

October 13, 2019
Jesus Christ Builds His Church
Acts 2:42-47

Intro: Anything manmade and done in human strength can come crashing down in an instant.

A few months before our family moved down to SC, I picked up an interesting book for some recreation reading titled *PTL: The Rise and Fall of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's Evangelical Empire*. Before I read it, I really had no clue what Jim Bakker was about. All I knew is that he was a celebrity Christian of the 1980's who was arrested for some scandal. The book went into detail on what Bakker actually did. Essentially, he sold time shares to his Christian retreat center in Fort Mill SC but did it deceptively though "faith giving." He got millions of dollars in over his head and could not pay contractors enough to keep building projects going. The whole time Bakker and his associates were living high on the hog, spending millions in luxury and self-indulgence. Two things were wrong. One, it's illegal according to IRS law. Second, you don't peddle the Word for profit (2 Cor. 2:17).

Eventually Jim Bakker and his empire came crashing down. The retreat center closed in 1989 and sat vacant for years with buildings left half constructed. It's a true story of what greed drives people to do, and sadly dragging the name of Christ down in the eyes of the world.

That was 30 years ago. Even though one man's building project stopped, what has continued locally and globally is that Christ has still been building his church.

That gets to the heart of Acts—God continues to work by his Spirit on his Son's building project. His building project is not built on greed or self-indulgence, but on the gospel and self-sacrifice. That is why it is unshakable.

- The promise of Jesus building his church is drawn from Mt. 16.
- The stress in Mt. 16:18 is what Jesus says he will do in his own word, "I will build my church."

Now the question is how? What "raw material" does Jesus use to build his church?

1. Christ uses human instruments to build his church.

- Mt 16:18 does not support Peter being the first pope or apostolic succession.
- He is simply an ordinary man—called to be an apostle—who preaches the first sermon and does a lot of foundational gospel work in the early church (Acts 1-12).
- Peter is an instrument; so are the apostles - (v43) "through the apostles" —language that reflects instrumentality.
- This view of being instruments is also found in 1 Cor. 3:3-5:

“For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? ⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? *Servants* through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.”

This is the starting point for how we need to view leaders. But it’s not just the leaders who are instruments, and that brings us to our main text (Acts 2:42-47).

2) The raw material is the *ordinary church gathered together* (2:42-47).

- It’s a summary statement of what was going on within the church those early days. Luke scatters them throughout Acts.
- From it we find some of the raw material of *how* Jesus builds his church. It’s through the ordinary church gathering.

*Let me note that these are the ordinary disciples of the church in 42-47. They are also the instruments of Christ to accomplish his mission in the world.

- Everything will flow from the idea of *being devoted*.
- It’s often the word used to describe earnest prayer (1:14, 6:4, Col. 4:2)
- The tense of the word is important; it’s present active, meaning a *continuous ongoing action*.

Illus: For example, some people were really devoted to a sport in high school or college. But it was a thing of the past; they left it behind. I have friends in Pittsburgh who played High School football. That was 20 years ago. They were devoted. But I have another friend who played for my high school team, then got a college scholarship for a D2 school, and currently is on the coaching staff for a team. For him, he has a *continuous devotion* to the sport. That’s how this is described. We don’t leave behind the things we are devoted to.

- This is critical. *For Christ to use us as instruments we need to be devoted...continuously devoted.

There are a few things that destroy a church:

1. False doctrine. There are so many warnings in the NT.
2. Tolerated sins. The NT is filled with instructions for holy and pure living.
3. Lack of devotion (apathy, complacency).

Jesus builds his church by a devotion to 5 things we see in Acts 2:42-47

—These are 5 things for us to constantly be aware of and practicing.

My Reformed leanings make me inclined to use the acronym TULIP.

*Acts reminds me of how I need to think about the church. It's opposite of the way I sometimes hear some Christians talk about the church. Humans, by nature, can be negative and critical. I can drift that way. But Acts puts the church in a positive light—portrays the church as a loving, caring, unified, supportive community. *There is actually nothing negative here. We would do well to have his perspective.*

1. Teaching

- This is nothing new. Teaching is the ancient way God builds his people. The Lord is a speaking and communicating God.
- Jesus is the supreme model. All throughout the Gospel we see Jesus teaching in synagogues, open fields, privately with disciples and in the temple.
- The church follows this pattern.
- The teaching of the apostles was centered on Jesus Christ, not practical tips for living, or life hacks. Jesus was the unifying center of how to live.

Two things we should note—on the teaching side and the listening side

Teachers: God has only called a few in the church to be teachers (Jas. 3:1).

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.”

Life and doctrine must be in good health.

Listening: How should teaching be received?

First, it is always to be applied. Be doers of the Word as James says (Jas. 1:22).

1 Cor. 8:1 gives us insight. Knowledge, even biblical knowledge, can have the tendency to “puff-up”- make us proud. *Without love we are nothing.* The only thing that matters is application of love behind what we do. In other words, if the teaching I'm under does not cause me to love God and others more, there is a problem. Either the teaching is defective, or my heart is.

I had a wise pastor tell me once, “You don't really know anything unless you can apply it through love”.

2. Unity

- The church's unity is found in two areas:
 - 1) Fellowship. Phil. 1:5. The word for fellowship—*koinonia* refers to a close relationship involving mutual interest and sharing. Think of a business partnership. Two people who are passionate about something, pull resources together for a common goal.

That's what fellowship is—pulling our resources together for a common goal—the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Fellowship is more than just sharing meals—it's sharing life

2) Breaking of bread — (communion, 1 Cor. 10:16, plus the original reads *the bread*).

The picture of communion is Christ as the host, who spreads a table and welcomes dinner guests that he calls friends, and God calls his children.

In other words, communion is saying this: the redeeming death of Christ is *what makes me part of this family*. It's what connects me to my brothers and sisters in this church. The church is a family of blood relatives, blood-bought relatives, that is. And so, we strive to be unified.

3. Love

- Believers who share the same Spirit of God will bear the same fruit—and the list begins with love.
- V44-45 - This is not the seeds of communism or socialism. It's merely a picture of a family.
- It's simple obedience to what Jesus says about how Christians should love other Christians (Jas. 2:15-16)
 "15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?"

The point of analogy is that a healthy family takes care of its' own.

4. Intercession

- We've seen this already, but the church needs to be devoted to prayer.

(Is. 56:7) "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples".

*The NT church fulfills the role of the temple (Eph. 2:21)—the building is not the temple, but the believers are.

- V43 "And *awe* came upon every soul".
- This is not merely excitement.
- The word behind awe is the word we could also translate as fear (KJV).

So, this is not like the emotion when looking at fireworks. It's more like the emotion when fireworks accidentally ignite in your direction, and you sense the overwhelming and deadly power. It's an awe mixed with uneasy dread.

This is how we should approach God and think of his church. Church is a happy place, but there is a holy sobriety we all need.

5. Praise

- This is actually a larger theme I was unaware of in Acts until this study. We will revisit it again.
- V47 is a comment on how the early church disciples conducted their lives. Praise was *habit*.

Conclusion:

This brings me to my final point. The main character or actor in Acts, is God. Teaching points first and foremost to God and his Kingdom. Unity is brought by God's peace. Love is modeled after the God who loves. Intercession is done before a God who hears. Praise is to the God who is eternally worthy of it.

Acts is about what God is doing. It's not about any one man, woman, church, ministry. It's about God, growing his kingdom, often slowly, but always sovereignly.