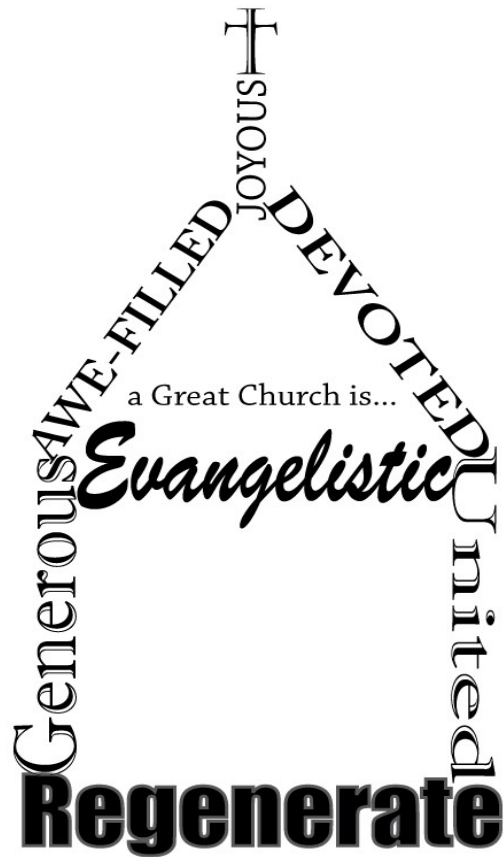


Kiama Anglican Church
Christ Church Kiama with St. Paul's Minnamurra



LEADER'S NOTES

Acts 2:37-47

Bible Studies : Term 2 : 2011 : **A GREAT CHURCH
IS ...
ACTS 2:37-47**

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

Acts 2:36

We concluded the gospel of Luke with the Risen Jesus ascending into heaven. Luke’s second volume opens with a retelling of the same story. But, for Luke, the story does not end there. The Book of Acts (which some have called the Acts of the Holy Spirit) goes on to record the preaching of the gospel of Jesus throughout the Roman world. From provincial Jerusalem to mighty Rome itself the story of the crucified prophet, of the incarnate God, who died on a criminal’s cross is told over and over again along with the call to respond to the salvation from sin that this death offers. And people respond in their thousands.

Acts also, then, records the setting up of the first churches (or gatherings) of Christians. It is to the first of these ‘churches’ that these studies turn.

In Acts, as we commence, Jesus has ascended, the apostles have waited, the Holy Spirit has come upon them, and Peter has preached on the day of Pentecost that Jesus is both ‘Lord and Christ’. The people respond and a group of 3000 plus is formed. The last few verses of Acts 2 that we are going to look at preserve for us something of how they organised themselves and what they did.

The church there in Jerusalem was not perfect, none are, but we can learn from it much that, if we have ears to hear, can make our church a better church or even a ‘great’ one.

Greg Holmes - May 2011

THE SECTIONS OF THE STUDIES

Read the Bible

It is good to read the passage for the week at the start of each study. Given that we are only dealing with such a short section of Scripture in this entire set of studies I would suggest that each week you read from Acts 2:37 up to the verse for particular study.

Discuss

The following three sections are the study proper. They are for the group meeting. As the leader you need to make some choices about which ones to do and how much time to spend on each.

Explore the Basics

These look at the basic ideas in the passage. I would recommend that each week you do these.

Deeper and Wider

As the heading suggests these dig deeper into the themes of the passage or look more widely at Scripture. It is probably among these that you as leader need to make some choices. Of course if you decide to have a go at them all I am sure it will be worthwhile.

Apply

These Questions should be done each week or at least you should work hard in your group each week to APPLY the lessons learnt to daily, everyday, hard slog, living in our world.

In these studies in particular we are looking at the nature of church and what we do together. It is important to make a real effort to work out together as a group what we can do in the areas of being a Regenerate, Devoted, Awe-Filled, United, Generous, Joyously Worshipping, Evangelistic Church.

We need to make the rubber of the 'idea' hit the road of our lives, thoughts and actions. - One of the problems in writing 'application' type questions is not knowing where all the individuals in groups etc. are up to. If you, as the group leader, can see a better application of the material - DO IT. - The important thing is to relevantly apply what we are talking about to our lives.

For next week : This is the passage for next week.

Please note that my answers below are not the 'correct' answers or what you are trying to get to in the study. I have set them out as a guide to my thinking only and an assistance to you.

*These Leaders Notes are meant to be the start of the assistance I am willing to give in regard to the studies. If you need anything further DO NOT hesitate to contact me.
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Acts 2

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.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts

Some scholars have regarded ACTS as the most important book in the New Testament, or at least as its pivotal book, coming as it does between the Gospels and the letters. It records the origin and growth of the Christian movement, telling us how the first believers lived out Christianity. It describes its message and ministry, and its life—including its triumphs and trials, the passions that drove it, and the source of the power that energized it. Any Christian wanting to know how to be a disciple of Christ in this world should turn to Acts to know how the first Christians lived. A recent topical study of Acts was therefore appropriately entitled *The Master Plan of Discipleship*. Furthermore, Acts is a deeply inspiring book. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who calls it “that most lyrical of books,” writes: “Live in that book, I exhort you: it is a tonic, the greatest tonic I know in the realm of the Spirit.”

Fernando, A., The NIV Application Commentary : ACTS (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1998) p22.

THE STUDIES

Study	Date	Topic	Passage	Page No
1	Sun 15 May	A Great Church is a Regenerate Church	ACTS 2:37-41	7
2	Sun 22 May	A Great Church is a Devoted Church	ACTS 2:42	9
3	Sun 29 May	A Great Church is an Awe-Filled Church	ACTS 2:43	11
	Sun 5 June	A Great Church is More than Just a Club.	Parish Houseparty: Bp. Hayward.	
4	Sun 12 June	A Great Church is a United Church	ACTS 2:44	13
5	Sun 19 June	A Great Church is a Generous Church.	ACTS 2:45	15
6	Sun 26 June	A Great Church is a Joyously Worshipping Church	ACTS 2:46-47a	17
7	Sun 36 July	A Great Church is an Evangelistic Church	ACTS 2:47b	19

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Study 1: Acts 2:37-41
A Great Church is a Regenerate Church

Day	Reading	To Think On	To Pray About	Personal Prayer Points
1	Acts 2:37-41	Our response to the Gospel as it is preached	Pray that those who hear the Gospel in our Church will respond to it in Repentance and faith	
2	Hebrews 4:12-16	Jesus as our totally sympathetic High Priest	Thank God that his Word is active in the world	
3	John 3:1-8	The wonder of 'new birth.'	Pray for those in your family who do not know the new birth in Jesus	
4	Psalms 51:8-13	The depth of repentance	Ask God to truly help you repent of the sins that beset you.	
5	Acts 17:22-31	The challenge of the Gospel and the Resurrection.	For a true appreciation of God's grace towards us	

Worth Noting

Peterson: *“Believers in every age have much to learn from Luke’s account of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the preaching of Peter about the Lord Jesus, and the fellowship and ministry of the first Christians in Jerusalem. However, it is not legitimate to argue that these experiences should be simply replicated in the life of every believer or contemporary church. Acts 2 is a narrative about the historic fulfilment of God’s covenant promises to Israel by the renewal of his people in Jerusalem. Luke is highlighting the faithfulness of God and outlining the way salvation was provided for believing Israelites by Messiah Jesus. That theme continues in Acts 3-7, until the persecution following Stephen’s death leads to the proclamation of the gospel in Samaria and beyond. As the story unfolds, we see how the gospel has its effect in different cultures. The Spirit progressively brings diverse groups to share in the New Covenant blessings first experienced by repentant and believing Israelites in Jerusalem. Although the pattern of fulfilment is never the same again, there is no suggestion in Acts of a decline from an idealised primitive community.”*

Study 1: Acts 2:37-41

A Great Church is a Regenerate Church

Explore the Basics

Read the passage carefully together.

- Discuss, in general, what it means for a church to be a 'regenerate' church. Now read the passage.**

Each of these studies begins with a similar question to this.

The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means and then to discuss how this applies in a 'church' in general.

The discussion as to how it applies to our church is covered in the application questions in each study. It will be helpful to the studies, I think, if you allow discussion to start before trying to 'nail' down a meaning.

Re-generate means simple 'started again' – or in John 3 terms 'born again'. It is a term we apply to individuals.

- What had the people heard? What had cut them to the heart?**

They had, of course heard Peter's sermon which started at 2:14. The climax of which is v36 : "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

What cut them to the heart was the challenge of the Gospel, the challenge of what they had done with Jesus and now the challenge of what they were going to do with Him.

Witherington: "v 37 tells us that Peter was indeed very persuasive – the audience was 'cut to the heart'."

Marshall: "The thought is of being brokenhearted and standing under conviction of sin. It was natural to ask what response should be made by those thus convicted (although the question may represent Luke's dramatization of the situation)."

Wright: *“The key thing to realize, in reading the early chapters of Acts, is that Jesus himself had warned his fellow Jews that they were precisely in danger of acceleration towards a cliff. That understanding doesn’t begin as an abstract theory about ‘sin’ or ‘judgment’. It begins as the very concrete and specific awareness: ‘this corrupt generation’ is heading for disaster, But Jesus stands in the way and can stop them from falling over the cliff. The message is then clear: ‘Be rescued’ – in other words, let God rescue you, let Jesus rescue you – from the ruin that will come upon the city and the nation, not as specific punishment for rejecting Jesus, but as the necessary consequence of that entire way of life of which rejecting Jesus was a key telltale sign.”*

3. **What does Peter tell them to do?**

In v38 he tells them straight : “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ

Repent – the internal action – turning away from sin.

Kistemaker: *“The imperative ‘repent’ implies that the Jews turn from the evil they have perpetrated, have an intense abhorrence for the sins they committed, experience a complete turnabout of their lives, and adhere to Jesus’ teaching”*

Clements: *“An individual decision to repent was required, but it was a decision to leave one group, ‘this corrupt generation’, and join a new group, ‘the fellowship’(v42).”*

Be baptized – the external action – evidence of the internal reality.

We come back to these elements of v38 in a later question.

Wright: *“To do all that is to ‘turn back’ from the way you were going, and to go in the other direction instead. That is what is meant by the word ‘repent.’”*

Longnecker: *“But Peter’s words came to his hearers as the best news they had ever heard—far better, indeed, than they deserved or*

could have hoped for. So today these words remain the best of good news and should be read as the proclamation of that news and not as just a set of theological problems.”

Marshall: *“ Calvin insisted that ‘repentance not only always follows faith, but is produced by it’ (Institutes III.iii:1), but it would be truer to say that repentance and faith are the two sides of the same coin. ”*

4. **Why should they do this and what will result?**

Why – again v 38 “... for the forgiveness of your sins

Result v 38-39 again : “.... 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.”

Note the elements that are involved in this. There is
Forgiveness

The gift of the Holy Spirit

The fulfilment of promises

Witherington: “What one can say is that Luke intends his audience to know that repentance, faith, baptism, the name of Jesus, and reception of the Spirit were all important elements when the matter of ‘what must we do’ or how people enter the community of Christ comes up”

The call of God.

Wright: “What God has promised for the ultimate future has come forward to meet us in Jesus Christ. We should expect signs of that future to appear in the present. And, whenever we are in a mess, of whatever sort and for whatever reason, we should remember this: we are ‘turn-back-and-be-rescued’ people. We are ‘repent-and-be-baptized’ people. We have the right, the birthright, to cash in that promise at any place and any time”

Kistemaker: “And to all who are far off – as many as the Lord our God will call to himself.’ ... the term ‘far off’ includes both time and place. God’s promise extends throughout the generations until the end of the world. It also reaching people from every nation,

tribe, race and language, wherever they dwell on the face of this earth.”

Peterson: “The population of Jerusalem at the time is estimated to have been between 180,000 and 200,000. Even 3,000 converts in the temple precincts would have been a distinct minority of the crowd. Nevertheless, it is extraordinary evidence of the convicting work of the Spirit, through the testimony of Christ’s witnesses, that so many should have been brought to repentance and faith at one time.”

Stott: “ Everyone God calls to himself through Christ receives both gifts. The gifts of God are coextensive with the call of God.”

Fernando: “ David Gooding describes this “amazing grace” as follows: They had murdered God’s Son; he was offering them his Spirit. They had crucified the second person of the Trinity; he was offering them the third. They had thrown God’s Son out of the vineyard in the hope of inheriting the vineyard themselves; now he was inviting them to receive God’s Spirit not just into their vineyard but into their very hearts, to be their undying life, to be the earnest and guarantee of an infinite and imperishable inheritance.”

Deeper and Wider

1. Scan the first two chapters of Acts up to this point. What main things have happened?

One commentator has these headings. (Fernando):

Prologue (1:1–2)

A. Preparation for Pentecost (1:3–26)

1. Instructions Before the Ascension (1:3–8)
2. The Ascension (1:9–11)
3. After the Ascension (1:12–26)

B. Witness in Jerusalem (2:1–7:60)

1. The Day of Pentecost (2:1–47)
 - a. The Coming of the Spirit (2:1–13)
 - b. Peter’s Pentecostal Speech and the People’s Response (2:14–42)
 - c. The New Community (2:43–47)

The main events have been – Jesus Ascension – return to Jerusalem – Choosing an new twelfth apostle – The coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost – Peter’s Sermon.

We need to note three ‘programmatic’ bits which set the scene for what is happening here in Chapter 2 and through the rest of the book:

1:4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

And

2:39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

Longnecker: *"The promise, Peter declares, is not only for his immediate hearers ("for you") but also for succeeding generations ("for your children") and for all in distant places ("for all who are far off"). It is a promise, Peter concludes, that is sure; for it has been given by God and rests upon the prophetic word of Joel 2:32: "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.""*

As we do these studies we need to remember that what we are considering is the very beginning of a process of establishing what we now so easily call churches.

Blaiklock : *"In this picture of the early Church note, first the mode of entrance. This was no loose group, but a clear cut society, universal in membership, but with definite firm standards. Repentance, confession and baptism were necessary."*

2. Read Psalm 51:1-13. What does this teach us about repentance?

This Psalm is David's prayer of repentance after his adultery with Bathsheba and being confronted with it by Nathan. (see 2 Samuel 11 and 12)

Not that it is God directed. It is not simply looking inward.

Repentance is turning back from sin to move in the opposite direction.

3. Look carefully at v38. What are the individual elements here and how do they relate to one another?

"Repent

Is the action we take inwardly. It is turning away from wrong actions, thoughts, motives and to right ones.

and be baptized,

Baptism was the sign of belonging to Jesus, it is not in itself salvation, but a sign of it.

every one of you,

Peter's call is to all who listen, those who respond with repentance and offer themselves for baptism enter the church.

in the name of Jesus Christ

The baptism is into a name, into the person of Jesus.

for the forgiveness of your sins.

All this means that the sins of the baptised 'repenter' are forgiven, he is brought into right relationship with God through Jesus.

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

As part of this process the Spirit comes into the life of the believer.

Kistemaker: "Repentance, baptism, and faith are theologically related. When the believer who repents is baptized he makes a commitment of faith. He accepts Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour and knows that through Christ's blood his sins are forgiven. Indeed Peter instructs the people that baptism must be 'in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.' Forgiveness of sins takes place only through Christ in consequence of his death and resurrection (see Romans 6:1-4)"

4. Read Mark 1:14-15. How does Jesus message relate to the response Peter calls for?

This programmatic statement for the ministry of Jesus reminds us that the essence of the response to Jesus is a repentance.

It is worth noting that in the book of Acts the preaching of the Kingdom is recast as preaching the King in the Kingdom, Jesus.

Apply

1. What place has repentance in your life? How do we go about repenting?

I think we need to recognise that this is not a one off thing. It is not that we just repent once – but of course we need to do that to come into God’s kingdom – but also that we who remain saved sinners are a repentant people constantly recognising our shortfalls and coming to God for forgiveness and turning to live His way.

2. Is our church a ‘regenerate’ church? What evidence do you have for your opinion? Where could we improve?

Each of these studies ends with a similar question to this.

The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means when it is applied to our church.

You will need to decide whether to regard our church as being the overall whole or the congregation you belong to.

I believe it will be worthwhile to discuss these things in relation to both.

Baldly put the question is are all them members of our church born again Christians. I think it is important for us to recognise that the answer is ‘probably not’. That is why it is important for us to continually be reminded of the great grace of God in the Gospel and to call on people to respond to it.

For Next Week: Read Acts 2:37-42 .

Study 2: Acts 2:42

A Great Church is a Devoted Church

Wright: *“(Luke’s) book has got off to a flying start, with the extraordinary conversation between the risen Jesus and the apostles, and then the spectacular events of the day of Pentecost. Peter’s address to the puzzled crowds, the first public statement of the good news about Jesus and his resurrection and about God’s rescue operation through him, now in full swing, is dramatic, full of energy and possibility and hope. And now at the end of that first Pentecost, we Pause for breath, look around, and see where we’ve got to.”*

Witherington: *“v42-47 provides us with our first summary glimpse at the interior life of the early church.”*

Explore the Basics

1. **Discuss, in general, what it means for a church to be a ‘devoted’ church. Now read the verse.**

Each of these studies begins with a similar question to this. The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means and then to discuss how this applies in a ‘church’ in general. The discussion as to how it applies to our church is covered in the application questions in each study. It will be helpful to the studies, I think, if you allow discussion to start before trying to ‘nail’ down a meaning.

The whole idea of ‘devoted’ speaks to a degree of enthusiasm and commitment. It is not that you think something is just a good idea, worth thinking about, worth having an interest in. It goes beyond that.

MS Word dictionary defines it as

1. loving and committed
feeling or showing great love, commitment, or loyalty to somebody or something, especially over a long period of time
2. dedicated
feeling or showing great dedication to something

2. **What four elements are mentioned in v42?**

The first thing we are told about this group of 3000 plus is about the 'religious' activities they undertook: They devoted themselves:

to the apostles' teaching

Teaching – they needed to learn more about this faith they had committed themselves to.

Fernando: "Considering that Jesus spent so much time teaching the crowds and his inner band of followers, it is not surprising that teaching had an important place in the early church. Jesus himself instructed his disciples to teach obedience to those who had been baptized (Matt. 28:20)."

to the fellowship,

Note that this is the fellowship – that is to the community

Witherington: "R. Pesch has suggested, perhaps rightly, that in fact only two things are really mentioned here teaching and koinonia (fellowship), with the latter further defined as involving the breaking of bread and prayer. I tend to think this suggestion is correct."

to the breaking of bread

Has something to do with eating together. – Hotly debated as to what exactly it means – Peterson: "Some scholars have argued that the expression v42 is a technical term for the Lord's Supper and that this was already separated from their ordinary meals. However the term describes the initiation of an ordinary meal in the Jewish fashion of breaking a loaf with the hands and giving thanks to God."

Fernando: "the phrase "breaking of bread" in Acts refers to the Lord's Supper, which was probably part of the ordinary fellowship meals as described in 1 Corinthians 11."

to prayer

Is 'the prayers' in the Greek – May mean they continued with the temple prayers in Jerusalem – but whatever it means it does mean they

prayed and there is ample evidence in the early chapters of Acts of prayer outside the temple and as Christians on their own or gathered as a Christian group.

3. **What does it mean to be ‘devoted’ to these things?**

It means that this group of 3000 people were each personally committed to these things.

They were not optional extras, or things to be done only on Sundays (or Sabbaths) but these became important parts of their daily lives.

Wright: *“These four go together. You can’t separate them, or leave one out, without damage to the whole thing. Where no attention is given to teaching, and to constant, lifelong Christian learning, people quickly revert to the worldview or mindset of the surrounding culture, and end up with their minds shaped by whichever social pressure are most persuasive, with Jesus somewhere around as a pale influence or memory. Where people ignore the common life of the Christian family (the technical term often used is ‘fellowship’, which is more than friendship but not less), they become isolated, and often find it difficult to sustain a living faith. Where people no longer share in ‘the breaking of bread’ (the early Christian term for the simple meal that took them back to the Upper Room ‘in remembrance of Jesus’) they are failing to raise the flag which says ‘Jesus’ death and resurrection are the centre of everything’. And whenever people do all these things but neglect prayer, they are quite simply forgetting that Christians are supposed to heaven-and-earth people. Prayer makes no sense whatever – unless heaven and earth are designed to be joined together, and we can share in that already.”*

Longnecker: *“The verb translated “devoted” (proskartereo) is a common one that connotes a steadfast and singleminded fidelity to a certain course of action. Luke uses it elsewhere in Acts to characterize the devotion of the 120 in the upper room to prayer (1:14) and the*

apostles' resolve in the matter of the Hellenistic widows to center their attention on prayer and the ministry of the word (6:4)''

4. **How do these elements relate to one another?**

It seems to me that all of these things are done in fellowship, in the community (though some of them may be done individually as well). These people gathered for these things.

The apostles teaching – defined and enriched their fellowship, directed their breaking of bread, and informed their prayers.

The breaking of bread was an act of fellowship and almost certainly included prayer.

The prayer undergirded it all.

Deeper and Wider

1. **What does 'apostles teaching' mean to us in the 21st Century?**

Essentially we have the apostles teaching and the New Testament of our Scriptures. God has so ordered the world that these writings have been preserved to record the teaching of the apostles so that through the centuries people could devote themselves to them.

Peterson: "Luke was also commending the positive example of the earliest community of Christians to his readers. This was not a breakaway movement from Judaism but the true Israel, where his Spirit was powerfully at work, fulfilling God's end-time promises."

2. **What is 'fellowship'? How do we practise it?**

The fellowship is the community. We practise 'fellowship' when we do things together as Christians.

3. **Discuss the meaning of 'the breaking of bread'? How does this relate to our church practices?**

I think we lose something if we restrict this to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. I believe it should be the common experience of Christians that they share in full meals together.

4. **Prayer is always a challenge. Discuss how we can devote ourselves to it.**

Really for discussion.

Apply

1. **How do you increase your personal devotion to the apostles teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and prayers? How can we help each other in this?**

First it is a matter of will – committing yourself to do these things.

Important to thoughtfully discuss the second part of the question.

Clements: *“There is something movingly spontaneous about their desire to do things together. Here was a group of people who did not want to be spectators, but participants. Church for them was not just an institution they went to on a Sunday, it was a community that formed the context of their whole lives and about which they felt passionately enthusiastic.”*

2. **Is our church a ‘devoted’ church? What evidence do you have for your opinion? Where could we improve?**

Each of these studies ends with a similar question to this.

The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means when it is applied to our church.

You will need to decide whether to regard our church as being the overall whole or the congregation you belong to.

I believe it will be worthwhile to discuss these things in relation to both.

This then follows on from the question before – what can we do. If you have any good ideas as a group pass them on to the Powers That Be.

For Next Week: Read Acts 2:37-43.

Study 3: Acts 2:43

A Great Church is an Awe Filled Church

Explore the Basics

1. **Discuss, in general, what it means for a church to be an ‘awe-filled’ church. Now read the verse.**

Each of these studies begins with a similar question to this.

The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means and then to discuss how this applies in a ‘church’ in general.

The discussion as to how it applies to our church is covered in the application questions in each study.

It will be helpful to the studies, I think, if you allow discussion to start before trying to ‘nail’ down a meaning.

Good to discuss this.

We will consider what the Greek words mean in questions 3.

2. **Who was filled with awe? Why?**

The verse says everyone.

It is likely that this is referring to people outside the infant church as well as inside it.

Fernando : First we are told about the “awe” that everyone was filled with and about the ministry of miracles performed by the apostles (v. 43). “Everyone” here could refer both to the believers and to outsiders who saw and heard what was happening in the church. These people could sense that God was at work. The miracles could also be signs to the Jews that the new age they were looking for was dawning. In the book of Acts such signs are closely connected to the evangelistic ministry of the church.

The reason given is : “and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.”

3. **What does ‘filled with awe’ mean?**

The ESV has – ‘and fear came upon every soul.’ – this reflects each of the Greek words in the sentence. The word the NIV translates ‘awe’ is ‘phobos’ (fear). This is the sort of reverential fear that is meant in the phrase ‘the fear of the Lord’ used so often in the OT (and NT)

Whilst there is the element of “I am afraid of that’ it also as the NIV has it suggest an awe or a reverence for God.

Stephen Renn : (Expository Dictionary of Bible Words) *As well as referring to a sense of terror, $\alpha\epsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\gamma\ \gamma\alpha\alpha\rho\epsilon\alpha\epsilon\}$ also indicates “fear” in terms of an awesome reverence of God. Such an attitude is in fact explicitly required of God’s people under the terms of the Mosaic covenant (cf. Lev. 19:14; 25:17; Deut. 4:19; 6:2, 13, 24; 31:12; Josh. 24:14). The psalmist also frequently exhorts his readers to fear God in this way (e.g., Ps. 33:8).*

4. **What are the things the apostles are doing called?**

Wonders and Signs.

We get many examples of them in the coming chapters of Acts.

Kistemaker: *“Jesus endowed the apostles with authority to perform miracles (compare Matthew 10:98). The apostles repeatedly exercise this power either in response to the faith of the people or to increase their faith. The result was twofold: the believers were conscious of God’s sacred presence among them and numberless converts were added to the church (v47).”*

Clements: *“The function of miracles in the Bible is often to accredit God’s special messengers. The apostles were special, and these signs were designed to mark them out in the special office they exercised.”*

Marshall: *“Wonders and signs – the words used are those which were also used to describe the mighty works of Jesus (2:22) – were being wrought by the apostles, and Luke will shortly relate specific examples.”*

Deeper and Wider

1. **Look carefully at v43. What is the relationship between the ‘awe’ and the ‘signs and wonders’?**

It is not a direct causal relationship.

The awe is at God himself and his work. I take it that the sign and wonders re-inforce this.

2. **Why call them ‘signs and wonders’?**

Signs – Signs, which is the word John uses for Jesus miracles, are things that point to something other than themselves. They convey a message or direct attention elsewhere.

Wonders – Are something to get out attention. – it seems to me that the one ‘action’ have both effects – The apostles actions are mean to draw our attention and then to direct that attention, not to themselves or even the act, but to the God who enables and is behind all they do.

3. **What is the place of signs and wonders in our day and age? Can God still do ‘signs and wonders’?**

For discussion.

Of course God can do what he likes.

There are of course spectacular signs and wonders done in Christian churches all over the world today. BUT there are also the less ‘spectacular’ signs and wonders that we are more likely to miss or dismiss as coincidence or the natural way of things. We should be more attuned to the God who created the world and is constantly at work in it.

The other thing to note is that we cannot demand that God act in the same way in our age as in this first church situation. The circumstances and the culture are different. God will always act in the best way for his people.

4. **Read Acts 5:12-16. What does this show us about the sorts of things the disciples were doing?**

Acts 5:12 The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. 13 No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. 14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. 15 As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. 16 Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.

The first thing to note is that this is exactly the sort of thing Jesus was doing.

Apply

1. **What fills you with awe about what God is doing in our world in 2011?**

For discussion

2. **Is our church an ‘awe filled’ church? What evidence do you have for your opinion? Where could we improve?**

Each of these studies ends with a similar question to this.

The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means when it is applied to our church.

You will need to decide whether to regard our church as being the overall whole or the congregation you belong to.

I believe it will be worthwhile to discuss these things in relation to both.

I guess the first question is to ask – “Do we see God at work in our church” – The answer must be ‘yes’ – if we think it is no then we need to look more carefully for God has promised to be at work among his people.

Then the question is how do we react.

And then are people in the community in ‘awe’ of what happens in our church.

For Next Week: Read Acts 2:37-44.

Study 4: Acts 2:44
A Great Church is a United Church

Explore the Basics

1. **Discuss, in general, what it means for a church to be a ‘united’ church. Now read the verse.**

Each of these studies begins with a similar question to this.

The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means and then to discuss how this applies in a ‘church’ in general.

The discussion as to how it applies to our church is covered in the application questions in each study.

It will be helpful to the studies, I think, if you allow discussion to start before trying to ‘nail’ down a meaning.

Unity is a big issue – We seek to be united in so many things.

One of the things is to establish what it means to be united. Need to look at whether it means conformity in all things,

2. **What was it that brought these people together?**

They were ‘believers’

That is, they were those who had committed themselves to this Jesus that Peter had preached in Acts 2.

Wright: *“The early Christian impulse was to see things exactly like that. We are ‘family’! We are brothers and sisters! Our baptism, our shared faith, our fellowship at ‘the bread breaking’, all point in this direction.”*

Peterson: *“The unity of the believers is stressed in two ways here. Firstly we are told that they were together. Secondly, we are told that they had everything in common.”*

3. **What is the first thing that is said about these ‘believers’?**

They were ‘together’ –

Right through God’s plan of salvation God saves people into a community.

In the OT that community was the people of Israel.

In the NT it is the new Israel – those who are committed to the King, Jesus.

We need each to have an individual faith in Jesus but it is a community in which we exercise that faith.

4. **What did they have ‘in common’?**

All things.

Need to some extent to be read in conjunction with next week’s v45

Deeper and Wider

1. **Discuss what it means to have ‘all things in common’?**

For discussion - on reflection there can be many levels of this.

At the most basic level it is about our attitude to our material things.

2. **Read Ephesians 4:1-13. What is the basis of our unity?**

Jesus

3. **Read John 17:20-23. What does Jesus pray for believers?**

John 17:20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Unity

It is important to note what the world can know when Christian dwell in unity.

4. **Read 1 Samuel 30:21-25. What does this say about our attitude to our ‘neighbour’ / fellow believer?**

For Discussion.

This is certainly not the world’s way of doing things.

Apply

1. **What do you do to promote unity in our church? In what situations is it easy? In what situations is it hard?**

For discussion

We need to recognise that there are many little (and big) things we do that either promote unity or endanger it.

2. **Is our church a ‘united’ church? What evidence do you have for your opinion? Where could we improve?**

Each of these studies ends with a similar question to this.

The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means when it is applied to our church.

You will need to decide whether to regard our church as being the overall whole or the congregation you belong to.

I believe it will be worthwhile to discuss these things in relation to both.

For discussion -

For Next Week: Read Acts 2:37-45.

Study 5: Acts 2:45

A Great Church is a Generous Church

Explore the Basics

1. **Discuss, in general, what it means for a church to be a 'generous' church. Now read the verse.**

Each of these studies begins with a similar question to this. The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means and then to discuss how this applies in a 'church' in general. The discussion as to how it applies to our church is covered in the application questions in each study. It will be helpful to the studies, I think, if you allow discussion to start before trying to 'nail' down a meaning.

Generosity is something I think that we expect from people with 'lots'. But I think the Bible expects all God's people to be generous.

2. **What specifically were these early Christians doing?**

Need to delve back into the last phrase of v44 about them having all things in common.

The text says straightforwardly that they were selling their stuff and helping out those who had less.

Kistemaker: *"The communal share of material goods was not a divestment of wealth. Rather, it was a willingness of the part of the owners to place their possessions at the disposal of all those believers who were needy."*

Clements: *"It seems closer to the truth that there was a renunciation of possessiveness."*

3. **What did they do to raise money?**

The sold their goods and possessions.

I am inclined to think this does not mean they sold all their goods and possessions – rather they sold what was necessary in order for them to be generous.

Kistemaker: *"The members of the Jerusalem church exhibited a unique spontaneity in taking care of the poor. They did so in obedience to Christ and the apostles, who taught them to 'remember the poor' (e.g. see Gal 2:10). Yet the apostles never told anyone to sell property to support the needy. Instead*

they stressed the joy of voluntary giving. Thus Paul wrote, 'Let each man give just what he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver' (2 Cor 9:7)."

4. **Where did the money go?**

To the less fortunate in the community.

This early church represented the whole spectrum of Jerusalem society and some outsiders.

Jesus' constant appeal to those who were disadvantaged in their society meant that there would be a good many of these in their midst. – As a congregation they felt the need to provide for them. Tony Campolo: *"There are 2,000 verses of Scripture that tell us we must be committed to protecting the poor and the oppressed... There is no concern of Scripture that is addressed so often and so powerfully as reaching out to the poor."*

Deeper and Wider

1. **Read Acts 4:32-5:11. How does this help us understand this verse? What is the main issue here for Ananias and Sapphira?**

The first section expands for us the ideas in this verse.

Barnabas selling a field gives us some idea of the sort of thing that was being done.

Ananias and Sapphira give us an example of how not to do it. The issue here is not that they were not giving but that they were lying about what they were giving.

2. **Read Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Isaiah 58:6-11. What does God say to his people about caring for the less fortunate? See also 1 John 3:17**

These passages from the Law, from the Prophets and from the New Testament show us that God has a great concern for the less fortunate of society.

3. **Is this a form of communism?**

This is often the claim that the Jerusalem church was setting up a commune.

This is a bit hard to get from the text. The text represents an attitude to one another not a rigid form of organisation.

Clements: *“This was not some centrally organised exercise in distributive justice carried out by Peter and John, but an exceptionally beautiful example of Christian charity.”*

Marshall: *“We have avoided the use of the term ‘communism’ in describing this practice, since modern communism is a description of a political and economic system of such a different character that it is anachronistic and misleading to use the term in the present context.”*

4. **What underlying attitude to wealth, possessions and materialism is exemplified in this verse? Read Proverbs 11:24-25 and James 5:1-5.**

All our ‘stuff’ belongs ultimately to God. He has given it to us and we are stewards of it.

We should be generous with it.

The James passage reminds us of God’s justice in this matter.

Clements: *“Clearly, then, it was not a case of substituting social action for evangelism, or of merging social with evangelism, but of preaching the love of God in Christ, in the context of a community that demonstrated that love practically. This combination of evangelistic preaching and social concern must characterise the agenda of a growing church today as well. The apostles were not content simply to win individual converts to faith. They insisted that this new caring community should always be the product of true evangelism. Such a community, by its body life, gives indispensable credibility and illustration to the message of the gospel.”*

Apply

1. **When was the last time you did something you would consider generous? What generous thing could you do in our church this week?**

For Discussion.

2. **Is our church a ‘generous’ church? What evidence do you have for your opinion? Where could we improve?**

Each of these studies ends with a similar question to this.

The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means when it is applied to our church.

You will need to decide whether to regard our church as being the overall whole or the congregation you belong to.

I believe it will be worthwhile to discuss these things in relation to both.

I suspect there are arguments, good arguments, both ways.

For consideration - Clements: *“St Ambrose, one of the early church fathers, rebuked the church of his day for the amount of money it spent on beautifying its church buildings, while neglecting the service of the poor. He said, ‘A slave redeemed at the church’s expense is a far better decoration for the Holy Communion table than a golden chalice!’. Some of us may smugly congratulate ourselves that we do not go in for golden chalices, but then we do not go in much for redeeming slaves either.”*

For Next Week: Read Acts 2:37-47.

Study 6: Acts 2:46-47a**A Great Church is a Joyously Worshipping Church****Explore the Basics**

1. **Discuss, in general, what it means for a church to be a ‘joyously worshipping’ church. Now read the verses.**

Each of these studies begins with a similar question to this.

The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means and then to discuss how this applies in a ‘church’ in general.

The discussion as to how it applies to our church is covered in the application questions in each study.

It will be helpful to the studies, I think, if you allow discussion to start before trying to ‘nail’ down a meaning.

We need to consider separately the two term – joyous and worship.

What really is joy.

What really is worship.

2. **What specifically were they doing ‘day by day’?**

Four (five) things:

Meet at the temple

Break bread in their homes

Ate together

Praised God

Enjoy the people’s favour

Longnecker: *“Every day” (kath hemeran) applies to the whole sentence (which NIV breaks into two sentences) as far as the words “all the people” in the middle of v.47 and ties together a number of complementary ideas.”*

Kistemaker: *“Luke emphasises the unity, harmony, joy and sincerity of the believers. The elements are the fruits of the Holy Spirit, who is at work in the hearts and lives of the early Christians. IN Acts, Luke repeatedly stresses joy or gladness, many times in relation to the influence of the Holy Spirit (see, e.g., 8:8, 38; 13:48, 52: 15:3; 16:34).”*

3. **In what ways are all these things worship?**

We need to consider the whole of Christian life as worship. –indeed the whole of life.

Meet at the temple – it appears they were continuing their traditional Jewish organised worship practices.

Break bread in their homes

Ate together – this is showing our worship of God through fellowship with other Christians.

Praised God – Could mean a number of activities from simply conversation, to prayers and singing.

Enjoy the people's favour – brings honour to the Lord God.

4. **What was the reaction of those outside the group of believers?**

Positive.

Kistemaker: *“Their lives are exemplary, so that through their conduct they are able to lead others to Christ.”*

Deeper and Wider

1. **What is worship?**

Really a discussion point.

I have showed my hand above. It involves our whole lives. Giving God his 'worth' in everything we do.

2. **Read Romans 12:1-13? What acts of worship are mentioned here?**

The Heading is – v1 - to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

Specifically - 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, / be transformed by the renewing of your mind. / Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, / have different gifts, according to the grace given us. / prophesying, / serving, / teaching, let him teach / encouraging, / contributing / leadership, / showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. / devoted to one another in brotherly love. / Honor one another above yourselves. / keep your spiritual fervor, / joyful in hope, / patient in affliction, / faithful in prayer / Share with God's people who are in need. / Practice hospitality.

Paul is basically saying that ALL of life is worship. We are 'living' sacrifices. Living, in all we do, acts of worship.

3. **Read Psalm 100:1-5. Read it aloud, with joy, together?**
Just do it.
4. **Read Revelation 5:6-14? What does this worship tell us about our worship?**
It is a reflection of that which takes place in heaven.

Apply

1. **‘Joy is not an emotion, it is a state of mind.’ Discuss.**
For discussion.
The point, I take it, is that even in the difficulties and struggles of life we can be founded on the deep joy of knowing Jesus and of the certain hope we have in Him.
C.S. Lewis: *Every joy is beyond all others. The fruit we are eating is always the best fruit of all.*
(Perelandra)
Fernando: “ *When God’s people come together and enjoy fellowship, “praising God” is the natural result (v. 47a). True fellowship focuses on God and helps people to remember the good things he has done, which, in turn, causes praise. Such fresh and powerful community life would win the admiration of people outside the church.* “
2. **Is our church a ‘joyously worshipping church? What evidence do you have for your opinion? Where could we improve?**
Each of these studies ends with a similar question to this.
The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means when it is applied to our church.
You will need to decide whether to regard our church as being the overall whole or the congregation you belong to.
I believe it will be worthwhile to discuss these things in relation to both.
For discussion.

For Next Week: Read Acts 2:37-47.

Study 7: Acts 2:47b

A Great Church is an Evangelistic Church

Explore the Basics

1. **Discuss, in general, what it means for a church to be an 'evangelistic' church. Now read the verse.**

Each of these studies begins with a similar question to this.

The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means and then to discuss how this applies in a 'church' in general.

The discussion as to how it applies to our church is covered in the application questions in each study.

It will be helpful to the studies, I think, if you allow discussion to start before trying to 'nail' down a meaning.

Probably worth trying to work out not what evangelism looks like but what an evangelistic church (the local church as a whole) would look like.

2. **Reading from 'having favour' in v47, what is the effect this church in Jerusalem is having on its community?**

It is look on favourably – that is the people see them as doing good things / being good.

This results in their numbers growing.

Stott: " the Acts 'is governed by one dominant, overriding and all-controlling motif. This motif is the expansion of the faith through missionary witness in the power of the Spirit... Restlessly the Spirit drives the church to witness, and continually churches rise out of the witness. The church is a missionary church'"

3. **Who is ultimately doing this work?**

Important to note that it is 'the Lord' who ultimately is adding to their numbers.

Not it is people who are 'saved' who are being added to the number of the church.

Stott: " Secondly, what Jesus did was two things together: he added to their number ... those who were being saved (the present participle sōzomenous either being timeless or emphasizing that salvation is a progressive experience culminating in final glorification). He did not add them to the church without saving them (no nominal Christianity at the beginning), nor did he save them without adding them to the church (no solitary Christianity either). Salvation and church membership belonged together; they still do. Thirdly, the Lord added people daily. The verb is an imperfect ('kept adding'), and the adverb ('daily') puts the matter

beyond question. The early church's evangelism was not an occasional or sporadic activity. "

Fernando: *" Ultimately, God is the evangelist.²¹ Paul wrote, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Cor. 3:6–7). God does use our efforts and our techniques, but we must ensure that we are in the place where he can use us and that our techniques are acceptable to him. "*

This however is not a 'cop-out' for us. Sure Jesus is the one who works in the lives of the people he is calling but he does it through his people, you and me.

4. **In what sort of timeframe is this happening?**

It is happening daily – that is regularly – part of the normal course of events for this church.

Deeper and Wider

1. **Look at Acts 2:41; 5:13; 5:14; 11:24; 16:5. What is the repeated message here?**

Acts 2:41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Acts 5:13 No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. 14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

Acts 11:24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

Acts 16:5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

The message is that growth is one of the vital things that a Church is about.

It should be the natural occurrence of events.

2. **Read Acts 1:1-11. How is this being fulfilled here in verse 47b?**

The important verses are v7-8

Here we have seen the beginning of the witness, right there in Jerusalem. The Book of Acts will indeed take the witness to Jesus to Judea, to Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the Earth (in the literal sense to Rome).

But it begins, at 'home', in Jerusalem.

3. **What is God's purpose in the world? Read Isaiah 49:5-7.**

Isaiah 49:5 And now the LORD says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has

been my strength— 6 he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” 7 This is what the LORD says— the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel— to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: “Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.”

This is part of one of the servant songs of Isaiah that point to the coming of Jesus. The significant point here is that the coming one will not only save Israel but all the world.

God’s purpose is always to call people to Himself. In Jesus he has made it possible for people to be in right relationship with Him. The only way to be ‘saved’ is to come into relationship with God through Jesus – the servant of the Isaiah passage.

4. Looking back at all the studies in this series, where do we, living in Kiama in 2011, fit into the outworkings of this Church from nearly 2000 years ago?

I am trying to get us to think about the fact that had this church not been faithful – in human terms – our Church would not exist.

If they had not told others about Jesus and had not sent out Phillip, Peter and others and then as a result Paul and others had not gone to the Gentiles, and if those believers had not told others – we would not have heard. – Mass media in the 21st Century was one person telling another and another and so on. There is an unbroken line from this group of believers down through countless generations to us here in Kiama.

AND this is one ‘chain’ that must not be broken.

Apply

1. Being personally evangelistic is hard. How can we encourage one another in this vital task?

For discussion

2. Is our church a ‘evangelistic’ church? What evidence do you have for your opinion? Where could we improve?

Each of these studies ends with a similar question to this.

The point of the question is to encourage some thought about what the particular characteristic of a church means when it is applied to our church.

You will need to decide whether to regard our church as being the overall whole or the congregation you belong to.

I believe it will be worthwhile to discuss these things in relation to both.

For discussion.

For Next Week: Read Acts chapters 1 and 2 again.

Wright: "Where the church today finds itself stagnant, unattractive, humdrum and shrinking – and, sadly, there are many churches, in the Western world at least, of which that has to be admitted – its time to read Acts 2:42-47 again, get down on our knees and ask what isn't happening that should be happening. The gospel hasn't changed. God's power hasn't diminished. People still need rescuing. What are we doing about it."