

## **“The Church Together”**

**Acts 2:42-47**

Dr. Jarrett Stephens | September 5, 2021

**Illus. – Not getting lost** - This week I had to run to the airport and drop off a friend of mine that had been in town for a few days. And I did something on the way back to the church that I’ve got to tell you was both daring and courageous.

After being here for just nine months, I made an attempt to get back here to church...from the airport NOT using any maps or directional helps from my phone. I am happy to report that I made it safe and sound after about, oh, I don’t know an hour of sitting in traffic due to the way that I chose.

Now, that I know I can do it, I will for sure Waze it from now on just so I have the quickest way back...small victories matter these days!

It got me thinking though as I’m learning Houston about things that seem to always be together. Like Houston and traffic – they just go together.

- Peanut butter and Jelly – it just goes together!
- Chips and Salsa – can you even imagine having one without the other?!
- Football and Fall – can I get a witness it’s finally here!

All these things are nearly always together. And in the passage we are looking at today, we’re going to see something else that is always together...and that is the Church.

I’m calling the message today: **The Church Together**

The disciples and followers of Jesus. All those that would trust him in the early days of the church, they always seemed to be together...it’s almost a theme throughout the book of Acts.

**Acts 1:14 – “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”**

**Acts 2:1 – “When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.”**

Our text we are looking at and diving into today – Acts 2:42-47, we see this word together used 2x in these six verses. Let’s look at it TOGETHER.

**Acts 2:42-47 – “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the**

**apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were *together* and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day, attending the temple *together* and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”**

By definition the Church is to be a Church together. The word church comes from the word “ekklesia”. And it refers to a group of people that have been called out to a gathering...or an assembly of some kind – they are together.

“Ekklesia” wasn’t a new idea to the people of the time. There would be an “ekklesia” for citizens to listen and engage in public affairs or to be a part of a political body of some sort or even to gather for religious purposes. It wasn’t an entirely new concept at all.

However, Jesus takes this word and he uses it to describe those gathered...those that are together who trust in him and follow him.

The word is first used by Jesus in **Matt. 16:18b** – “...**I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**”

Last week, we read and studied at Pentecost of the birth of the Church. God baptizes his followers with the Holy Spirit and it’s important to note that the Holy Spirit came as they were gathered together.

Remember, it’s individuals who have been graciously redeemed, saved by the sacrificial atoning death of Jesus on the cross that constitute the Church. One person does not make a church! It’s individuals gathered...individuals together that make the Church.

It can 2-3 individual believers gathered together...  
It can be 2-300 individual believers gathered together...  
It can be 2-3000 individual believers gathered together...

### **Illus. Here’s the church...**

The Church by definition is together. It’s a called out people gathered together and I would add that practices the ordinances, but we’ll get to that later.

The question this text is answering today is what does the Church do or what is it supposed to do **WHEN** it’s together.

Now, it’s **VERY** important to note that the book of Acts is descriptive **NOT** prescriptive. Meaning, what we read in Acts is the history of the early church. Some of what went on **CAN’T** be replicated...and it’s not meant to be!

However, much of what we read can serve as a model to us and we should strive to be as MUCH like what we see in the early church as possible. This text we are looking at today is one of those texts.

The Church Together...let's look at what the Church is together doing. First, the Church is:

## 1. Together in Discipleship

**Acts 2:42** – “**They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching** (or doctrine as some of your Bibles translate it)...”

In the early church there was a premium put on doctrine. When they met together the apostles’ teaching was at the center of all activity when they met. They “devoted” themselves to it the Bible says.

Some translations read they “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine...teaching.”

Now, the early church did not have a bound Bible like we have today, but they would have had a knowledge of what we know as the Old Testament. Just look at Peter’s sermon from the earlier verses in Acts 2. He quotes some of the prophets and Psalms.

These men had grown up going to the local synagogue, making pilgrimages to Jerusalem their entire life. Their religion was deeply interwoven into their lives and the Law, the prophets and psalms was a part of their worship and ritual.

So, certainly their teaching is shaped and drawn from the Old Testament and combined with what they had learned from Jesus in following him for three years. And so now, filled with the Holy Spirit who is enlightening them and guiding them in truth, when they met together they talked doctrine...they taught scripture. They taught Jesus.

It is NOT a stretch to say when we gather together today as the Church – what is it that we should be doing? It’s the same thing the early church was doing. We give ourselves steadfastly to the teaching of God’s Word.

And what a grace it is to have our Bible translated in a language we can read and understand so that we can know exactly what doctrine to give ourselves to...we can know Jesus’s words...we have written down for us the apostles’ teaching. What a grace!

This Bible – teaching it and all that is contained within it is NOT supplemental to what we do, it is CENTER to what we do!

EVERYTHING – our music, our prayers, our programs, our events, our preaching – EVERYTHING should center, funnel and be filtered through the Word of God. We devote ourselves to it!

This is my highest calling as a minister of the gospel. It's the number one job description for pastors in the church. Because it's teaching God's Word that grows faith and paves the way to spiritual maturity.

The books 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are what we call the "pastoral epistles". These are letters written by Paul to Timothy and Titus who were pastors in local churches. And time after time after time, Paul urges these pastors to teach the church and make sure the church is learning and holding to sound doctrine.

**Titus 1:9** (qualification for an elder/pastor in the church) – **"He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."**

**Titus 2:1** - **"But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine."**

**1 Tim. 4:16** – **"Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."**

The early church knew the only way to stay healthy...the only way to stay pure...the only way to stay on mission was to give themselves to God's Word.

And the same rings true for us today. This should serve as a model for us. When we are together. We must be together in discipleship and our primary curriculum is the Word of God. This goes for our Life Groups, Midweek programs, messages from the pulpit. The focus is on God's Word!

I love the fact that our faith does not just include our heart, but it also includes our mind. These apostles weren't basing their faith just off an experience they had with Jesus, they were building their faith by giving their mind to sound doctrine.

Don't ever think you have to check your mind at the door when becoming a Christian. Following Jesus is based on something concrete! THIS is the doctrine we teach and give ourselves to.

The early church was: Together in Discipleship. They learned together and therefore grew together. Secondly, they were:

## **2. Together in Fellowship**

**Acts 2:42** – **"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship..."**

Now, this is a great Bible word and it's critical in the life of a church. It's this idea of walking through life...sharing in life – ready for our word again – TOGETHER.

You've probably heard the word "koinonia" – it's to share in common or to have in common.

If you grew up in church...especially a Baptist church, chances are you had a fellowship hall. It's where the church gathered to share a meal, have a party...it was a place you could be together and develop meaningful relationships.

Fellowship is more though than just hanging out...it's hanging out with a deeper purpose. Fellowship brings with it a sense of belonging and family.

This is where we really get to know one another. It's where we can get involved in each other's life and celebrate life's victories and go through life's defeats TOGETHER. It's where people have the opportunity to speak truth in love to us and to pray over us and be in our corner!

Listen, if you are not experiencing true fellowship, you are missing out! Biblical fellowship is more than tailgating with your college buds...its more than eating wings with a groups of guys...it's more than playing bunko or being in a reading club!

As **Rick Warren** writes in *The Purpose Driven Life* – **“Fellowship is experiencing life together. It includes unselfish loving, honest sharing, practical serving, sacrificial giving, sympathetic comforting and all the other “one another” commands found in the New Testament.”**

LOVE this...LIFE TOGETHER! We call our small groups around here: “Life Groups”. And one of the main purposes of Life Groups is so that we can experience “fellowship” with one another.

NOT one time here in v. 42-47 do you see the focus on a singular person, but instead it's all about “they” “themselves” “together”.

**Millard Erickson** in his work *Systematic Theology* writes, **“Christianity is a corporate matter, and the Christian life can be fully realized only in relationship to others.”**

This is where fellowship comes in and why it is so important. No more lone-ranger Christianity! No more life being about me, myself and I. When we are called to Christ, we are called to community...to fellowship!

The Church is together in discipleship. The Church is together in fellowship. Third, the church is:

### **3. Together in Worship.**

**Acts 2:42, 46-47** – **“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers...and day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God.”**

We see a group of people here who are committed to worshipping God...and worshipping him together! They go to the temple and worship him together there. They worship in their homes together there.

The idea of breaking bread is two-fold here. First, is they would take the Lord's Supper as Jesus told them to do and remember and reflect on how he died for them and his promise to return to them.

Then, they would share other meals together, showing hospitality to one another – as we read here there was such a sense of generosity and joy that surrounded them.

Speaking of a church that I want to be a part of...may this be said of us, Champion Forest. May we be a people that when we gather there is a sense of joy – joy in Christ and joy that we are together.

Truly, I pray that during the middle of your week, you can't wait to get here! I pray that when people come on our campus they sense something different than they get when they go to a Stros game or a restaurant they enjoy. I pray that joy is the word people will use to describe us!

This should be the atmosphere of our worship and being together. Are you kidding me?! We've been forgiven and saved. We have the privilege to know and worship the God who created the heavens and the earth – we should be the most joyful people on planet earth!

They broke bread...they prayed together the Bible says. Prayer! It's the lifeblood of a church. We should not refer to ourselves as a church, if we are not continually calling on God in prayer.

- We call on him in prayer corporately...
- The songs we sing to him, we make our prayer...
- I hope you pray personally as the message is being preached for me, for you, for others...
- Pray during the invitation that people would respond...

I want to be a part of a church where everything we do is saturated in...bathed in prayer. It's a directional conviction that we have as a staff. We talk about it often in our staff meetings and try to model it before you.

**“We commit to an aggressive pursuit of God through prayer for Spiritual Awakening in our church, community, country and world.”**

I believe you can judge the health of the church based on the quality of its prayer life. It's why we are calling the church to corporate prayer this Fall.

**Illus. Wed. Sept. 15 Night of Prayer** (again the first Wednesday evenings in October and November.

You heard me mention it last week, and I'll go ahead and mention it again here, I want to get our prayer room that has 24-hr access fixed up and relaunch our church-wide prayer ministry.

The words of Jesus from Matt. 21 had to ring in the ears of those early followers of Jesus as they attended the temple together. It was the temple where Jesus drove out the money-changers – guaranteed you that got their attention and he said:

**Matt. 21:13a – “He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer...”**

That was a scene that had to have been seared into their conscience and burned into their hearts! They NEVER forgot that vivid lesson on prayer and so we see prayer becoming a way of life to the early church.

They had watched Jesus pray...they had seen him break away at times for isolated prayer with his Father.

They knew what we often forget...and that is if Jesus needed prayer, how much more does his Church! Look at the priorities of the Church and prayer is at the very top!

The Bible says (v. 47) they were “praising God” – and again, notice it, it's all in the context of doing these things together.

The early church was:

- Together in Discipleship
- Together in Fellowship
- Together in Worship

#### **4. Together on Mission**

**Acts 2:45 – “And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”**

Meeting needs is the natural by-product of a heart that has been changed by the love and grace of God. You look at the life of Jesus and his ministry was preaching the gospel on one hand and meeting the needs of people on the other.

Look, who do you think it was that was taking care of the orphans and widows in their time of need? Who was it taking in the homeless and clothing the naked? Who was it opening up their homes and feeding the hungry? Caring for the outcast...the broken...the needy?

It wasn't the powers of Rome! Weakness was not in their vocabulary! It wasn't the chief priests and elders! They were more concerned with their position and how people viewed them!

It was the Church! It was the early Christians who took up the cause of the least...the lonely...the outcast and the broken.

**Rodney Stark (The Rise of Christianity) – “Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with many urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services...No wonder the early Christian missionaries were so warmly received in Antioch. For what they brought was not simply an urban movement, but a new culture capable of making life in Greco-Roman cities more tolerable.”**

So much more we could say about this, but the bottom line is, this Church was loving and put their love into action and it's no wonder then that according to (v. 47) they had such great “favor with all the people” and that the Lord was “adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Listen: Count me in on wanting to be a part of a church that is together in discipleship...together in fellowship...together in worship...and together on mission.

TOGETHER! It sounds simplistic – that a church is together, but I want to close the message today with less of an application and more of a warning.

Don't get me wrong, I hope that you will take some of these things we talked about today and apply them to your life. A good question of application might be to ask yourself are you balanced?

**Illus. Balance** – “blessed are the balanced” – athletic position – balance – are you out of balance in any of these areas. Where do you need to grow: discipleship, fellowship, worship, mission. Ask yourself and seek to put yourself in position where you can become more balanced. I think we provide a number of outlets where this can happen at church.

I want to close with a warning. The Enemy will do anything he can to keep us from gathering together – because he knows the great power in it and that flows from it!

Jesus said in **Matthew 18:20** – “**For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.**”

Peter called the church in **1 Tim. 3:15b** - **“...the pillar and buttress of truth.”**

It's the church that I believe is where we according to Hebrews 6 “we taste the heavenly gift, share in the Holy Spirit, taste the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come”.

It's no accident that the Enemy wants to distract and discourage us from meeting together. Are you kidding me? He KNOWS the power of what this is!

- That when we join together in discipleship our faith is strengthened and solidified...
- That when we join together in fellowship, we learn that we are not alone and have people in our corner loving us and pushing us to be more like Jesus.
- That when we join together in worship, strongholds are broken...
- That when we join together on mission, truly nothing can stop the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ...not even the gates of hell!

Satan KNOWS that lives are changed and eternities of people are altered because the church is meeting together and so he'll use...he'll throw any excuse he can at us to keep us from gathering!

And I want God's voice to come through mine today and just want to say to us all, “Beware of rationalization!”

- Rationalization says, “I can skip out on church this week, they won't even know I'm not there...”
- Rationalization says, “What's a few Sundays at the ballfield instead of church matter...”
- Rationalization says, “It's rainy outside so I think I'll just stay in and watch it on the internet...”
- Rationalization says, “I don't need my life group...that men's bible study or that women's bible study...I'm doing just fine here on my own...”
- Rationalization says, “I don't need to give...I'm not in a position to right now...or someone else will handle that...they don't need me...”
- Rationalization says, “I'm sure so many people have signed up for that ministry or to be a part of that mission, I'll just look out for the next opportunity...”

Listen to me: Rationalization is like a slow suicide to your soul. I can promise you at the root of your rationalizations is the voice of our Adversary who longs to steal, kill and destroy our lives.

There is a reason the writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 10:24-25** – “**And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**”

The Church Together. When we are Together. Together:

- In discipleship.
- In fellowship.
- In worship.
- On mission.

We can't be stopped. Will you pray with me?

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*Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.*