

7. Christ Gave the Church Keys for Development

In our last topic, we saw that Peter and the rest of the disciples explained the message of the death and resurrection of Christ to the people that were gathered in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost. As Peter concluded his message, he called on the people to repent and place their faith in Christ. He promised them that if they repented that they would receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In our topic today, we are going to see how the Lord worked in the lives of the people and the lessons that we can learn to help our physical and spiritual children learn to develop others.

We begin by seeing the response of the people to the message about the death and resurrection of Christ. Acts 2:41 says, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to *them*.” Here, we see that the Lord produced a great response when there was the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We see that the people who responded to the message responded with great joy and gladness. This is a reminder of the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of the Father as He draws people to Christ.

As a result, the Lord added about three thousand new believers to the 120 who had been praying in the upper room. Suddenly, the church was faced with a new challenge. How were they going to help all of these new believers begin to grow in their understanding? Acts 2:42 and 46 tell us about the action that the apostles immediately took. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Acts 2:46 tells us where the people met to learn the apostles' doctrine. That verse says, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” The temple was where the believers went for prayer as we will see in chapter three; but here, we see that the early church was breaking bread from house to house.

First, as the Christians gathered in houses throughout the city of Jerusalem, we see that they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine. In Acts 1:15, we saw that there were 120 disciples. A disciple is defined in Matthew 13:52 where we read, “Then He said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.’” The word translated “instructed” is the word that is translated “make disciples” in Matthew 28:19 and “made many disciples” in Acts 14:21. Here, we see that a disciple is the head of a spiritual household. He or she has a treasure (in this case, the apostles' doctrine since the New Testament had not yet been written.) A disciple is able to bring out of his treasure things that are old (the basics of Christianity) and things that are new (the things that he is continuing to learn). Since there were 120 disciples, each disciple was responsible for about 25 new Christians.

The one hundred and twenty who were already disciples met with small groups in homes to help them to understand the things that Christ had taught the disciples. They followed the example of Christ in Luke 24:44-45, where we read, “Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the

Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” The disciples explained what they understood but the Holy Spirit was the real Teacher. Christ had promised the disciples, in John 14:26, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” As we explain the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is the One who gives spiritual understanding.

Second, the disciples and new Christians spent time in fellowship (sharing their lives with one another) as these discussed the apostles’ doctrine. John was one of the 120. He wrote, in 1 John 1:3-4, “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” In the book of 1 John, he wrote some of the same things that he and the rest of the 120 were helping these new Christians to understand. I recommend to new Christians that they read the entire book of 1 John every day for a month and then we discuss what they are learning when we get together for Bible study.

Third, the disciples and new Christians spent time together breaking bread. This included both eating meals together and also having communion together to remember the death of Christ and the purpose why He died. 1 Corinthians 11:28-29 point out the fact that this is also a time of self-examination for Christians when those verses say, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.” Here, we see that one of the best ways to help new Christians understand the meaning of communion is to have communion in their homes so that they can get their questions about the meaning of communion answered.

Fourth, the disciples and new Christians were spending time together praying. Most were probably praying that the Lord would open the hearts of their relatives, friends, neighbors and co-workers. Acts 16:14 shows why such prayer is powerful. That verse says, “Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.” Here, we see that the Lord is the One who opens the hearts of those who are hearing the Word of God explained.

We also see that God was working mightily in the lives of people. Acts 2:43-45 says, “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.” Here, we see that God was verifying the message of the apostles about the resurrection of Christ with many wonders and signs. Hebrews 2:3-4 says, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” Here, we see that God verified the message of the apostles with signs, wonders, various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Since there were Jews from many parts of the world that had become Christians, many of them

stayed after the Day of Pentecost to learn more about Christ. As a result, the Jews living in Jerusalem began selling their possessions and goods so that they could use the money to provide for the needs of new believers who had not planned to stay in Jerusalem for several extra months. Later, the Gentile churches responded to this sharing by sending gifts to the church in Jerusalem to help them with their own needs since the early believers had sold what they had to help new believers. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 8:13-14, “For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack--that there may be equality.” Here, we see that the love of Christ working in our lives will also cause us to want to share with needy Christians that are lacking as we share of our abundance to help supply their lack.

Acts 2:46-47 go on to say, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” The Jews had gathered for many years in the courtyard of the temple at the time of the morning and evening sacrifices for prayer. The new believers continued to participate in these times of prayer. This gave them the opportunity to share with other Jews that were not yet Christians the message about the death and resurrection of Christ. Activities in the temple were under the supervision of the Sanhedrin and the high priests who had put Christ to death just a few weeks earlier. However, the believers were not afraid to share about their new faith in the very place where those who condemned Christ provided the supervision.

We see that the believers were also breaking bread from house to house. We saw in verse 42 that this was where the new Christians were getting their questions answered as they learned more about Christ and His teachings. This was also where they had their communion services. The word translated “gladness” means *extreme or exceeding joy*. That is the way the word is translated in Jude 24 where we read, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.” When individuals understand that Christ has made us faultless before God, they are able to experience great joy.

The people were filled with praise to God for the way that He was changing and transforming their lives. They were also experiencing the grace of God as He worked in their lives and in the lives of their family and friends. As a result, we see that the Lord was adding people to the church each day. This reminds us of the fact that Christ said in Matthew 16:18 that He would build His church. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that our ministry is to serve one another as Christ is being formed in our lives. This is what makes it possible for the Lord to build His church because those who are not yet Christians see how the Lord changes and transforms the lives of those who are growing in the love of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand how Christ builds His church.