

Acts 2:44-47 Teacher's Lesson Snapshot of a Healthy Church, Part 2: Crazy Giving

Literary Pause: Acts 2:42-47 is like an oasis in the middle of the book of Acts. Luke pulled over to the curb and parked a minute. There are several places in Acts like this where Luke paused and summarized the state of the church (4:32-37, 5:12-16).¹

Review: How did Luke describe what the early church was like (2:42-47)? (*Write on the board some of the words Luke uses to describe what was going on*). There were devoted to a) teaching, b) fellowship, c) breaking of bread, and d) prayer (2:42). They felt awe (2:43). There were wonders and signs (2:43). There was generous giving to those in need (2:44-45). They met daily both in the a) temple and in b) homes (2:46). They ate together and were glad (2:46). There was praise (2:47). They had favor with the populace (2:47). New people were being saved (2:47).

Introduction: Acts 2:42-47 contains key components that help make for a healthy church experience. One of the components is serious, sacrificial giving (2:44-45). As we shall see today being part of a New Testament styled church will necessarily involve your pocket book, either in giving or receiving.

Liberation Theology: You may recall that for years President Obama attended a church led by Jeremiah Wright, a man who was heavily influenced by something called Liberation Theology. Liberation Theology is a false application of Acts 2:44-45. Sin is the economic oppression of the poor. Salvation is the poor rising up against oppression by any means necessary.² It was arguably invented by the KGB in the early 1960s and took root in Latin America Catholic Church.³ It is violent, revolutionary communism with a thin veneer of "Christianity" over it. It is also called Black Liberation Theology. If Acts 2:44-45 does not teach Marxism, what does it teach?

—2:44-45—

******How would you describe giving in the early church (2:44-45)?** There was a super sensitivity to the needs of others and sacrificial giving in response.

ESV **Acts 20:35** . . . remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

ESV **James 2:15-16** If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good¹ is that?

Application: Clearly, giving is good. *If the measure of your spirituality was how much of your time, talent or treasure you give to the Lord, what grade would you get? Would you hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mt 25:21)?*

¹ Marshall, 89.

² "Liberation Theology", Equip.org, accessed June 29, 2017.

³ Ion Mihai Pacepa, "The Secret Roots of Liberation Theology", NationalReview.com, accessed June 29, 2017.

1. What special need might have moved the Jerusalem church to such sacrificial giving

(2:44-45)? See *Matthew 24:1-2, Acts 2:5-11, 41, 6:1ff.* **1)** Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem within their lifetimes. Perhaps they saw no reason to hang onto land and houses since all would soon be destroyed. **2)** Thousands of people traveled to Jerusalem each year for the feast.⁴ Many of these doubtless were converted at Pentecost. The only church in the world at that time was located in Jerusalem. They would have needed to stay longer to learn more about Jesus and His commands. Their funds would eventually run low. Money was needed to support these pilgrims as they tarried on Jerusalem longer than planned. **3)** Also, it appears from Acts 6 that the church was responsible for feeding a large number of widows.

Modern Special Need: Already at least one Christian owned bakery has been forced out of business by the government because they would not cater a homosexual wedding. A farmer who refused to allow a homosexual wedding on this farm was banned from selling his produce in the main town 20 miles away. These brothers are being hurt financially for their faith. In such cases the church should help them financially.

2. How is what they did in 2:44-45 different from modern, progressive socialism? See *Acts 5:4, Romans 13:4.*

a) It was voluntary, rather than due to government coercion. With socialism, giving is compulsory. The government is the only entity that has the authority to hurt someone who has not hurt anyone else. I once got a jury summons that said I was “commanded” to report to the courthouse. If a person does not report for jury duty, or does not pay his taxes, or refuses to respond to military conscription, or refuses to bake a cake for a homosexual wedding, the government can use force against that person to coerce him into compliance. There will be due process, but in the end the government can forcibly seize your property and put you in prison. If you resist, the government will use force against your person, even deadly force if necessary. Thus Paul wrote that the government “does not bear the sword in vain” (**Rom 13:4**).

Example: Suppose you were sick and there was a medical doctor in your neighborhood. You would never dream of calling the police to force that doctor to come spend his day at your house in order to care for you — for free. In socialism, that same doctor is forced to work at the hospital for free a good number of days in the week. Of course he can work at the hospital of his own choosing, but since a large portion of his paycheck is taken away by the government to be redistributed to others, that doctor is effectively being forced to work for free part of the time.

The ownership of private property is not allowed under pure political communism. However, these first-century believers still owned the homes the church met in and were still perfectly free to hold back private property. For example, Ananias and Sapphira sold their land but then lied about what percentage they gave to the church. The problem was not how much they gave, or whether they sold what they had or not, but the fact that they lied. Thus Peter asked the lying Ananias:

ESV **Acts 5:4** While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? . . . You have not lied to men but to God."

⁴ Marshall, 88.

b) All was done between believers and did not involve unbelievers. Government socialism is forced upon all people, regardless of creed. A problem with socialism is that it often removes people's incentive to be productive because the government will take so much away of it from them. Why take an investment risk when the reward will be taken away anyway? And even if you succeed, you will be punished for success as the lion's share of your return will be confiscated by the government. It also removes incentive in that a lazy people will be supported by the state because other people's wealth will be distributed to them. And, as has been wisely said, the problem with socialism is that eventually you run out of other people's money to spend.

Capitalism: If socialism is practiced, it is best practiced among believers on a voluntary basis. However, it has been argued that for fallen man, capitalism is the best economic system. Most people are self centered, have selfish interests, and are driven by ego or a desire for wealth. Capitalism affords natural man the opportunity to get what he wants. However, in capitalism, the more you serve other people, the more you meet other people's needs, the more wealth potentially flows to you. The genius of capitalism is that sinful selfishness is channeled in such a way as to benefit other people. It is a win-win situation.

3. Some Christians, such as the Hutterites, still feel this should be done today. In such communities, typically all personal property is sold and placed into a common fund from which all draw (which is actually not what the Jerusalem church did, either). However, the vast majority of the church throughout history has not followed the example of the Jerusalem church. Why have most churches not done as the Jerusalem church did in 2:44-45? 1 Timothy 6:17-18, 2 Corinthians 9:7. Be careful when deriving application from historical narrative; the rest of the New Testament must be factored in, especially the didactic portions:

a) **No Pattern:** What happened in Jerusalem did not turn out to be a New Testament pattern. There was a unique situation that called for a unique response. There is no record that any other churches in the New Testament did this. This would thus be a freedom issue.

b) **No Requirement:** The church never required people to give up all or even part of their property. Any and all giving was voluntary:

ESV **2 Corinthians 9:7** Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

c) **No Vow of Poverty:** There continued to be people in the church who were considered "rich". This means they did not all take a vow of poverty.

ESV **1 Timothy 6:17-18** As for the rich in this present age, charge them . . . to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share . . .

4. According to 2 Thessalonians 3:10, who does not qualify for charity from the church? Even if the Jerusalem example is followed, Scripture is clear that some believers are not worthy of financial help from the church:

ESV **2 Thessalonians 3:10** If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

5. That which is a New Testament pattern is for needy widows to be the special concern of the church. The church kept a list of widows who were qualified to receive support from the church. Not all qualified. However even then it is to be limited. Which widows should receive help from the church? See 1 Timothy 5:3-16.

ESV **1 Timothy 5:3-10** Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.

However, family members were expected to take care of their own widows so the church was not burdened:

ESV **1 Timothy 5:4** . . . if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family, and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God . . .

ESV **1 Timothy 5:16** If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are really widows.

6. Another group deserving of the church's assistance is orphans.

ESV **James 1:27** Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans . . .

6. Beyond the needy, who else is worthy of church support? See 1 Corinthians 9:1-14, 1 Timothy 5:17-18. The two other groups are missionaries and qualified elders.

Missionaries

ESV **1 Corinthians 9:1-14** Am I not an apostle? . . . Do we not have the right to eat and drink? . . . Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? . . . For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an **ox** when it treads out the grain." Is it for oxen that God is concerned? . . . If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? . . . the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

Truths: Paul stated that missionaries have "right" to support, and the right to refrain from working for a living (i.e. a secular job). He stated a kingdom principle that those who sow spiritual seeds should reap a material harvest. Finally, we learn the Lord Jesus "commanded" that evangelists get their living from the gospel. It is incumbent on the church to pay the tab, to support such people. It violates a direct command of Jesus if we (all together) do not support missionaries.

Principle: Paul took up a offering from Gentile churches throughout the Roman Empire for the poverty stricken Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Listen to his reasoning:

ESV **Romans 15:25-27** . . . I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their [the believing Jews'] spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

Teaching Elders

ESV **1 Timothy 5:17-18** Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

Truth: Using the same arguments he used in 1 Corinthians 9 concerning missionaries, Paul argued for supporting qualified elders. Having qualified elders who are supported by the church is essential for the long term health of the church. If we resist that, we are only cutting off our nose to spite our face. It is only ourselves we are hurting. *How long would you work at your job if you did not get paid for doing it? Or, if you got paid working somewhere else, but for some reason still wanted to do your present job for free, how much of it would you be able to get done on the side after work and after you spend time with family?* There are important jobs that need done in the church. If no one does them because everyone is busy working elsewhere, either these jobs won't get done or will be done poorly, to the detriment of the church.

TANSTAAFL: There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch (somebody paid for it).

Our Local Situation: It would be great if we could meet for church in homes, but that simply is not feasible. Instead, like the Jews had synagogues and the Temple, we have a church building. It is a blessing to have such a great place to meet every week for church! Church members can use it for weddings, funerals, dances, home school events, seminars, Bible studies, prayer meeting, etc. But it costs money for heating, air conditioning, landscaping, painting, insurance, etc. When you give, part of it goes toward use of our ministry center. Also, each month our church helps support indigenous missions teams in India (Stephen David) and Sri Lanka (Muralee), plus an orphanage in Hyderabad (Pradeep). We also give heavily to domestic missions (the Wards) and contribute toward the Tucker crisis pregnancy center. We have a special fund set up for benevolence needs within our own body and have used it repeatedly to help those who need a little extra help. Recently we sent \$1000 extra over to help the victims of flooding in Sri Lanka. We also give a little to the Greater Atlanta Baptist Network, which they use for church planting and a little to the Southern Baptist Convention. There are other worth missions and mercy ministries we could support if we had the funds to do so.

7. What giving principle might we derive from 2:44-45? We should be generous and ready to share.

—2:46-47—

8. Luke tells us the believers attended the temple and broke bread in their homes “day by day” (2:46). How were they able to hold down a day job, spend time with their kids, and go to a church gathering every night? This clearly was a unique situation. Excitement was at a fevered pitch. Any pilgrims needed to learn all they could as fast as they could. Later on it became the norm to meet once a week for church, on the Lord’s Day.

9. If breaking bread (2:46) refers to the Lord’s Supper, how did Luke describe the ordinance? *See Revelation 19:9.* It was associated with food and glad hearts. In the early church, the Lord’s Supper and the Agapé meal were coterminous. Rather than a funeral atmosphere as is so common today, it was a festive atmosphere, as at a wedding banquet. The meal part of the Lord’s Supper looks forward to the marriage banquet of the Lamb.

ESV **Revelation 19:9** Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

10. What last bit of salvation information did Luke give Theophilus in 2:47? In addition the 3,000 who were baptized, the Lord continued to add to their number day by day. Once again we see God’s sovereignty in salvation.

11. What relationship might there be between praising God, favor with the people, and the Lord adding to their number (2:47)? *See 1 Peter 3:15, Philippians 2:15, 3:1, 4:4, Psalm 22:3, Acts 16:22ff.* A lifestyle of praise can be a powerful witness, as suggested in the favor they had with the people and the numbers being added to the church daily.

Though God is sovereign in salvation, He has chosen to use us in the process of bringing the elect to faith. A joyful, praising attitude from us is part of that process.

ESV **Philippians 3:1** . . . rejoice in the Lord.

ESV **Philippians 4:4** Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

ESV **Psalm 22:3** . . . you [God] are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

ESV **Acts 16:22-25** . . . the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God . . .

ESV **Philippians 2:15** [We are] children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

ESV **1 Peter 3:15** always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you;

Application: *Is praising God an integral part of your life? Are you a person of praise?*

Application: As was pointed out in the previous lesson, we do not come to church worship. We are to bring our worship with us!

So What?

12. What truths about giving, fellowship or praise do you need to act on?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
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07/02/2017