

Acts 2: 42

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

This morning I would like us to consider what the real purpose of the church is.

If someone were to ask you, "What is the purpose of Immanuel Bible Church?" what would you tell them?

Conversely, if someone were to ask you, "What isn't part of Immanuel Bible Church's charter?" what would you say?

Listen to the vision statement of Immanuel Bible Church:

Our vision as a church is to grow as an equipping center and be a place where people continue to come for outstanding corporate worship, Bible teaching, and training in ministry. Our desire is to encourage community groups which are connected and accountable. We plan to continue our commitment to a balanced ministry of seeking, serving, and sharing our Lord.

Look in your Bibles at Acts 2: 42.

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

We read last week that there were 3000 new converts following Peter's sermon. These believers formed what we now know was the first Christian church in history. And God gives us in these last few verses of Acts chapter 2 a glimpse of what went on in this first congregation.

Think about what 3000 baby Christians would need from the disciples. Remember, at this time, there was no New Testament, there were no church bylaws, and there was no "rule book". In fact, the Old Testament saints never saw the Church.

But what did they have, that the Old Testament saints didn't have?

They were led by the God the Holy Spirit living within them. Now let me ask you a question. If you were placed in charge of this group of new believers, what would you do to get things organized? What priorities would you focus on first?

Verse 42 says they devoted themselves to 4 things:

1. Teaching
2. Fellowship
3. The Breaking of Bread
4. Prayer

Let's look at each of these for a moment.

First teaching.

What do you suppose they would want to teach these baby believers?

Look at verse 42. Who was doing the teaching?

Why do you suppose only the apostles, the twelve men who had learned directly from Christ himself were doing the teaching?

What we call the great commission is found in Matt 28:19-20 and given by Jesus directly to the apostles. Jesus said,

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

In my opinion, there is no higher calling than to be a teacher. Of all the titles given to Jesus, I think he would have preferred being called "teacher" over any other. When you think back over your lives, many of you could point to a teacher who had a great impact on you.

Keep your finger in Acts but turn over to the book of Ephesians, chapter 4.

In the book of Ephesians, the apostle Paul tells us why teaching is so very important.

Eph 4:11-16

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Verse 12 says the purpose of the teacher in the church is to equip the saints for the work of service.

Let me say that again. Teachers prepare saints to serve outside of the church.

Let me ask you a question, and I know I may touch a nerve here, how do those verses square up with what has become the “Seeker Sensitive Movement” in the church? That is, the teaching is geared not toward equipping the saints for service outside the church but rather, bringing the un-churched inside the church to teach them the basics.

Back to Acts 2.

The second priority of the new church was fellowship.

How would you define fellowship?

There is a reason we call our Ambassador class an Adult Bible Fellowship and not a Sunday School class. What is the reason?

Fellowship means “having a common purpose, sharing, or being a partner.” It involves sharing “something” with someone, or sharing “in” something with someone. Sharing projects, emotions, grief, joy, makes us partners with each other.

It involves giving of our time to one another. It involves encouraging each other and getting involved in each other’s lives.

The result of pure fellowship is that people are involved and participating partners in the lives of those around them. That can’t be done when you just come to the morning service, sit in the pew and leave.

I love this ABF. I am grateful for our table leaders and for the leaders of this class. Those who prepare the room, the refreshments and clean up afterwards. Thank you to each of you for all you do.

Third. The Breaking of Bread.

Now many people teach that this means that they observed communion each day. And although they certainly may have done that, there is no evidence from what is written here that it means anything other than they ate together.

There are other passages in scripture that are much stronger verses regarding the Lord’s supper and if you want to infer that they observed the Lord’s table at each meal, I don’t see any harm. It certainly would have been traditional for Jews to have wine at their evening meals and Jesus did command that we remember Christ’s body and blood until he returned.

What is clear here is that they fellowshiped together and that they ate together. In our busy world in Fairfax county, it hard to make time for people to get together. We have to check calendars and sometimes schedules weeks in advance.

Lastly, they spent time in prayer.

Notice verse 42 says they were continually devoting themselves prayer. For me, prayer is something I do as a last resort. If after trying everything else, I think, “Oh, I can pray.”

Now I know that when I pray, God isn’t sitting up in heaven saying, “I didn’t know that!”

God wants us to come in agreement with Him to acknowledge that it is He who controls our lives.

1 Thes. 5:17 tells us to “Pray without ceasing.” In other words, our lives should always be in constant touch with our Lord. It needs to be as much a part of our lives as breathing.

So the first church had 4 priorities:

1. Teaching
2. Fellowship
3. The Breaking of Bread
4. Prayer

Next Luke gives us a feel for what the atmosphere was like to have been a part of that first church. Look at verse 43.

43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

So we are told 2 things happened. First, everyone kept feeling a sense of awe.

What does awe mean?

Second, many wonders and signs or miracles were taking place. Who were performing these miracles?

Why do you think Luke specifically points out that only the apostles were performing the signs and miracles?

God is a God of order. It would have been chaos if 3000 people were going around performing miracles to authenticate the gospel. Instead of causing confusion, God used the signs and miracles to further the gospel and not divide the kingdom.

These next verses have caused much deep thought. Let's look at them carefully. Verse 44.

44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

When we began this study, I told you there were things that occurred in the early church that were not meant for us today and other things that are meant for us.

Here we come to passage that needs some discussion. It appears from these verses that these believers had such unity and unselfishness that they sold their property and their possessions and they shared them with one another as anyone had need. They became so much a part of each other's lives that they appear to have set up a communal living arrangement for some 3000 people.

Now Immanuel has 3000 plus or minus people attending, so it would be like all of us selling everything we owned and sharing everything with everyone.

What's wrong with that picture?

This was not a form of modern communism because it was totally voluntary and motivated by love.

Should this be the way our church functions today?

Notice that God blesses their ministry. Verse 46.

46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having

favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

It must have been exciting to have been part of that first church. But God wants us excited to be part of our church today. If you really want to excite someone today, I have an idea. Teach someone this week something from God's word, have some Fellowship with believers outside of immediate family, Break Bread with another couple soon, and remember to Pray.