

Believers Praise God

Bible Background • ACTS 2:32-33, 37-47

Printed Text • ACTS 2:32-33, 37-47 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 134

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit in our lives, DISCERN how the Holy Spirit inspires believers to share a life of worship, and PLAN opportunities for people to begin a relationship with Jesus through our ministries.

In Focus

For years, the church had prayed for a new building to house a soup kitchen and beds for the homeless in the community. As head of the homeless ministry, Jessica was devastated by the pastor's decision to divert funds from the new building to missions work in India.

"How could you use the building funds like that? Some of them are not even Christians. Pastor, we need a bigger building. This community deserves our help," Jessica stated. "We are getting a bigger church every time we save a soul or feed a body. It doesn't matter if it's here at home or throughout the world. Come with us next month and see for yourself," said Pastor Whitaker. Jessica agreed.

One month later, Jessica and the members of her church arrived in Mumbai, India. The riverbanks overflowed, and the city was dirty and desperate. Pastor Whitaker shared the Gospel and held prayer meetings. They passed out medication, prepared meals, and sterilized linens and clothing for people left homeless by the monsoons.

When Jessica returned home, the size of the church building was insignificant. She realized that because of the sacrifices she and the rest of the mission team made, God's Church was increased. The community of faith is much larger than the four walls of her local church body. These people needed help, too.

Are you willing to sacrifice and share for the improvement of the entire church body? What are some elements of what makes a great church?

Keep in Mind

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Testify (Acts 2:40) Diamarturomai (Gk.) — To witness or to bear witness earnestly or repeatedly, attesting to the truth of redemption

B. Wonders and signs (v. 43) terata kai semeia (Gk.) — Miracles that point to God's direct activity in the earthly realm

C. Singleness of heart (v. 46) apheloteti kardias (Gk.) — Gladness and sincerity of heart

Say It Correctly

Triune. try-YUNE.

Sporadic. spur-AH-dik.

KJV

Acts 2:32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

NLT

Acts 2:32 "God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this.

33 Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today."

37 Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"

38 Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 This promise is to you, to your children, and to those far away—all who have been called by the Lord our God."

40 Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!"

41 Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders.

44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had.

45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need.

46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—

47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

The People, Places, and Times

Pentecost. The Old Testament Feast of Weeks, which occurred on the fiftieth day (seven weeks) after Passover, is called the Pentecost in Greek (meaning "fifty"). A harvest festival, it marked the beginning of the time when the people brought their offerings of firstfruits. Leviticus 23:15–21 provides the most detailed account of the ritual observed during the feast. The observance is also known as the Feast of Ingathering (Exodus 23:16) and Day of Firstfruits (Numbers 28:26). For the church, Pentecost has become a time to celebrate God's bestowal of the gift of the Spirit. It celebrates the birth of the New Testament church when thousands were filled with God's Spirit, the Gospel was proclaimed to every nation, and the first missionaries were anointed for service.

Background

The events in our lesson today take place after Jesus had appeared to the apostles and specifically instructed to wait for the promised Holy Spirit, which would be given to them so they might have effective witnessing. In obedience to Jesus' command, the apostles went to the upper room in Jerusalem and devoted themselves to prayer and supplication.

At-A-Glance

1. The Call to Community (Acts 2:32–33)
2. The Community Forms (vv. 37–43)
3. The Community Grows (vv. 44–47)

In Depth

1. The Call to Community (Acts 2:32–33)

Peter has been giving his audience the full story of God’s history-spanning plan of salvation. He concludes with the exciting news, only 50 days old: Jesus Christ is risen, and ascended to glory, power, and honor. The Father gave Him the Spirit to pour out on His followers. This is the explanation for the speaking in tongues that had astonished everyone. In this explanation, we see that the very basis of Christianity is grounded in community between the Persons of the Trinity. Each has a role, each affirms the others’ powers. It is a communion of love that naturally calls others to join in its love.

What is your response to hearing the Good News of vv. 32–33?

2. The Community Forms (vv. 37–43)

After listening to Peter’s convicting message, the Scriptures affirm that the people were ready for a change in their lives (v. 37). In essence, they tell Peter, “Whatever that is you have, we want it in our lives today.” The apostle tells the people that all they have to do to receive God’s power is repent of their sins, receive Jesus Christ as their Savior, and they will receive the precious Holy Spirit. Many people believe that Peter’s words were only applicable to the people whom he addressed. But Peter makes it clear that the promise of God’s power is available to all who would believe in Jesus Christ throughout this age (“unto you, and to your children”) and the age to come (“to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call”). The Holy Spirit’s presence and power for the believer did not cease at Pentecost (Acts 8:5; 10:44–46). The Holy Spirit is the birthright of every true born-again believer in Christ (Joel 2:28; Matthew 3:11; Luke 24:49).

Those in the crowd whose hearts had been “pricked” by Peter’s words accepted his call to repentance and were baptized that same day. On the birthday of the New Testament church, 3,000 people were converted to Christ and formed the first Christian community. Once the people had received Peter’s word, they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine. It is evident that the people needed to be taught how to live for God and how to effect change in the lives of their community, and they were willing to sit at the apostles’ feet to feast on the Word of God.

What keeps the modern church from such diligent fellowship and discipleship in Christ?

3. The Community Grows (vv. 44–47)

The 3,000 new converts joined together with the original 120 believers (Acts 1:15) to form a community of believers who “had all things [in] common” (2:44; 4:32). This meant that everyone in the community was ready and willing to sacrifice for the good of the whole. They shared a commonality of participation, prayer, and purpose. They regarded their material blessings as a means of being a blessing to others. All their possessions, talents, and time were dedicated to furthering the mission of the Church and meeting the needs of the brothers and sisters. The group continued to meet daily in the Temple and at various homes after the services to share meals and companionship. The table of fellowship provided members of the early church with an opportunity to gather together in small groups and discuss the day’s teachings. As the church was faithful in its mission, God demonstrated His faithfulness to the church. Not only did God continuously provide for the needs of His people, He “added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). The church did its job, and God did His.

What helped the early church grow so quickly?

Search the Scriptures

1. The church took on the responsibility of meeting the material needs of some of its people. How did they finance this ministry and how did they determine what a person received (Acts 2:45)?
2. What words and/or phrases in Acts 2:47 demonstrate the love and unity among the new Christians?

Discuss the Meaning

1. The church assumed the responsibility of meeting the needs of its less fortunate members. Should our modern-day churches assume this responsibility? If so, how should this ministry be funded? Should this ministry be more than just a “giveaway” program? If so, what programs would you suggest?
2. Lifestyle and active evangelism were key elements of the early church. Do you believe that every Christian is called to active evangelism, or are some people called on just to let the light of their lives shine?

Liberating Lesson

During the reconstruction period and through the period of Jim Crow segregation, the church was the spiritual, social, and political center of the Black community. In modern times, the church has become far less influential. What are some of the social and political factors that may have contributed to this decline? What are some of the implications of the church’s decline in influence? What can the church do to improve its relevance to Black society? To society in general?

Application for Activation

Spend some time this week contemplating the lives of the early Christians. Think about their devotion to learning doctrine, their commitment to the church, and the willing sacrifices they

made for each other. Ask God to point out areas where you and your church may need to improve. Then determine to work on those areas. Be prepared to share your experiences with the class next week.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 2:32-33, 37-47

Acts 2:32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. 33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

Peter's long discourse (vv. 14-33) has all been to explain "this, which ye now see and hear": the miracle of the disciples speaking in tongues at the Temple while celebrating the Pentecost with Jews from around the world. When asked what was happening, the outspoken disciple took the opportunity to explain the entire Gospel message to the crowd, culminating in Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Peter remembers Jesus' promise to send the Spirit on them after His ascension and accurately recognizes this as the fulfillment of that promise.

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

The audience for Peter's sermon is deeply affected by his message. The Bible reports that "they were pricked in their heart." In Greek, the word *katenugesō* (kah-the-noo-GEH-so) translates as "to sting sharply, stun, or smite." The audience was full of remorse at the gravity of the wickedness committed by the crucifixion of the Messiah, and their blindness and inability to recognize Him. The sin of rejecting and crucifying Jesus was great, yet Peter's words held out hope; so the question, "What shall we do?" undoubtedly means, "What shall we do to be saved?" This is the first time that the most important question ever asked was expressed and the first time it was ever answered so clearly.

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Peter explains the appropriate response to the Gospel: they must repent of their sins and turn to God. The verb “repent” (Gk. metanoëo, mehtah-no-EH-oh) means to change one’s mental attitude. The call to repentance, which is Peter’s basic and primary demand, requires a complete change of mind and attitude about Jesus. It is an essential element in the proclamation of the Gospel. People have frequently attempted to add additional conditions and works to God’s requirements. The fact remains that salvation is a total work of the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and there is no additional effort that we can add to re-make God’s plan or provision. Salvation is strictly by grace through faith. The only way to have a personal relationship with God is to accept the provision He offers. There is no “plan B.”

Peter called on them to visibly demonstrate their repentance by receiving baptism, the sign of the New Covenant (cf. 13:24; 18:25; 19:3ff; Mark 1:4). They must be baptized in the name of the very person they had previously rejected. This would be a clear token of their repentance and of their faith in Him. Submitting to baptism was a humbling experience since Jews regarded baptism as necessary for Gentile converts only. Baptism does not add anything to our salvation. It does not wash away sin or help to make us more worthy of the gift God has already given us. Rather, we partake of this ordinance out of love and obedience to Christ. Remember, salvation is a complete and total work of God.

The word “baptize” comes from the Greek word baptizomai (bap-TEED-zo-my), which means “to dip” or “submerge.” When we are baptized, we are indicating to all who witness the event that we identify with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. When we go under the water, it represents a death to our old lifestyle independent of Christ. Being raised out of the water is indicative of rising to a new life of submission to Jesus Christ. We are raised to a new way of thinking and being. Then they would receive two free gifts from God: the remission of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The “gift” of the Holy Spirit must be distinguished from the “gifts” of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the Spirit Himself given by the Father through the Son. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are the spiritual abilities that the Spirit distributes as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11). The Holy Spirit is a gift from God who brings the church to life, furthers its growth, and links its members collectively and individually with Christ and with one another (cf. Acts 2:43–47).

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

God had placed no limitations on His offer. Redemption is for all of humanity not just for the 3,000 who responded. Rather, the promise of the Holy Spirit was for them and their children and for all who were far off (Jews and Gentiles included). The promise was extended to those who were present on the Day of Pentecost, to their contemporaries, and to their descendants as well. It was to both the people of Jerusalem and to those of distant lands (cf. Acts 1:8; Isaiah 57:19; Joel 2:32). Everyone God calls to Himself through Christ receives both gifts. Those who call upon the name of the Lord are those whom He has called to Himself (cf. Joel 2:32). God has made His promises available to their descendants and all future generations.

40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

The phrase “with many other words” indicates that this was not the end of Peter’s sermon. Peter both warned and pleaded with his audience. The essence of his warnings and pleadings was, “Save yourselves from this untoward (Gk. skolios, sko-lee-OCE) generation,” a generation that was perverse, and morally crooked (cf. Luke 9:41; 11:29; Deuteronomy 32:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:10). The audience would have to change from a corrupt generation to a new community. By repenting, they would belong to the remnant of the righteous and save themselves from the perverse generation. Peter’s words reflect the conviction of the disciples that they formed the faithful remnant of Israel. God’s wrath would fall upon the faithless people of Israel (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

Peter exhorts his audience to reject the corruption of those who denied the truth about Jesus. This passage is particularly sobering for our generation, where so many wrong things (abortion, bigotry, homosexuality, pornography, fornication, etc.) are justified as “lifestyle alternatives.” As Christians, our attitudes and actions must be consistent with the principles and commandments of God’s Word: faithfulness, generosity, justice for the downtrodden.

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Large numbers of people gladly received Peter’s message, repented, and were baptized. Three thousand were added to their number that day. The growth of the church is regularly noted throughout Acts. Those who received redemption in Christ were baptized. The converts were instant in their obedience to the command to be baptized. Many were travelers visiting Jerusalem for Pentecost. Some returned to their own countries as baptized Christians, thus furthering the spread of the Gospel.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

The four foundations on which the early church was built included the following:

1. The apostles’ “doctrine” (Gk. didache, dee-dah-KAY), or teaching. The apostles were not inventing their own “doctrines,” per se, but teaching the facts of Jesus’ ministry, His works, and His words as recorded later in the Gospels. They also included constant exposition of Old Testament prophecies as they related to Jesus. The New Testament is the final form of the teaching of the apostles. We must study it and submit to its authority.

2. “Fellowship” (Gk. koinonia, koy-no-NEE-ah) comes from the word koinos (koy-NOCE), which means “common.” It indicates a relation between individuals that involves an active participation in a common interest. It also has the meaning of generous participation or giving of oneself to one another (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13). The early disciples remained constant in fellowship.

When the church underwent systematic persecution, fellowship was also a means of solidarity and survival. Their fellowship was not only a sense of belonging to a new community; it was also the practical expression of the fellowship of the Spirit through the sharing of personal possessions. Their fellowship is expressed in what they shared—their common share in God (2 Corinthians 13:14)—and in what they shared—what they gave as well as what they received (cf. Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37).

3. Their fellowship was expressed not only in caring for one another but in the “breaking of bread.” The breaking of bread here denotes something more than the ordinary partaking of meals together. It is a reference to the regular observance of Jesus’ breaking of bread at His last meal with the disciples (Luke 24:35; 1 Corinthians 11:23ff; Acts 20:7). Jews saw a religious significance in all meals. Jesus often thanked God while breaking bread (Luke 9:16, 22:19, 24:30); this form of fellowship was also, then, a form of worship.

4. “Prayers” (Gk. proseuche, pros-yoo-KHAY) are mentioned on equal grammatical footing as doctrine and the others. Praying is just as important to the Christian life as meeting together and learning the Scriptures. Prayer meetings were in homes as well as public prayer services in the Temple court and synagogues (cf. Acts 2:46; 3:1; 12:5, 12). The new church’s collaboration involves cooperating to accomplish the work of the Gospel, ensuring each other’s success, praying together, sharing meals, and observing the Lord’s Supper. This verse emphasizes the important disciplines of learning, fellowship, prayer, and communion. These disciplines are vital to our spiritual growth and maturity. No Christian should neglect them.

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

The word “fear” (Gk. phobos, FOE-boce) denotes awe, not terror. A reverential fear of God is critical in helping Christians walk according to godly principles. The verb “came” (Gk. ginomai, GEH-no-my) is used here to describe something happening again and again (continuously and habitually). The people were in renewed awe of the visible power of God at work through the disciples. In this situation, the fear was felt by all of Jerusalem, giving the infant Church time to establish a tradition of unity and holiness. Jerusalem was so overwhelmed by the events and acts of the apostles that favor was bestowed, giving the disciples time to multiply and establish themselves before the inevitable tide of opposition from the established Church and Roman Empire. The miracles the apostles performed were done to confirm the Word, and the apostles’ teaching, as Jesus had promised (Mark 16:20).

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

In addition to other expressions of fellowship (v. 42), the disciples were together with a deep sense of their unity in Christ. They gave up their private property and held “all things common.” The word “common” (Gk. koinos, koy-NOCE) denotes sharing their possessions, which was an expression of their fellowship. These verses give a picture of Christian unity. This was not communism, in the contemporary sense. Nor was it communal living. It was simply Christian charity. All of the apostles and their converts realized the importance of developing and

nurturing the faith. Some who were not from Jerusalem ran out of money, so those who were “local” did what they could to make it feasible for these converts to remain nearby. The example and teachings of Jesus made it easy for the believers to share among themselves.

Property was not regarded as private, but as held in trust from God to be donated for the common good. Those with “possessions” (Gk. ktenos, KTAY-noce, meaning “land”) as well as those who had more portable “goods” (Gk. huparxis, HOO-park-sees, literally meaning “wealth” or “movable” possessions) began to sell their belongings and divide the proceeds among the members of the community according to their individual needs. This voluntary sharing of possessions was based on the deep sense of fellowship and unity of the Spirit that was exceptionally active. The attempt to maintain communal life was plagued with serious difficulties as soon as the flame began to burn a little lower (Acts 4:32–5:11).

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

The daily practice of the disciples involved meeting in the Temple for public worship and witness. They also met in each other’s homes for fellowship meals and the breaking of bread in accordance with Jesus’ ordinance. They were doing these practices regularly. The expression “with one accord” (Gk. homothumadon, hoemoe-THOO-mah-DON) means in “unanimity,” with the same desires.

Within the fellowship, there was a spirit of joy and generosity of heart. The believers are described as having “gladness” (Gk. agalliasis, ah-gah-LEE-ah-sees, which means “extreme joy”) and “singleness of heart” (Gk. aphelotes kardia, ah-feh-LOW-tace kar-DEE-ah) literally meaning “in exultation and sincerity of heart” (cf. Galatians 5:22). Their Spirit-filled worship was a joyful celebration of the mighty acts of God through Jesus.

47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The believers enjoyed great popularity and favor with all the people because of the quality of their fellowship, and they ascribed all glory to God. The disciples were not so preoccupied with studying the Word of God and fellowshiping that they forgot about bringing the Gospel to others. The Gospel was spreading through the witness of the disciples by the power of the Holy Spirit. At this juncture, there was no persecution or opposition. Their numbers were constantly increasing as more people were added by the Lord to the new community. The Lord added to the church, no doubt, through the preaching and the impressive life example of the disciples. The verb “add” (Gk. prostithemi, pros-TEE-thay-mee) here means “kept adding.” The increase was not sporadic; it was continuous and daily. Their worship and proclamation were the natural overflow of hearts full of the Holy Spirit.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Priestly Kingdom, a Holy Nation
(Exodus 19:1–8)

TUESDAY

Worship God Alone
(Exodus 20:1–6)

WEDNESDAY

When Kindred Live in Unity
(Psalms 133)

THURSDAY

Praise in the Heavenly Community
(Revelation 4)

FRIDAY

The Day of Pentecost
(Acts 2:1–12)

SATURDAY

Jesus Is Lord and Messiah
(Acts 2:22–36)

SUNDAY

A Community of Praise
(Acts 2:37–47)