

**A 1<sup>st</sup> Century Vision For The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church**  
**Acts 2:14-47**

- I. Exalt The Savior 2:22-36
  - 1) Tell of His accreditation. 2:22
  - 2) Tell of His crucifixion. 2:23
  - 3) Tell of His resurrection. 2:24-32
  - 4) Tell of His exaltation. 2:33-36
  
- II. Exposit The Scriptures 2:17-21; 25-28; 33-36
  - 1) Joel 2:28-32 The Spirit has come from the Son. 2:17-21, 33
  - 2) Psalm 16:8-11 The Son has been raised by the Father. 2:25-28
  - 3) Psalm 110 The Father has exalted the Son 2:33-36
  
- III. Edify The Saints 2:42-47
  - 1) Be a teaching church. 2:42
  - 2) Be a loving church. 2:42
  - 3) Be a praying church. 2:42-43
  - 4) Be a giving church. 2:44-45
  - 5) Be a worshipping church. 2:46-47
  
- IV. Embrace The Spirit 2:14-21, 33, 38
  - 1) Welcome the Spirit as promise. 2:14-21, 33
  - 2) Welcome the Spirit as a gift. 2:38
  
- V. Evangelize Sinners 2:37-41, 47
  - 1) We must speak to sinners about the Savior. 2:37-40
  - 2) We will see sinners come to the Savior. 2:41,47

## A 1<sup>st</sup> Century Vision For The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church

### Acts 2:14-47

#### Introduction

- 1) The 21<sup>st</sup> century church, particularly in America, is suffering an “Identity Crisis.” It is not sure who it is or what it should be doing. It is uncertain how to measure its health and recognize its success. One part of the spectrum says it must be seeker-sensitive and purpose-driven, relevant, positive, and even attractive. Another challenges it to return to the ancients in form and practice. Others call the church to doctrinal purity grounded in Reformational theology. And still others call us to community and authenticity, to experience intimacy and family.
- 2) As I try and take all of this in and carefully, fairly and honestly evaluate and critique what is being said, I confess that I find an element of truth in each perspective. Every one of them is saying something we need to hear, and is challenging us to consider issues we dare not ignore.
- 3) This challenge, as I see it, is two-fold, if we are to emerge (pun intended!) from all of this and find the way forward! The first challenge is balance. How do we keep our equilibrium in the midst of these swirling movements? And second, and even more crucial, what is our source of authority for determining who the church is and what the church does? I believe the answer is the same for both questions. What we need, what we must have is a rigorous and clear 1<sup>st</sup> century vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. We must take off our cultural blinders and rid ourselves of our personal and theological pet peeves, and work our way to the bedrock basics of Scripture. Here we will catch a vision of the Church as God intends it to be.
- 4) I believe an excellent place to begin our search is the day the church was born in Acts 2. Here we find what Alistar Begg calls “a good church,” a church that I would say “pleases and honors God.”

#### Transition:

I discover 5 essential features from this 1<sup>st</sup> century fellowship to guide and direct the 21<sup>st</sup> century fellowships.

- I. Exalt The Savior. 2:22-36
  - The context is the Day of Pentecost and Peter’s great Pentecostal sermon. Jesus has ascended in exaltation and the Holy Spirit has descended as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Joel 2) and the promise of Jesus (John 14-16).
  - The people are confused as the 120 began to speak in tongues, languages they were not trained to speak. Erroneously they conclude the disciples are drunk. However, no decent Jew would drink wine or eat food before that time on a holy day such as Pentecost.
  - Peter starts where they are, with their confusion and their questions, and makes a beeline to Jesus. Verses 22-36 are the heart of his message and he makes 5 foundational observations concerning the person and work of Jesus, observations that are the heart and soul of gospel witness any place and any time. Curtis

Vaughn notes “he begins with the man Jesus (vs. 22) and closes with the ascended Lord (vs. 34).” (p.25).

1. Tell of His accreditation. 2:22
  - ❖ Jesus of Nazareth (historical person), a man attested (“accredited” [NIV] vindicated, approved) by the supernatural which God did in and thru Him and which you know.
  - ❖ This is neither mythology or fable, saga or legend. It is historical reality grounded in public witness and testimony.
  
2. Tell of His crucifixion. 2:23
  - ❖ This great one was nailed to a Roman cross and died a shameful and unjust death, at the request of the Jewish people. Note the balance of blame.
  - ❖ Note: 1) God foreordained and purposed it (Divine sovereignty) 2) You did it by lawless hands (Human responsibility). God planned it and humans are responsible for it. God’s sovereignty and man’s freedom were both involved. Polhill points out “this double dimension of divine purpose and human responsibility runs throughout Luke-Acts” (p.112).
  
3. Tell of His resurrection. 2:24-32
  - ❖ God did it. v. 24
  - ❖ David foresaw it. (Ps. 16:8-11) vs. 25-28
  - ❖ Peter explained it. vs. 29-31
  - ❖ The disciples witnessed it. v. 32
  - ❖ From the very beginning, the death and resurrection constituted the core of the Christian gospel.
  
4. Tell of His exaltation. 2:33-36
  - ❖ Resurrection led to ascension and exaltation.
  - ❖ David saw this too! (A powerful apologetical strategy for witnessing to Jews) Psalm 110:1.
  - ❖ It is a signed, sealed and settled reality, this Jesus that you crucified is Lord and Christ!
    - 1<sup>st</sup> century church was a Christ-centered church, a Jesus church. They loved Him, talked about Him, worshipped Him and shared Him.
    - Adrian Rogers offers us some wonderful counsel when he says, “Do not sing songs a Unitarian can sing and do not preach sermons a socialist can affirm. Preach the gospel! Preach Jesus! Exalt the Savior!”

Transition:

Yes, we must exalt the Savior, the Jesus of Scripture, the Jesus of History.

- II. Exposit the Scriptures. 2:17-21; 25-28, 33-36

The 1<sup>st</sup> century church was a Scripture-saturated church. On the day of Pentecost the Word of God was taught. In the days following Pentecost, the Word of God was taught (2:42). We should note carefully the Trinitarian emphases of these texts taken as a whole.

1. Joel 2:28-32 → The Spirit has come From the Son. 2:17-21, 33

- ❖ Joel prophesied it.
- ❖ Jesus promised Him.

2. Psalm 16:8-11 → The Son has been raised by the Father. 2:25-28

- ❖ No resurrection no Christian Faith.
- ❖ Ill. Mike Bryan and how it all stands or falls with the resurrection.

3. Psalm 110 → The Father has exalted the Son. 2:33-36

- ❖ This man came to life and stayed alive.
- ❖ This man is Lord and Christ, and there is no question about it (v. 36).
  - Doubtless Luke provides us a summary.
  - Clearly Peter explained and expounded these text in an expository and applicational manner.
  - Apart from the exposition of Scripture, the people would have remained confused and unconverted. No word, no conversion.
  - We are not smart enough to teach anything other than the Bible, and we are too smart to teach anything but the Bible.
  - One may build a large crowd without the Bible as foundational, but you will never build a great church without the Bible as foundational!
  - We must teach the Bible comprehensively.
  - We must teach the Bible correctly.
  - We must teach the Bible consistently.
  - We must teach the Bible compellingly.

- It is a sin to make the Bible boring! -

- Luther wrote more than 60,000 pages in his lifetime, and yet at the end of his life he said, “I hope all my books would disappear and the Holy Scriptures alone be read.”

III. Edify the Saints. 2:42-47

Jesus commanded His Church to be a disciple-making church, a church that is creating “little Christs,” persons who by the grace of God are daily being conformed more & more to the image of Jesus. In these verses we are exposed to 5 essential, non-negotiable components of a church that is building up, edifying, and discipling its membership.

1. Be a teaching church. 2:42

The early church was constant and consistent in teaching, the “doctrine” (NKJV) of the apostles. John Stott beautifully summarizes what took place:

❖ One might perhaps say that the Holy Spirit opened a school in Jerusalem that day: its teachers were the apostles whom Jesus had appointed; and there were 3,000 pupils in the kindergarten! We note that those new converts were not enjoying a mystical experience which led them to despise their mind or disdain theology. Anti-intellectualism and the fullness of the Spirit are mutually incompatible, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Nor did those early disciples imagine that, because they had received the Spirit, he was the only teacher they needed and they could dispense with human teachers. On the contrary, they sat at the apostles’ feet, hungry to receive instruction, and they persevered in it.

(Stalt, *Acts*, 82).

❖ George Barna well says, “The church is designed to be a teaching center. [However], Christians don’t act like Christians because they don’t think like Christians. Christians don’t think like Christians because they don’t understand their faith.

(*Barna Report*, Spring 1998).

❖ A great church will be a Bible-teaching church. And John MacArthur notes, “Novelty is not necessary . . . regular, consistent teaching of Biblical truth is what every Christian needs.”

(July 18, 2005 Newsletter).

## 2. Be a loving church. 2:42

We must also build and develop a church devoted to fellowship. Here is the community component of a healthy church. Here is the desire (and God-given longing) for authentic relationships so many seek having been beaten, battered and broken to pieces by the mirage of the modern world that promised so much and delivered so little.

## 3. Be a praying church. 2:42-43

❖ We move forward in the work of God on our knees. It was this way in the past and it will be this way in the future.

❖ A prayerless church will be a powerless church.

## 4. Be a giving church. 2:44-45

Here is a real and genuine community made evident to all, both to the believing fellowship and the skeptical society. Unlike too many local churches whose motto could be “the killing fields”, this church could justly be called “the caring place.”

5. Be a worshipping church. 2:46-47

- ❖ Ulrich Zwingli, “the 3<sup>rd</sup> man of the Reformation” said, “truth wears a happy face.” The 1<sup>st</sup> century church was a happy face church. (Note the inclusion with “daily”)
- Daily with one accord in the temple.
- Daily breaking bread house to house.
- Daily they had “glad and generous hearts” (*RSV*)
- Daily they were praising God.
- Daily they were having favor with saved and lost alike.
- Daily the Lord was adding those who were being saved.
- ❖ Here is formal and informal worship set side by side.
- ❖ Here is structured and spontaneous worship wed as perfect partners.
  
- ❖ Adrian Rogers again puts it just right: “This church was not rusted together by traditionalism, they were not wired together by organization, and they were not frozen together by formalism. They were melted and brought together by prayer, praise and the power of the Holy Spirit of God.”
  
- ❖ Alistar Begg adds, “Although worship services ought to be dignified, it is not right for worship services to be dull. The Lord Jesus was present; there was reverence and rejoicing, formality and informality, structure and absence of structure. Trumpets sounded and cymbals clanged and other instruments joined in this great cacophony of sound and they raised their voices in praise to the Lord . . .

IV. Embrace the Spirit. 2:14-21, 33, 38

The Holy Spirit has rightly been described as the misplaced member of the Trinity. Because of Pentecostal and Charismatic excess, some have overcompensated by negating and neglecting the ministry of the Spirit all together. Extremism in either direction will seriously impair the health and effectiveness of the church. Again Biblical balance is the essential key.

1. Welcome the Spirit as promise. 2:14-21, 33

- ❖ The prophet Joel predicted a great and awesome day that would inaugurate the messianic era and the last days.
- ❖ God would pour out His Spirit on all (v. 17).
- ❖ God would pour out His Spirit in those days (v.18).

2. Welcome the Spirit as a gift. 2:38

- ❖ You receive Him by grace and as a gift, not thru works and as an obligation.
- ❖ You receive Him you do not earn Him. He is now in you as well as with you!

V. Evangelize Sinners. 2:37-41, 47

A Christ-centered church will be a soul-winning church. Interestingly both Emergent-church and extreme – Reformed persons recoil at such talk. My counsel to you: get over it! Ask God to infect you with the gospel-germ and the

disease of evangelism. You will discover this is one disease for which you will not want a cure.

1. We must speak to sinners about the Savior. 2:37-40

Vs. 37 Peter cut them.

Vs. 38 Peter charged them.

He presents them with 4 essential components of the salvation experience taken as a whole: 1) repentance (1<sup>st</sup> words also from John the Baptist and Jesus); 2) baptism in the name of Jesus; 3) forgiveness of sins; and 4) receptive of the Holy Spirit. That baptism is important but not essential to salvation is seen in the fact that numerous persons are converted in Acts before baptism, but no one is converted apart from repentance and faith. Again Polhill is helpful. “the dominant idea of 2:38 ... seems to be repentance, with the other elements following. Repentance leads to baptism, the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Spirit.” (p. 117).

Vs. 39 Peter comforted them.

Vs. 40 Peter challenged them.

2. We will see sinners come to the Savior. 2:41, 47

- ❖ The body of Christ multiplied 26 times in one day at Pentecost from 120 to 3,120, and, it did not stop there.
- ❖ Again, verse 47 is remarkable! Daily! Some are lucky if it is monthly! That is not the New Testament pattern!
- ❖ Thom Rainer in *Breakout Churches* says nearly 50% of all pastors across America did not share their faith one time in the course of 6 months. This is unacceptable.
- ❖ Many may proclaim the gospel better, but no one can proclaim a better gospel. Romans 1:16 says, For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (NKJV)

Conclusion:

John Polhill has well said that these verses “give an ideal portrait of the young Christian community, witnessing the Spirit’s presence in the miracles of the apostles, sharing their possessions with the needy among them, sharing their witness in the temple, sharing themselves in the intimacy of their table fellowship. Their common life was marked by praise of God, joy in the faith, and sincerity of heart. And in it all they experienced the favor of the nonbelievers and continual blessings of God-given growth. It was an ideal, almost blissful time marked by the joy of their life together and the warmth of the Spirit’s presence among them. Luke’s summaries present an ideal for the Christian community which it must always strive for, constantly return to, and discover anew if it is to have that unity of spirit and purpose essential for an effective witness.”

Warren Wiersbe notes, “The Christians you meet in the Book of Acts were not content to meet once a week for “service as usual.” They met daily (2:46), cared daily (6:1), won souls daily (2:47), searched the Scriptures daily (17:11) and increased in numbers daily

(16:5). Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, not a once-a-week routine. Why? Because the risen Christ was a living reality to them, and His resurrection power was at work in their lives through the Spirit.” (p.34).

\*As we move ahead in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have some very important decisions to make. The church is at a crossroads, it faces a moment of decision. What will we do?

Will we focus on society or will we focus on a Savior?

Will we focus on a theological system or will we focus on the truth of Scripture?

Will we focus on social concerns or will we focus on personal conversions?

Will we follow the wisdom of this world or will we focus on the Word of God?

Will we strive to be popular or will we strive to be pure?

Will we choose to be theatrical or will we choose to be biblical?

Will we ignore the topic of sin or will we instruct concerning the truth of sin?

Will we be culture driven or will we be Scripture-driven?

The choices we make have definite consequences. The decisions we make will chart our future. I am convinced more than ever the vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century church is found in the 1<sup>st</sup> century church. If ever there was a time to go back to the future, that time is now.