

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
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A LOOK AT THE BEGINNINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Acts 2:22-42

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Today, we will be looking at the beginnings of the New Testament Church and these three points.

- The church age started when the Holy Spirit came.
- The church grew when people accepted the message.
- New Testament churches share the same DNA.

**INTRODUCTION:** Last week I spoke about how Jesus appeared to many people after he resurrected from the grave... several hundred in fact. Then he ascended into heaven. The disciples were told to go to Jerusalem and wait for ten days. They did that and then Pentecost came.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus was intentional. He told his disciples everything they needed to know. He challenged their faith and built their courage. He trained them well. Rising from the dead was Jesus' greatest encouragement to the disciples. They still had a lot to learn, but they were given the task to take the Gospel all over the known world. They would probably never be together again at one time.

The Holy Spirit came with a sound like a rushing wind 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. They were fulfilling the prophecy of Joel. Peter quoted that prophecy and launched into a sermon.

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 2:22-41

*“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. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> David said about him:

“I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. <sup>26</sup> Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, <sup>27</sup> because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay. <sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.’

<sup>29</sup> “Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. <sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

“The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand <sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” <sup>36</sup> “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” <sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

<sup>38</sup> 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. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

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

## **THE CHURCH AGE STARTED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT**

**EXPLANATION:** We just read Peter's sermon at Pentecost. He wasted no time, he didn't have three points, two illustrations, and a poem. He'd never delivered a sermon in this way before. He had to be very careful that he was clearly and fairly representing the Gospel. So what did he do? He simply said what he knew to be true.... that the people killed Jesus, that Jesus resurrected from the dead, he quoted the scriptures he knew, and then told the people to repent and be baptized. And what was the result? Three thousand conversions!

**APPLICATION:** We can use Peter's message as a model for our own testimonies: Tell others that Jesus died and was resurrected, quote relevant scriptures, and explain that they should repent and be baptized. Trust the Holy Spirit to fill you and to help others understand.

When I was a teenager, I was invited to preach several revivals. My dad coached me by saying, "Get good and filled with the Holy Spirit. Confess your sins. Get clear before the Lord. Get prepared to preach the revival." I had never heard him say it quite like that before.

**EXPLANATION:** The church age started when the Holy Spirit came. Jesus was no longer with them in human flesh.

Jesus gave a hint at what the church age would look like in John 14:12-14.  
*Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*

What did Jesus mean when he said that believers would do greater works than he did? Here's how my simple mind understands this verse. Jesus never prayed with someone on the phone in another country. Jesus didn't preach to people on television where people at home could hear. Jesus never sent an email to a hundred people at one time.

## **THE CHURCH GREW WHEN PEOPLE ACCEPTED THE MESSAGE**

*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

I never noticed the word “accepted” before!

There’s a scripture for the Calvinists to put in their pipes and smoke. The church grew because people accepted the message! It doesn’t say “those who were chosen,” does it? No, it does not! Those who accepted. Yes, it was first God’s grace extended because they heard the message in their own language. The phrase “those who accepted” indicates there were those who did not accept.

In God’s sovereignty, he knows who will or will not accept, but on this side of God’s sovereignty – meaning we do not know and cannot understand the mind of God – God holds the church accountable for sharing the message and he holds individuals accountable for accepting the message.

**ILLUSTRATION:** We have this thing called the Annual Church Profile. Each year, we are asked by our denomination to complete the ACP. I cannot stand it! Do you know why? Because we don’t match the profile. From it comes some type of not-so-subtle scorecard about the health of the church. There is nowhere on the ACP that asks how many times we’ve shared the Gospel as a church – which is our responsibility, but it wants to know how many professions of faith we’ve had, which is the individual’s responsibility. Our job is to share the apostles’ teaching and equip you to share it. We cannot force people to accept it, can we?

This week a pastor-friend told me of a friend of his who pastors in another state. He said a friend of his is having trouble keeping his congregation of 400 encouraged when a brand-new church down the road has a thousand people. You know, if we play the comparison game, we are missing the point! The question is this: **IS THE CHURCH BEING FAITHFUL TO ITS MISSION?** Is the church telling the message? If people accept, GREAT. If not...then the church should stay faithful to sharing its message.

## **NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES SHARE THE SAME DNA**

**SCRIPTURE:** Acts 2:42

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer.*

**EXPLANATION:** God's message would be spread a different way. In the past, his message had been spread by the priests, the judges, the prophets. The rabbis were never mentioned in the Old Testament. They came about during the four hundred years of silence between the book of Malachi and when Jesus was born. During Jesus' time, the rabbis shared God's message. But all of them had one thing in common... they all rejected Jesus as Messiah. So God went a different route. He opened up his message of salvation to all people, and anyone who believed could share God's message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

**APPLICATION:** DNA is a self-replicating material which is present in nearly all living organisms as the main component of chromosomes. It is the carrier of genetic information. We all have similar DNA even though we have many differences.

Verse 42 tells us the DNA of the church. Devoted members, study of the Bible, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer -- the word outreach is not there, but it is implied within the context of the rest of the chapter.

Just as no two humans are alike, no two churches are alike. In the Old Testament there was the temple, or the portable tabernacle that was used during the wilderness wanderings. The temple provided specific functions for a specific group of people. It was very different than what we know as church today.

Some of the differences between churches are stark, and it is true that we've focused on those differences more than we've focused on the DNA that unites us. I appreciate who we are as Baptists. I like being connected to the history of Baptists, but I've always enjoyed fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ of other denominations. I've heard that in other nations, churches aren't so divided. Once I took some boys on a mission trip to Andros Island in the Bahamas. Here's what we did. We, as Baptists, insulated a Methodist church. The insulation was paid for by Presbyterians from Florida and the excess went for repairs at the Anglican parsonage. In America, I'm afraid that would never happen.

An article in Newsweek magazine this week said there is more Christian persecution in the world right now than any other time in history. Do you realize what a strong statement that is? I believe in the future, due to persecution,

Christians will have to work together better than we have before. We've heard of church splits, but I wouldn't be surprised if, in the future, we hear of more mergers.

Am I calling for the unification of all churches? No, but I think we should focus more on what unites us -- our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Read the book of Acts and you'll see how they ministered to people at their point of need. Ministry is meeting needs. Churches die when they fail to meet the needs of those around them.

In the Old Testament, the temple was it. In the New Testament, however, when the church age started, we see that churches spread throughout the nations. They had different sets of issues and needs, and because of that, no two churches looked alike. Today, we have a continuation of that. Churches must maintain the basic DNA outlined to us in verse 42, but we must reach out to people at their point of need, according to the changing ebbs and flows of those needs.

**CONCLUSION:** Let's not be satisfied with a perfunctory church that does perfunctory functions. Let's open our eyes, be creative, and ask God's Spirit to lead us down new avenues of faith in order to reach more people with the message that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

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