

Finding Your Story in HIStory

What Now?

Acts 2:41-47

Dr. Steve Horn

April 15, 2012

Introduction to the Text: This year we have made it our goal to understand something of what God is doing in history. Repeatedly, we have said something like this: God created us for relationship. We have more times than not chosen rebellion against that relationship instead of relationship. But, God has continued in history to pursue passionately that relationship with His most prized creation—humanity. In the last few weeks we have seen that love come to a culmination in the coming of Jesus to earth, the cross of Christ for our sins, and the resurrection as the exclamation point on what God is doing in history. Today, we ask, “What now?” History is not over, you know.

Text: ⁴¹ So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about 3,000 people were added to them. ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers.

⁴³ Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. ⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. ⁴⁶ Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

Introduction: A good story always leaves us asking “What now?” Have you ever come to the end of a book or the end of a movie and said, “I wonder what happened next?” As we begin to wind down this retelling of the history of God, we might want to ask the same question. We are going to attempt to give some answer to that over the course of the next two weeks. Today, we ask, “What now?” So Jesus came in order to redeem us. He died for the forgiveness of our sin. He rose again showing victory over sin, Satan, and the grave. What now? Well, the Book of Acts tells us what happened next. The Book of Acts tells us the story of the beginning of the church. If we are going to find our story in HIStory, we are going to find it, in part, in the context of the local church.

The Requirement for Membership into a New Testament Church

Some churches require different things to be considered a “member” of the church, but basically there are three New Testament requirements to be a part of a church.

- **Belief**—You must be a believer in Christ. You must believe the right things about Christ. In Matthew 16, Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do men say that I am?” Upon hearing a few replies, He asked, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” What Jesus said next is pivotal. He said, “You are Peter and upon this rock, I will build My church.” I believe that Jesus was pointing specifically to the faith (the belief statement) that Peter had just made. Paul, in speaking to his protégée, Timothy, called the church the “pillar and foundation of truth.” (1 Timothy 3:15) So, we must have right beliefs.

- **Baptism**—Baptism is the mark, or the identification, that you maintain and agree with the beliefs.
- **Belonging**—As we read in Act 2, there is such a feeling of wanting to belong. Those early believers could not have thought in terms of just occupying a seat. They wanted to belong to the community of believers. They needed to belong to the community of believers.

Chuck Colson writes in his book, *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe It, and Why it Matters*:

We cannot treat the local church like a restaurant, picking and choosing from the menu, visiting another whenever we feel like it. Church membership involves making a covenant with fellow believers. It takes time to develop unity with others at any depth, and this never takes place, ever—not at any time or anywhere—without conflict.¹

The Commitment of a New Testament Church

Next, we see what the church should do. Here are the priorities of the local church. We are going to be pressed all the time to do so many different things, but here is what we must be committed to doing.

They were continually devoting themselves to...

- **Teaching**—They wanted to learn all they could.
- **Fellowship**—They recognized that authentic fellowship would sustain them, but also be contagious as they shared their message with others.
- **Worship**—We see this in our text by their breaking bread together. In this context, “breaking bread” most likely refers to sharing the LORD’s Supper together as a way of remembering. Worship is remembering what Christ has done for us.
- **Prayer**—They were devoted to prayer because they believed that something unique happened when people prayed. When the early church had a problem, they didn’t panic, picket, or pout. They prayed. Just one or two pages over in Acts 4, we see a remarkable example of this kind of praying.
- **Evangelism**—Not necessarily expressed in Acts 2, but the rest of Acts indicates that the Church was devoted to sharing the message of Jesus with others.

The Excitement of a New Testament Church

¹ Chuck Colson, *The Faith: What Christians Believe, Why They Believe It, and Why it Matters*, Zondervan, 2008, 155.

In our text, verse 43 gives us the indication that fear came upon every soul. A better translation is awe. It was excitement.

Something is happening all weekend that produces great excitement. It's sporting events. People cheered. They were excited. Why? First, people get excited because they believe in their team. Second, people get excited because they are committed to their team. Third, they believe that their team is going to win or hope they can win. If folks can do that about a sports team, should we not be able to do that for our LORD and His church?

Excitement happens when we stand in awe of God. We cannot manufacture excitement. Excitement is contagious. Pray for God to do marvelous works in our midst that we stand in awe.

The Attachment of a New Testament Church

Some might consider this portion (vv. 44-46) of the text difficult to apply in a contemporary setting, but notice the timeless application. At the very least, our fellowship has these obligations:

- Relational
- Financial

In the 1988 Winter Olympics American speed skater Dan Jansen was favored to win a gold medal. The day before his first race, Dan's sister died from leukemia. Bearing the sorrow, Jansen fell in the first turn. Four days later, in the 1,000 meter race, he fell again. Jansen received a lot of mail, but one letter was more than remarkable. The letter came from a 30 year old Special Olympics athlete named Mark from Pennsylvania. Mark wrote:

Dear Dan,
I watched you on TV. I am very sorry you fell two times. I am in the Special Olympics. Seven years ago, right after my Dad died, I won a gold medal in the PA State Special Olympics. Before we start each race, our teachers tell us to say, "Let me win, but if I can't, let be brave in the attempt." I want to share my gold medal with you because I don't like to see you not get one. Try again next time.

Inside the envelope, Dan found the gold medal. That's it. That Attachment! When somebody needs something, we give them, even if it is ours.²

The Assessment of a New Testament Church

How do we know if we are doing any good? The assessment is found in verse 47. There is really no other gauge for a church.

So, Some Conclusions:

1. Every Christian ought to be an active part of a local church.

² From Sermon by David Dykes, January 7, 2001, "Back to the B.A.S.I.C.S."

2. Every church ought to be growing.