

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: What Happened to Believers After Jesus Left Them? Acts 2:22-47

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INTRODUCTION: There are three points to my message today:

1. The early Church set a model we still follow today.
2. The early Church set a particular pattern of behavior.
3. The early Church grew because it was healthy.

BACKGROUND: Following his Resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to several hundred people over a period of forty days. In today's scripture, people watched as Jesus ascended into heaven. Two men dressed in white appeared and asked them why they stood there gazing.

Jesus was intentional about his earthly ministry. He told his disciples everything they needed to know. He challenged their faith and built their courage. And, then, rising from the dead was the ultimate encouragement builder.

But, Jesus never had plans to stay with them very long. When he ascended into heaven, he left the work up to his disciples. It was time for them to get on with all they'd been trained to do.

Very soon after the ascension, the disciples elected another disciple to take Judas' place. Then the Holy Spirit came "like a rushing wind," the Bible says, and filled the disciples with the ability to speak the languages of a diverse crowd. Some thought they were drunk, but Peter said they were not drunk. They were fulfilling the prophecy of Joel. Peter quoted that prophecy and launched into a sermon.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:22-41 ²² *"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of*

wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵ David said about him:

*“I saw the Lord always before me.
Because he is at my right hand,
I will not be shaken.*

²⁶ *Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest in hope,*

²⁷ *because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
you will not let your holy one see decay.*

²⁸ *You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence.’*

²⁹ *“Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay.*

³² *God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. ³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴ For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,*

*“The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand
³⁵ until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.””*

³⁶ *“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”*

³⁷ *When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

³⁸ *Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

⁴⁰*With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”* ⁴¹*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

EXPLANATION: This was Peter’s sermon at Pentecost. It wasn’t very long, but it was heart piercing. In talking about the length of sermons, one commentator noted the longest sermon Jesus preached was the Sermon on the Mount, and it could have been no more than thirteen minutes! 😊

Peter got right to the point when he accused the people who were present of crucifying Jesus along with the help of evil men. Peter’s sermon was powerful, and it convicted the people of their wrong doing. Obviously, they wanted to know what they should do, and Peter said, “Repent and be baptized.” They could not go back and undo what they had already done, but they could repent and start new lives.

Three thousand people were converted that very day. The Church went from a handful of members to over three thousand. It is possible this number reflected the men only. If so, it would have made the number even greater. Imagine what would happen today if that many people joined any church in one day. Most churches would be afraid. They’d believe someone was trying to take over or the preacher was giving the place away. We don’t have any record of naysayers that day, but what we do have is a record of what they did.

Let’s look verse by verse from verse 42 to verse 47 to see how the large community of believers functioned.

First, THE EARLY CHURCH SET THE MODEL WE STILL FOLLOW TODAY.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:42 ⁴²*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer.*

EXPLANATION: The apostles’ teaching — what were the apostles’ teaching? At this point, they didn’t have Paul’s epistles or the rest of the New Testament. In fact, they may not have had much of it at all in writing. The teaching was by word of mouth. They had to memorize it or write it down for themselves. Today, we’ve got

it all in writing. We can go right to the source, read, and study it for ourselves. When it comes to the apostles' teaching, we have it easy compared the first Church because it's written down right here.

But what was the apostles' teaching? The Greek word for apostles' teaching is the word *didache*. This word is used sixteen times in the New Testament, and each time it refers to either the teachings *of* Jesus Christ or the teachings *about* Jesus Christ.

Keep in mind these people were what we call the first generation of believers. The second generation of believers put together a writing called *The Didache*, which outlined basic doctrine, baptism, communion, and Church structure. But, here in Acts 2, the word *didache* refers to those who taught *about* Christ or who learned *from* Christ himself.

The Greek word for our English word “devoted” is *proskarterountes*, which means “continually” and “steadfastly.” And, they didn't take the word or its meaning lightly.

Also in verse 42 we have fellowship or *koinōnía*, which means “what is *shared in common* as the basis of *fellowship (partnership, community)*.” Fellowship is more than just saying hello. It's the sharing of common interests in a Christian community. Last Wednesday night I met with our finance committee about what we can do to make up for the shortfall we have right now. It's not terrible, but I'd like us to be doing better. One thing which was brought up was the general idea of what the dollar value of things are. For instance, what is the per-person dollar value of walking into a nice, comfortable building? Someone has to pay for it. I thought about how we could come up with a dollar value. We could take all our bills, divide them by our average attendance, and then determine a dollar value. I just might do that to see what the result is.

But, really, when it comes to true Christian friendship, *koinōnía*, you can't put a dollar value on it. Do you know why? Because none of us would be able to afford it—it's far more valuable than money. Hundreds of times, I've heard people say, “I don't know what I would do without my church family.”

Next, it says they continued in the breaking of bread. I believe this most definitely has a dual meaning. Depending on the context, the “breaking of the bread” can mean communion, and it can also mean eating meals together. Why is it important eating together is mentioned as something the early Church did? Because before Christ, Jews did not eat with non-Jews—now, Jews who became Christians ate with non-Jews.

Next, the scripture says they continued in prayers. You would think they would do this, wouldn't you? But, this statement is there for a reason. Why, because it's possible to do all the other things and forget prayer. It's possible to have teaching, fellowship, and meals together, and forget to pray. Prayer, among other things, is acknowledging teaching, fellowship, and meals are all made possible by God.

Not only did they start the model of church we have today—

Second, THE EARLY CHURCH SET A PARTICULAR PATTERN OF BEHAVIOR.

The first behavior was awe. Awe: wonder, amazement, astonishment—because of what was going on.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:43 ⁴³ *Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.*

Let me be clear, I have not seen many signs and wonders as were recorded in the Book of Acts. I hear of similar movements here and there, but not like the Book of Acts. It's clear to me the Apostles (those who were taught directly by Jesus himself during his earthly ministry) had a special blessing of power to work signs and wonders. Of course, God could do it again. And, occasionally, we get a glimpse of what it was like. When God moves, let's recognize it and be in awe!

SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:44 ⁴⁴ *All the believers were together and had everything in common.*

EXPLANATION: The Greek word for “common” is *koina*, which is related to the same word *koinōnía*, which means “fellowship.” That's very interesting. They

shared time together in fellowship, but they also shared things together in fellowship.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:45 ⁴⁵*They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.*

EXPLANATION: They didn't have retirement plans or insurance. They didn't have career paths. The idea of selling things and sharing the money made from the sale was quite a new and unique model. I want everyone to envision this...the people were a mix of races and backgrounds. During that period of human history, people were categorized and stayed in their own groups. Now, with Jesus, everyone was equal because of the cross. Everyone realized the only way to God is through Jesus, and therefore, everyone was a guilty sinner. When we look at it that way, we realize we are no more important than the next person.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:46 ⁴⁶*Every day, they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,*

EXPLANATION: Prior to Jesus, worship was only on the Sabbath. And, for many, the Sabbath became a ritual of going through the motions without any real-life application. Now, the temple became a place of buzzing activity every day. Again, they shared meals at home. The Greek word for "home" is *oikos*, which means "house to house." Christians went in and out of each other's homes, enjoying fellowship, and sharing food together. The rules that divided people in the past no longer mattered. People who were once outcast merely by their birth now mattered. It must have been the most freeing thing ever.

I want to add here to the importance of the home being mentioned. They didn't do everything in the temple. I've said numerous times—and I believe it—*one way to kill a church is to be at church all the time and only have church friends.*

ILLUSTRATION: A few years ago, a friend of mine in his eighties said his church outreach was on the baseball field. At the time, I didn't understand exactly what he meant. Now I do.

I hope you are building friendships with non-believers so you can reach them for Christ. If you don't, the Church will die. Most people, as they grow older, have less and less non-Christian friends. Well, if we are serious about the Gospel, we must change that.

Third, THE EARLY CHURCH GREW BECAUSE IT WAS HEALTHY.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:47 ⁴⁷*praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

There you go—that's what happened with the first Church. It was really a pretty simple arrangement.

CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION: Now, I come to the conclusion. Let's say someone who lived during the time Acts Chapter 2 was written wasn't quite certain about all this teaching about Jesus. The sheer excitement of this large group of people was no doubt captivating. There was something so unique, so fresh, and so undeniably worthwhile about them, that people just had to be a part of it. Oh, that we would be that Church today!

Don't you want to become a part of the body of Christ, a part of his Church? Don't you want to follow Peter's sermon where he told the people to repent and be baptized? He said that long ago, and it's still relevant today.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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