

Sunday, October 16, 2022

Devoted Discipleship

As you are well aware by now our year-long theme is Love: The Mark of a True Disciple. Today we focus our attention on one of the earliest accounts and insights on the activity and characteristics of Disciples after Jesus death and resurrection. Obviously, we have early accounts of Jesus' 'Disciples' that followed Him during His earthly ministry. But today, we pick up exactly 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, on the day we know as Pentecost Sunday. (By the way 10 days after Jesus' Ascension). So this account describes what some Bible scholars and theologians call the 'Birth of the Church'. The Disciples and followers of Jesus were in the Upper Room waiting and praying when the Holy Spirit came upon them. This power from God is what initiates and propels this small band of followers into what we know of as the Church. On this day, Peter went forth under this newly infused Holy Spirit power and preached to a large diverse crowd from many areas, and about 3000 people came together for the first time as the Official People of God in Christ, aka, THE CHURCH. This body of people... sought repentance, confessed their faith in Christ, were filled with the Holy Spirit, were baptized, and immediately they Devoted themselves to being faithful disciples of Christ.

Let's read a portion of this passage from Acts 2:38-47, to show you the Biblical context and the connection, from the beginning between The Church and Being a Disciple.

Acts 2: 38-47...³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day....⁴² They DEVOTED themselves to the apostles' TEACHING and to FELLOWSHIP, to the BREAKING OF BREAD (COMMUNION) and to PRAYER.⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common.⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Our key word today is DEVOTED. In verse 42 the Greek word is

4342 προσκαρτέρω proskartereo {pros-kar-ter-EH'-o}

Meaning: to be devoted or constant to one; to be steadfastly attentive unto, to give unremitting care to a thing; to continue all the time in a place; to persevere and not to faint; to be in constant readiness for one, wait on constantly, steadfast, loyal, persistent.

I propose that Devotion and Disciple go hand in hand.

The early church was unwaveringly **DEVOTED** as Disciples of Christ.

ACTS 2:42 HIGHLIGHTS 4 SPECIFIC THINGS THAT ARE CHARACTERISTIC OF DEVOTED DISCIPLESHIP

⁴² *They DEVOTED themselves to the apostles' TEACHING and to FELLOWSHIP, to the BREAKING OF BREAD (COMMUNION) and to PRAYER.*

In this passage we learn how the earliest church was **DEVOTED** to

1. **TEACHING,**
2. **FELLOWSHIP,**
3. **BREAKING OF BREAD(COMMUNION), &**
4. **PRAYER.**

(Adapted from “Devoted” SermonCentral.com Series)

➤ **The First Devoted Discipleship Characteristic:**

TEACHING

The specific gift of teaching is found throughout the New Testament. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry we learn from the gospel of Matthew 4:23 Jesus “*went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.*” Teaching was a key component of Jesus’ ministry. In the book of Ephesians, Paul includes *teachers* as gifts given by God for the equipping of the church.

Ephesians 4:11-13...¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Teachers help lead us to unity, maturity, and fullness of faith. Our goal, through teaching and training, is nothing short of the fullness of Christ. We should cultivate a desire and a willingness to learn from godly, prepared teachers. We must be clear, the while teachers are vital and to be respected, the real issue is the **CONTENT**, not the **CONDUIT**. The early Apostles and Disciples were teaching **JESUS & THE SCRIPTURES**. The **CONDUIT** -Teachers teach the **CONTENT** – Scripture.

2. - Devoted to Fellowship

Pastor and author Dietrich Boenhoffer said, “*The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.*”

Charles Spurgeon said, “*Satan always hates Christian fellowship; it is his policy to keep Christians apart. Anything which can divide saints from one another he delights in. He attaches far more importance to godly intercourse than we do. Since union is strength, he does his best to promote separation.*”

Psalm 133:1-2 says, “*How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity. It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, down upon the collar of his robes.*”

These are just a few examples of how valuable we know fellowship to be in our lives. There is great power in gathering together in worship, prayer, and communion. The earliest church communities were absolutely devoted to being together. Whether it was homes, synagogues, or marketplaces it would seem that nothing would stop them from being together and there is so much we can learn from their example in this area.

“The word fellowship is derived from the Greek word **koinonia**. Koinonia can be defined as “*holding something in common*” and is specifically used 20 times in the New Testament (e.g. Phil. 2:1-2, Acts 2:42, 1 John 1:6-7)¹” What is it exactly that we hold in common as a Christian fellowship? If you guessed Jesus, you’re correct. And amazingly, despite all our differences, when we hold Jesus in common with others we experience this deep abiding community that wouldn’t be accomplished otherwise.

We are one body in Christ. We have a common focus and a common goal, and believe me when I say that it takes every single one of us to accomplish anything here.

3. Devoted to Breaking of Bread/Communion

Communion is a time we take as believers to remember Jesus. It stands to reason that when we gather together we would also take communion together and keep ourselves focused on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Breaking bread with other believers isn’t simply about passing the mashed potatoes around a dinner table.

It's a time of remembrance, praise, and community... made possible by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

N.T. Wright says this about it all: *"When Jesus wanted to explain to His disciples what His death was all about, He didn't give them a theory, He gave them a meal."*

So today, as we look at the practice of breaking bread, (Communion, Lord's Supper) we also remember it is only possible, through Christ, that we are here today. He built the trail so we could walk the path. And thankfully, he included food as an integral part of the journey.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26...²³ *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,*²⁴ *and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."*²⁵ *In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."*²⁶ *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

Communion is about remembering Jesus.

- His life.
- His sacrifice on the cross.
- His body, broken for you and me.
- His blood, the marker of a new and final covenant between God and man.
- His death.
- His resurrection.
- His promise to return again for His church.

These are realities for the believer that we simply cannot forget. And because communion is implicitly done *with* others, it follows that we celebrate and remember Jesus *together*.

Think about it like this: Our common union, the thing that brings believers together all around the world through the millennia, is Jesus Christ. This **Act of Remembrance** is connected to, and a part of the previous point **fellowship, or koinonia**. Our common bond is Jesus. Communion is our divine opportunity to remember Him every time we get together in fellowship.

4. Devoted to Prayer

“One of the greatest and best gifts that God gives to any man or woman in the world is the gift of prayer.”

Simply put, prayer is an exchange where we make our requests known and God receives them. We could do an entire series on prayer alone, so today I’m going to be focused on three examples of prayer we see in the life of Jesus: *Individual Prayer*, *Communal Prayer*, and *Powerful Prayer*.

➤ Individual Prayer

For many of us, this will be the type of prayer we also practice the most. And the good news is, Jesus was absolutely committed to His prayer time as well.

Mark 1:35... *Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and slipped out to a solitary place to pray.* (Berean Standard Bible)

Let me ask you, how often (or do you?) slip away and have a personal, intentional prayer conversation with God?

➤ Communal Prayer

A 2nd type of prayer is communal or corporate prayer. It’s a gift to pray with others in a community.

There is power when we pray together--when we make our requests known together. When we gather together in unity and pray, He hears, and He responds.

In fact, when asked for advice on prayer, listen to what Jesus says:

“This, then, is how you should pray;

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

-Matthew 6:9-13

Communal prayer is an opportunity to take our eyes off ourselves and listen to the requests of others. It’s a time we get to share in the suffering and the joy of our church community. Whether it be in small groups, in coffee shops, on street corners, or gathered together on Sunday...there is power when we pray with one another.

It’s well known that the early church, the one we read about in Acts, experienced unprecedented growth, success, and transformation as a result of their **DEVOTION** to the Christ and thru the power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer was a huge part of all that was accomplished. And I believe prayer is as imperative today as it was then. Do you agree?

Many of us are devoted to all kinds of things that don't really matter in the end. Our social media accounts, our favorite shows, hobbies, etc... And these things aren't all bad, but it is a problem when we trade these things for times of individual, communal, and powerful prayer.

What if you simply exchanged 10-15 mins a day this coming week for prayer. What if you connected with some others who wanted to pray, together, once a month or once a week?

Devoted Discipleship

Teaching,

Fellowship,

Breaking Of Bread(Communion), &

Prayer.

I invite you to commit and/or reaffirm your DEVOTED practice of these 4 practices. It will certainly make a big difference in your DiscipleWalk.