

Portrait of the Early Church (2:42-3:26)



A. Early Church's Expansion (2:42-47)

1. **Early Church's Devotion:** '*continued steadfastly*' (2:42), 'continually devoting' themselves' (NAS) to the apostles' teaching and fellowship.

The Apostle's Teaching - The most essential element for all spiritual growth is the Word of God. '*Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*' (Matt 4:4). 'Devotion' means more than 'hearing'. It is attentive 'listening' and 'practicing the teaching.'

The Fellowship (Gk. 'te koinonia') - 'the' fellowship, 'distinctive fellowship.' Not a pizza party, but communal sharing from the same pot. E.g., 'hot pot' but it goes much further than a meal. True Christian fellowship shares the deepest things together.

- i. **Breaking of Bread** – Usually, the meal led to the breaking of bread and sharing of the cup to commemorate the Holy Communion together (c.f. 1 Cor 11:17-34).
 - ii. **Prayer** – Then they devoted themselves to prayer, '(the) prayer(s)' (c.f. 1:14). They had not only individual prayers but also corporate prayer time with all kinds of prayer - 'petition', 'intercession', 'intimacy prayer'. What did they pray for? For the word of God to spread in power and for the church to be strengthened. (4:27-31; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31)
2. **Seven Portraits of the Early Church:** (One of the seven progress reports in Acts: C.f. 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31)
 - i. **Reverent Church (2:43)** – The fear of God was upon them – reverential awe; awareness of the holiness of God (Rev 4:8). This was the first mark of the early church which we need desperately today.
 - ii. **Spirit-led Church (2:43)** – Signs and wonders occurred in the hands of the apostles, and then it spread to the whole church (4:31, 6:8, etc).
 - iii. **Sharing Church (2:44-45)** – (Gk. 'koinonia') They were willing to share all things. No other NT church practiced communal living to the extent that the Jerusalem church did. Believers were willing to sell their property and personal possessions to help other brothers and sisters in need. It was a spontaneous, voluntary decision of the individual believers, and not the mandatory top-down command by the apostles (Acts 4:32, 34-35; 5:4). It was not forced socialism or communism.

NT does not command communal living to the church. What kind of grace does it take for a church to be living at this level of sharing and giving? (i) They were far more at home in heaven than on earth. (ii) They truly understood they were the family of God, and sharing was the expression of the love of God.
 - iv. **United Church (2:46)** – The believers met daily in one accord, enjoying the unity of the Spirit. They congregated in the temple area (3:11; 5:12), and they shared meals together from house to house, and observed the Lord's Supper together, which was the sign of deep friendship.

This is a challenge to the western church.
 - v. **Sincere Church (2:46)** – They ate their food with gladness and simplicity, lit. 'sincerity of heart'. There was no hidden agenda.
 - vi. **Joyful Church (2:47)** – The church overflowed with the testimonies and praises of God, and they ate their food with gladness and enjoyed favour with all people.
 - vii. **Growing Church (2:47)** – '*The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*' If we are a reverent church, a Spirit-led church, a sharing church, a united church, a sincere church, and a joyful church, then we will be a growing church. It was *the Lord who did it*. It is Jesus' church.

Notice the six marks of the church were the qualities of the early church. Then the Lord added numbers to them daily such as those who were being saved. (c.f. Matt 16:18)

B. The Healing of the Lame Man (Acts 3:1-10)

This is the first of the fourteen miracles in Acts. (Peter: 3:1-10; 5:1-11; 5:17-26; 9:32-35, 36-42; An angel: 12:1-19, 20:12; Paul: 13:4-12; 14:8-11; 16:16-19, 20-42; 20:7-12; 28:3-6, 7-8). Acts 3:1-6:7 describes the expansion of the church in Jerusalem. Acts 3-5 emphasises how the Christian witness led to conflict with Jewish leaders.

It was extraordinary how God started His church. Who would have thought of starting with a bunch of uneducated fishermen; by giving the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost; without any mission fund, building, or any natural resources? But then who would have thought God would send His Son to a humble manger in Bethlehem? The apostles had no backing of men, but they had heaven's backing.

1. There are two parts in this chapter: (i) Healing the sick; (ii) Preaching the Saviour. It is interesting to note that Peter and John kept up with the Jewish prayer routine – 9am, 12noon, and 3pm, which is the time of evening sacrifice (C.f. 10:9 – noon; v30 - 3pm; Dan 6:10; 9:21). The lame man was carried to the front of the temple gate every day to beg. He was a man crippled from birth, and begging was the only way to survive since there was no social security in those days. The best spot to beg for a good collection was at the temple entrance. (Gate beautiful was either the Golden Gate outside of the temple or Eastern Gate at the Court of Gentiles.)
2. Seeing Peter and John coming he asked for money, but Peter said, 'Look at us.' (3:4). Peter said, *'Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.'* (3:6) Peter lifted him up by the hand, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength and he leaped, walking and praising God. This man got a whole lot more than what he asked for. This is God's way, *'Pressed down shaken together and running over.'* He could work now and did not have to beg anymore.
3. Thomas Aquinas (c.a. 1100 AD) went to visit Pope Innocent III who was counting money. The Pope said, *'No longer can the church say gold and silver I do not have.'* Thomas said, *'Neither can we say, 'Now rise up and walk.'* So sadly, the more resources we have, to the same degree we tend not to depend on God. The apostles had no human resources to rely on, but they had all the divine resources because they relied on God. This man was so excited he followed Peter and John to Solomon's porch. They were now inside the large opening of the Gentiles Court, where Jesus taught 7 weeks ago (Jn. 10:23). The people were gathering to see the man they knew was crippled from birth, leaping and dancing, and everybody's eyes were fixed on Peter and John.

This launched Peter's second message. On the day of Pentecost, Peter's preached his first message to refute the accusation that the believers were drunk. Now Peter had to refute their misunderstanding that he and John healed this man by their own power or godliness.

C. Peter's Second Sermon (Acts 3:11-26)

Peter opened up, *'It is not our piety nor our power that has done this. We are just ordinary folks. Don't stare at us like that.'* (3:12) *It was not some magical power we have, but a miraculous work of God whom you are worshipping.* God has done this miracle to glorify Jesus with the highest honour. Peter's second message follows a similar pattern as his first message at the Pentecost.

1. The Cross of Christ: The crucifixion of Jesus was the most hideous crime ever committed. Peter charged Jews of four crimes: (i) Delivering Jesus over to be killed; (ii) They robbed the Holy and Just One of justice when Pilate wanted to release Him; (iii) Having denied Him they asked for a murderer to be released instead, Barabbas; (iv) They have executed the 'Prince of Life' (Author/Source – 'archegos'), but God raised Him up from the dead.
2. The Person of Jesus: There are 250 names and titles of Jesus in the Bible. (i) 'God's Servant' (3:13 c.f. Suffering Servant in Isaiah: Is 42:1; 49:6-7; 52:13; 53:11) Jesus was the Suffering Servant who will save God's people from their sins. *'He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquity. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him and by His stripes, we are healed.'* (Is 53:5); (ii) 'Holy and Righteous One' (3:14) - absolutely perfect and holy. This was the title of the Messiah (Ps 16:10; Is 31:1).

'My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities (Is 53:11); (iii) 'Prince of life' (3:14) – meaning 'Trailblazer', 'Pioneer' or 'Author of Life' who will open the way of eternal life (Ps 16). (iv) 'Christ/Messiah' (3:18) – The one whom God anointed as the King. (v) 'Prophet like Moses' (4:22 c.f. Deut 18:15-19) – 'whoever does not listen to this Prophet will be utterly destroyed from among the people.' (vi) 'Seed' (the seed of Abraham) (3:25-26) – The seed of the woman through whom the 'blessing of God's salvation will come to the whole world and He will defeat the devil.

3. The Secret of the Healing (3:16): Faith in the 'Name of Jesus' that this man stands in perfect health – not Peter's godliness. Even the faith itself is the gift that comes through Jesus' (v16) Whose faith? Peter's faith? or the lame man's faith?

Peter charged them with the stark reality of their sin (3:13-15). But now he is tenderly appealing to them: (i) that they have committed this crime in 'ignorance' (3:17); (ii) It was God's plan for Christ to suffer for us so we can receive forgiveness and eternal life in God (3:17). Therefore, the only right response they must give to God was to 'repent' (change of mind) and 'be converted' (turning back – the OT concept of repentance) to receive the forgiveness of sins (3:18).

4. Prophetic Outline of History (3:19-21): 'If Jesus was the Messiah, where is His kingdom? And why did He come?' Jesus will be coming twice. First time to wipe out sins and refresh us before God, and the second time to restore all things and to bring new heaven and new earth: (i) 'Repentance'; (ii) 'Refreshing (times of)'; (iii) 'Restoration of all things'; (iv) 'Return'.
5. Jesus, the Prophet like Moses! (3:22-23 c.f. Deut 18:15-19): Moses has already told you that the Prophet like him will come. When He comes, everyone must listen to Him because whoever does not listen to Him will be utterly destroyed and be cut off from among God's people. The hearers must make a decision. Either they accept Jesus as their Messiah or face destruction!
6. Last Appeal to Repentance (3:24-26): Jesus Christ is the seed of Abraham through whom all the family of the earth is to be blessed. God has indeed sent Jesus, not to condemn you, but to bless you in turning away every one of you from your iniquities and sins!

We must remember that it is the name of Jesus that saves, heals, and delivers from all the power of evil. There is no power in any other name but only in the name of Jesus. Whenever we are tempted to use any other name, we will fail miserably. God is in the business of glorifying Jesus' name because Jesus alone is worthy, and His name alone is powerful, and He is to be exalted.

Let's pray and speak in Jesus' name against death, sickness, and the devil. May the name of Jesus be in continually be our prayers. Amen.