of the day of Pentecost when the Spirit of God was outpoured on the people, resulting in people speaking in languages that were understood by their hearers in their own tongue. Then we have Peter explaining the significance, which we looked at last week, right, that this was to fulfill what God had promised, that the prophets had spoken about, that the last days, the messianic age had now come. And then in verse 37, we begin to see the response of the people to what had happened and to the preaching that had happened as they were cut to the heart, convicted of their sin, and the text tells us they responded in faith and were baptized, they and their families, with them. And this is really a continuation of that response that we saw beginning in the passage last week, and it says, and so, right, if you kind of just follow the flow of the narrative, they responded, they were baptized, and now we see that the community of God's people is now living with one another, devoting themselves to the apostles' teachings, and fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers, and the Lord continues to add to their number. But ultimately, right, the first one of these being the apostles' teaching. And of course, that's another way of talking about, what, the Word of God. That this is not to say that, right, the teachings that they were committing themselves to were excluding the Old Testament. No, we're talking here about both the New and the Old Testaments, the full counsel of God from ultimately Genesis to Revelation, that the revealed Word of God was central to the life of the early church. And Boyce makes an important point, I think, with respect to this emphasis of the early church, that they were focused upon the ministry of the word from the very earliest stage, even immediately on the heels of the day of Pentecost. Why, because if you think about what had just happened, right, there would have been a tremendous temptation coming off of Pentecost and all that was done and said and heard, to think that the experience that had just been had by God's people, right, the manifestation of the signed gifts, that there would have been a temptation to think that that was now the norm. That, right, to think that the true mark of the church and of spirit-indwelt believers in Jesus would need to continue to seek and to have these extraordinary experiences in their lives and to seek to devote themselves to continually having such experiences. But the description we have here is not that at all, rather it says they devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings, the scriptures, they devoted themselves to the word of God, to fellowship, the ordinary means of grace that have been true in every age, the word, the sacraments as we'll see in a moment, and prayer. This is the mark of the true church, if you will, or one of them, that they would be committed to the teaching of God's word, a commitment to God's word as the foundation of their life, their worship, together. And so, the point being that a healthy church in any age of the church is one that has a focus on the Word of God, has a robust teaching and preaching ministry where the Word of God is held forth, where the Word of God is understood to be authoritative over all of life. And that indeed it is from the message of that word that has the power to change men's and women's hearts to give them life from God. That the church in view here in Acts 2 is one where the exposition of scripture is central. Right, not storytelling or the teaching of good morals or motivational speeches that are intended to drive emotional responses, but sound exposition of the word of God, where the word of God is faithfully explained and applied, that that is what is in

view, that Luke is really emphasizing for us as he writes about the practice of the early church, that a healthy church will be one where the word of God is taught, is held as authoritative in every aspect of its ministry, understanding that the people of God are built up, the body of Christ is built up by the word and spirit working together to effect change in people's hearts. than in fact it is the word of God that needs to be held forth even for those who do not know Christ. that the life-giving message is the message that God has revealed for us in Scripture, that Christ came to save sinners. And so that's the first mark of a healthy church that Luke describes for us. The second is fellowship. And commentators and scholars have pointed out, right, that, and you've probably heard this a number of times, Koinonia, right? That it's more than just spending time with other people, but it has to do with something more than that. that it has to do with having something in common, participating in something together. And we have, again, a beautiful description in these verses of what that looks like, that it has to do with participating in something together. in life together. And not just any life, but a life that is grounded upon the truth of God's word and is lived in light of Christ and his redemptive work. And of course we have this description here in verse 44, we've already read it. that they were all together and they had all things in common and selling their possessions and distributing proceeds as any had need. Day by day, they were attending the temple together, breaking bread in their homes, receiving their food with glad and generous hearts. And so we see this picture that demonstrates for us what this koinonia looks like right, that there is this intimate involvement in one another's lives. It says they were together every day, that they were breaking bread together regularly in one another's homes. They were caring for one another through the sharing of resources. Not because the church was, you know, levying taxes against them and forcing them to give, but because of their genuine concern and love for one another's needs, and out of thankfulness in their hearts, they were looking out for one another. Right, and of course, all of this centered upon their common union and communion with one another in Christ. And of course, again, when we look at such a picture, it's easy to say, well, it's really not feasible or necessary in the church today to function in such a manner. the commonality and participation in one another's lives that we see here is, right, that this is what God's people need in every age, right, as fellow members of the body of Christ. I mean, yes, it may look a little differently today than it did then, but we have a vested interest, don't we, in one another's lives. We have a responsibility. to look out for one another and our common good and growth in grace. And I think in today's church, and perhaps it's even harder in larger churches, that this type of bond, this type of intimate connection and fellowship is very difficult. Because for one thing, I don't think we see it as necessary. We probably don't feel the need to have this type of involvement in one another's lives in our modern society. We can easily go to church on Sundays and even Wednesdays, but see all of our social needs and even financial needs provided for elsewhere. But the picture that the book of Acts gives us, that the word of God gives us, is that a healthy church like the one that is held before us here at the end of Acts chapter two is a church that has robust fellowship where the people of God are engaged in one another's lives in a very real and tangible way and participate together in life and of course in the means of grace. So first, the Word of God, secondly, fellowship, but the third is this, the breaking of bread and prayers. And again, you may have heard this already. This is, when we have the definite article there of the breaking of bread and the

prayers, that this is a formal term that refers respectively to the Lord's Supper. the breaking of bread and the prayers referring to the prayers offered in public worship. And so in other words, this model church, as Boyce describes it, was committed to worshiping together, which indeed they were. They were devoted as God's people to gather together for worship, engage in the means of grace together, the means that God had given them, right, the right preaching of the word as we have already talked about, but also their regular participation in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and faithfully gathering to pray together. Right, and so public worship, gathering together, and on the Lord's Day in particular, in the assembly of God's people, and I mean, I guess nowadays we have to clarify that preferably in person, if you're able, that that is a vital component, again, of a healthy church. And so the, the gathering of God's people for worship was not for the sake of entertainment or for experience, but to do what we'd been created to do and been recreated in Christ to do, which is to worship God and to offer Him the glory that is due His name. But also corporate prayer. was a central component of the worship and fellowship life of the early church, the model church. And I'm just gonna read some quotes, and there's a lot of quotes you could read, but I wanna read a handful from the great Charles Spurgeon regarding the importance of prayer. The first one is this, he says, if a church is to be what it ought to be for the purpose of God, we must train it in the holy art of prayer. The second one, prayer meetings are the throbbing machinery of the church. Thirdly, the condition of a church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. so is the prayer meeting a grace-o-meter. And from it, we may judge of among, I'm sorry, judge of among the divine working, judge of the divine working among a people, sorry. If God be near a church, it must pray. If he be not there, one of the first tokens of his absence will be slothfulness in prayer. And lastly, he says this, believe me, if a church does not pray, it is dead. Those are Spurgeon's words about the importance of prayer to the life of a church. And so that is the words that we must take to heart because we see it, I mean, Spurgeon's enough, but the word of God shows us the importance of prayer, that a healthy church will be evident by a commitment to faithful worship and fervent prayer. among its people. Fourthly, and finally, we read that the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. And the picture that we have as we read this description, the way it's written, is that the adding to the number that was occurring was really sort of the natural outflow of what was happening in the church, that as the church was faithfully engaged in the apostles' teachings and the teaching of God's word and engaging in fellowship, life together, and worshiping God and praying together that there's this sense in which the Lord was faithfully adding people to their number day by day. And certainly there is, I think, an attraction or an attractiveness of a church that is faithful in these things and that God will use such a church to draw people to Himself. But we shouldn't assume that the early church, the church here in Acts chapter 2 was not intentional in its efforts to reach out to the community around them, right? In fact, we know the opposite is true. When we read the book of Acts, right, God's people were faithful in their witness in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria. and the ends of the earth. Now, God had to drive them out sometimes to do that, but nevertheless, we see that the engagement of God's people, that that is the means that God uses as he sends his people out into the community to bring the life-giving message of the gospel, that that is the means, the hands and feet who bring the good news, as Romans 9 describes, Romans 10, that is how he brings people in, the hands and feet of his own people preaching the good news. But it's

important, we don't wanna miss, as we read this description here, that it was the Lord that added to their number day by day, right? It was not because, you know, the apostles came up with well-organized outreach programs or properly trained them in persuasive gospel presentations. Rather, it was the Lord who worked in people's hearts as his people went out and shared the the message of Christ and Him crucified, right? It's important, and I would argue it's freeing to us to understand that we are not the ones that convince anyone to believe in the gospel, right? It's the Lord who works in men's and women's hearts. to draw them to himself. We don't convince anyone of the truth. Only God can open a man's heart to believe. But he does use the hands and feet of his people. We are the means that God uses to communicate His message to reconcile sinners to Himself. And I say it's freeing because, right, I think one of the biggest stumbling blocks that people experience when it comes to sharing their faith with others is we're afraid to say the wrong thing, right? And that's not to say that we shouldn't be prepared to give a defense, right? We're always to be ready to give a defense for the hope that is within us, as Peter writes in his epistle. But that it isn't, because of our excellent presentations or our words ultimately. Yes, God may use us, but ultimately God is the one that has to convince people to believe. And so it takes all the pressure off of us and we can simply be his witnesses wherever he has put us to let the light of Christ shine brightly through us to the world around us. And so God's people, right, are called to be his witnesses, to be salt and light, engaging the lost with the only message that can make them found in Christ. the message that Jesus Christ died for sinners like you and me. And so this is a beautiful picture that Luke provides for us here in Acts chapter 2 of a church that is centered upon the Word of God, that is committed to biblical worship and fellowship and witness. Not one that we should look at and just simply write off as an unattainable ideal, but one that we can emulate for the glory of God and the good of God's people as we grow up in the grace and knowledge of Christ. as Paul writes in Ephesians 4, 13, until we attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Indeed, this is a picture of how God's church can function. even in today's world by the power of His grace. Let me pray and then we'll pray. Gracious God, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for, Lord, giving us a right foundation in Christ and Lord, instructing us in, Lord, how we might live, how we might have life in you and how we might live together by the power of your grace. May you, Lord, use us to be a faithful community of your people, to hold forth the truth of your word, to live in unity and fellowship together. to be a church that is committed to worshiping you as you designed and a church that is committed to praying with and for one another and for the world around us. And may you use us as your witnesses here in Columbia and the Midlands and to the ends of the earth. And so we thank you and pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.