**Simple Church**

**Acts 2:37-47**

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Dr. Ritch Boerckel

Welcome once again, church, as we gather together online to worship God and praise Him. Today we’re going to think about what the church is, what we’re to be about. What is our purpose? What is our beginning? What is our end? What does God have for us? It’s going to be a sweet time as we worship the Lord together around prayer, around the Word. And again, just as we’ve sung, oh, we need Him, don’t we? We need Jesus. We need Him as our Savior. We’re desperate without Him. Without Jesus’ work for us, we wouldn’t be able to connect with God in a real way. We wouldn’t have this great assembly, this family that God made us a part of and to share together. We’re so thankful for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We’re also thankful for the Holy Spirit and His work in us, the dynamic power that God provides for us through Him, so that we could have a changed life, we could become more like Jesus.

Today we’re going to open up our Bibles together to Acts 2:37-47. It’s the story of the beginning of the church. And if you’re like me, through this pandemic you’ve missed gathering together as a church. Now this Sunday we are having this sweet time to gather together outside at Drive-In church, outdoor church. I know if you’re listening to this you may not have been a part of that. But as we begin to reopen, let’s continue to open up our hearts to God. Let’s open up our hearts to one another. Let’s find ways to still express this beautiful, beautiful body, the church of Jesus together. So Acts 2:37-47.

This comes on the heels of the Holy Spirit coming, baptizing those who were in Jerusalem, the 120 disciples, and then Peter preaching this amazing gospel sermon. So we pick up that story in verse 37. It’s speaking about Peter’s sermon.

***37*** *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”* ***38*** *And Peter said to them, “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*** *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”* ***40*** *And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.”* ***41*** *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

***42*** *And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* ***43*** *And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.* ***44*** *And all who believed were together and had all things in common.* ***45*** *And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.* ***46*** *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,* ***47*** *praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

How sweet it is to read about the beginning of the church and to consider what God has done for the past 2,000 years, and we get to be a part of it! How sweet! Let’s pray and ask God to direct us as we think about what the church is and what the purpose of the church is together.

The first ten Sundays of 2020 appeared rather normal. Then on March 15, everything changed. It was the first Sunday we were not able to gather together. It’s been eleven Sundays! Think of that. In 2020, we’ve had to miss more Sundays than we’ve been able to gather. We’re right to recognize God’s good purposes in every trial. God intends to use trials to conform us into the likeness of Jesus. This is His sovereign purpose. That’s true for us as individuals. I pray that this has been a season of spiritual renewal for you personally, for you to deepen that walk that you have with God, to seek Him with your whole heart. And it’s also true for us corporately as a family, as we seek the Lord together. We long to be more like Jesus individually, but also for our church family to represent Jesus; more of His love, more of His obedience to the Father, more of His zeal to glorify the Father. God is giving us a very unique season to pause with a lot of our sort of normal activities and patterns and to get back to the foundation of our individual life and the foundation of our church. James says it best when he says

**James 1:2** Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

I know it’s easy to have a spirit of grumbling and complaining. There is a lot that is not the way it’s supposed to be in this season. But I trust above and beyond all of that, we’re listening to God’s Word.

**James 1:2** Count it all joy, my brothers,

God is doing something special. He is offering us a very unique gift. This season away from corporate gathering has caused me to ask some fundamental questions all over again. I’ve been asking questions like: what is the church? What are we here for? Why is she so important? What are we about? What is the source of our power, the source of our life, the source of our influence? And I’m praying that our time in Acts 2 this day will help us to answer some of these really important questions.

Many modern churches have become very complex in their communications, in our organization, in the many ministries that we have, in our equipping, in our decision-making process. There are just a lot of complexities to so many modern churches. I know that’s true for us at Bethany. And there is a need for some complexity if we’re to be sensitive and relevant and loving to all in our community, to everyone in our church family. But at the same time, it’s right for us to recognize there is a danger to this complexity. The danger would be that in chasing so hard after complex aspects of church life, we remove our focus from the simple.

Church in its essence really is simple. Church is simple in its beginning, its founding. Church is simple in her commitments that God would have us to make to Him and to one another. And church is very simple in her purpose. When we become involved so deeply in the complexities of church life that we lose this simplicity, we really are losing the church. That’s why it’s such an important danger to watch out for. My task today is to remind us that Jesus’ church is simple.

This week, I was reflecting with my brother Scott, who is also a pastor, that this season asks a church leader to focus on so many things. A church leader is asked to be an expert in governmental policies. A church leader is asked to be skilled in organizational flexibility. A church leader is asked to be schooled in applications of the US Constitution. A church leader is asked to be proficient in multimedia communications. A church leader is asked to be accomplished in technology. A church leader is asked to lead numerous teams in a harmonious manner, equipping and yet keeping everything sort of in line. As I reflected on these tasks, I wondered, “Did these elders in this first church, the church in Jerusalem, concern themselves with all these things?”

Now it does seem from Acts chapter 7 that these leaders too, were tempted to lose the simple in the midst of some growing complexities of church life. But the truth here that we want to always return to is that first and foremost, a church leader is one who simply spiritually shepherds God’s people by teaching the Word, by praying with and for them, by encouraging them toward repentance and faith in Jesus, and by equipping them to fulfill Jesus’ ministry in this world. That simple task must not get lost on the church leader or the church will begin to spiritually die.

Now the temptation for church leaders is to have complexities crowd out the simple. The temptation also though for church members is to encourage complexities to crowd out the simple for church leaders. How so? Well, for church leaders, the temptation is to, for instance, meet for several hours with other leaders and to have a vast amount of that time devoted to discussing all these complexities with very little time for the simple, the main things. And this temptation is to be so concerned and focused on these complexities that we fail in those simple tasks, these simple responsibilities that God gives us. For church members, the temptation is to ask church leaders to lead so well in the complexities and not ask them to lead well in that which is simple. The temptation is to be disappointed when leaders fail to do well with the complexities, and really then to be not so concerned when leaders fail in the simple. So, for all of us, leaders and members alike, it’s this focus. What simply does God have us to be as a church? What does He have us to be about? Let’s pray that the simple would rule our hearts as leaders and the simple would be the driving passion of the members because it’s the simple that provides life and joy. It’s the simple that provides influence in this dark world. It’s the simple that brings glory to God.

So today we begin this quest for these simple main responsibilities, main purposes of the church. We do that by opening up our Bibles and looking at Acts 2:37-47. The main idea here is that Jesus’ church simply loves what Jesus loves. And Jesus becomes our North Star. We never take our eyes off of Him. In the midst of all the other challenges and obstacles and changes, Jesus becomes our North Star. We fix our eyes on Him and we know that if we lose sight of Him, we will stray way off course. So as we look at Acts 2, what we find is a very simple church. We’re going to consider three parts of this simplicity. First, this church is simple in her beginning. Second, this church is simple in her commitments. And finally, this church is very simple in her purpose. So let’s look at the

**Simple Beginning: The Holy Spirit works a miracle through the Gospel of Jesus.**

This church begins when simply the Holy Spirit descends from heaven and works a miracle through the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus. That’s how this church begins and that’s really how every church begins. So the Holy Spirit descends upon 120 disciples of Jesus at Pentecost in Jerusalem. And right after that, Peter, the Apostle Peter, preaches this sermon. It’s his first Gospel sermon. And at the end of this sermon, God will bring 3,000 people into the church. All of this is recorded in Acts chapter 2. Peter begins this sermon in verse 14.

**Acts 2:14** But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.

And with that, Peter begins to speak to these folks who had been spiritually hardened. They were a skeptical group. Remember, just 50 days earlier, many of these were part of the group that were shouting, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” when Pilate asked them what they wanted him to do with Jesus. Peter’s message here, as you would read Acts 2, is very simple. It’s very straightforward. His message is that Jesus died as part of God’s preordained plan to redeem mankind from sin and that then God raised Him up from the dead. And he references David in the Old Testament, the greatest king of Israel. He references that David spoke of Jesus’ death. He prophesied of it. David prophesied of Jesus’ resurrection. And David prophesied that there would be one who would come, the Messiah, who would rule and reign as the rightful King over Israel. This King David called Jesus, Lord just about 1,000 years prior to Jesus’ arrival on the earth. So this sermon that Peter preached was all focused on Jesus. It was a sermon that was biblical. Peter quotes from three Old Testament passages. It was a sermon focused upon Jesus; His Person and His work. And it was a sermon that was very bold in calling for a response. If you look at verse 36, Peter says

**Acts 2:36** Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

That’s an incredibly bold statement to make toward the end of his sermon. Remember, again, these folks had participated in the murderous intent toward Jesus, the Messiah. And he is reminding them of that great crime. It’s important for us to follow Peter’s pattern in the messages, the sermons of the church. It’s important that we would be biblical, explaining biblical texts as Peter did, that we would be Christ-centered, and that we would be bold. It’s a day in which we need boldness as believers, boldness for Christ.

Again, some of this trial that we’re experiencing with the pandemic has kind of stirred some of the boldness among God’s people. So some are asking, “Should I stand up for what I believe by defying government orders in this time of pandemic?” I’m not going to share my opinions on that question here. I have some opinions, but what God cares about most is that we are bold for Jesus. Let us be known for our zeal to proclaim Jesus as Messiah. We know that’s a message that could become very unpopular, and it is unpopular. But let’s stand up and share Jesus boldly. That’s how the church began. It was with a proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah. We have a family that agrees about Jesus at Bethany. So let’s stand up and be bold for Him. Peter presents his summation then after saying

**Acts 2:36** Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Peter is saying that God the Father made Jesus the Messiah. So the people now hear this message and God does a work. It’s a miraculous work because these folks that had been hardened are now softened.

***37*** *Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”*

Here when it says they were cut to the heart, it means that they were struck or they were stunned. This is the convicting work of the Holy Spirit using the Word of God pressed against the soul of man, the soul that is in rebellion. Now they are struck by God with conviction about their own guilt, with conviction about their own spiritual need. And they ask the question, “What shall we do?”

Now, as they ask this question, God is awakening them. He’s awakening them first to their need. They are guilty of rejecting the Messiah that God sent. He’s awakening them to the glory of Jesus Christ. Jesus really is the one who is the Messiah. He is the Lord. He died on the cross for sin and He rose the third day and declared Himself as king, as Lord, as victor. And they were becoming spiritually awake to the fact that the eternal destination of their soul rested upon Jesus. And so, what should they do? Peter doesn’t leave them in the dark. Look what he says.

***38*** *And Peter said to them, “Repent*

Turn from your own self-will way of life. That’s the way you’ve been living. All we like sheep have gone astray. You’ve been going away from God. Repent! Turn around toward God. Turn from your sin. Turn from your idolatry. Turn from the rejection of Jesus.

*“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ*

In other words, baptism is a reference to that confirmation. “I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior.”

*“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*** *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”*

What a promise the Gospel offers! I would ask you at this moment, have you done what Peter urges that audience in the first century to do?

*“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,*

The promise is offered to us as well as to this people in the 1st century. Have we embraced Jesus as our Messiah, as our Lord, as our King?

***41*** *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

Added to what? Well, they were added to the church. The beginning of the church is very simple. It begins with the Holy Spirit descending. It begins with a sermon that Peter preaches about Jesus. It begins with the Holy Spirit using that sermon to awaken hearts and convict them. It begins with the Holy Spirit then opening those hearts to believe in the Messiah. And the Lord then adds to the church 3,000 souls. If we skip down to verse 47 then we see similar language.

*And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

They were being rescued from sin. So we find that every person who is joined to God is joined to this group that God calls the church, the body of Christ, this people who are God’s precious possession, separated out from the world for worship, for service. And no person is joined to God without being added to this group. Such is the precious beginning of the church.

The church didn’t begin by a group of people saying, “Let’s form a society. Let’s form a new group. Let’s call ourselves ‘the church.’” It began with the supernatural working of God through the Holy Spirit as a result of the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church’s beginning is always very simple. It simply is the work of the Holy Spirit bringing transformation through this gospel message which has the power of God to bring salvation to a soul.

Now what you’ll notice is that these 120 disciples that were part of the church on the day of Pentecost prior to Peter’s preaching, they didn’t seem to do a lot of strategizing in how to get the message out. They didn’t seem to do a lot of planning. There were not a lot of executive meetings. In our day there wasn’t a lot of Zoom or Google Hangouts going on to strategize, how are we going to get this thing off the ground? There was just a simple belief that Jesus is the Messiah and then a bold proclamation of that truth. And then God did a miracle. Here’s the truth. Every true church is not the result of human efforts. It’s not because there are a lot of good people who tried real hard to make this happen. But every true church is simply the result of the Holy Spirit’s working. Every true church begins in utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit to create something that man cannot create. And every true church’s existence once it is begun, it depends upon that continued working of the Holy Spirit. Man can’t begin a church and man can’t sustain a church. Only the Holy Spirit does that. It’s pretty simple, isn’t it? It’s important for us to remember that. Indeed, we as people get to be part of the church. We have responsibilities for the church. But really, the life of the church is in our dependence upon the Holy Spirit to do something and to accomplish something which we could not. So that’s a simple beginning, but then what we find in verse 42 are some very

**Simple Commitments: Jesus’ church devotes herself to the Word, fellowship, worship and prayer.**

***42*** *And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

You might underline that word “devoted.” It literally means they were continually devoting themselves. They were refusing to stop thinking about or talking about this very thing that now had become the very purpose and meaning for life. There is a phrase that some may use. It’s like a dog on a bone. That’s what they were in regard to these four commitments. They were like dogs on a bone. They held onto those bones and they refused to let those purposes go. There was no distraction. They had full attention. You know, when you have a dog with a bone and you try and distract it or take the bone away, the dog would growl. It is not pleased. This is the kind of commitment, this devotion, that these 3,120 people had in reference as a church to these commitments. They were devoted to

**Simple commitment #1: The Word.**

***42*** *And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching*

God’s Word is spiritual food that nourishes the church. This group of people understood that. They would say, “This is our life. This is how we are strengthened. This is how we’re comforted. This is how we’re led. We are devoting ourselves like a dog on a bone, to the Word.”

Food is of primary importance. This is the first commitment that is listed. They were devoted to the apostles’ teaching. It doesn’t say the very first thing that they were devoted to was outreach programs or to compassion ministries or to miracles that they had experienced in the past. The first thing is the Word of God, the apostles’ teaching. Why? Without the nourishment of the Word the church has no spiritual strength for anything else. It’s fundamental! Peter says this:

**1 Peter 2:2** as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

One of the great joys of my life is my second grandchild, Asher, who is 6 months old. When he’s hungry, he cries. He is devoted to receiving milk. Just this past week, he tried some solid food for the first time. He tried some applesauce and then he tried a banana. I got the privilege of seeing a video of him trying this for the first time. First, he reached out for the spoon of the applesauce. He was so excited. He had a smile on his face. And then he drew it in and with a smile, he ate it. And then as he was eating, he kind of had this look on his face like he wasn’t sure. And then he had a smile again. And then he kind of had a frown again. As he ate, there was both pleasure and there was also a little bit of disruption. But one thing about a baby is that they’re hungry for food. They’re really devoted to food. That’s a major part of their life as they grow. This is the idea behind what this simple church did. They just said, “Here’s what we’re about. We are about listening to God’s Word, delighting in God’s Word as a family, as a community.”

When someone asks the question, “What do you like doing with your church family?” there are a lot of ideas that may come up on what we miss about being together. But the first thing I believe that is right for us to say is what I miss most is just getting together as a community and listening to God’s Word as a family. Let me offer you two applications from this commitment, from this devotion.

First, let’s commit to reading God’s Word together. I know that’s harder in this pandemic, but it’s a vital aspect of the nourishment of the church. Let’s listen to God together. That’s why we’re committed when we’re able to come back together not just simply to stay at home and listen online. I know many of you are comfortable doing that. Many of you are listening in your pajamas, and that’s completely fine. But let’s not get so comfortable that we stop yearning for listening to God’s Word together in one another’s presence. God speaks to His church when we’re gathered together to listen to His Word.

And let’s also find ways that we can do that informally as well; in our homes, in our Christian friendships, whether it’s through Small Groups or whether it’s with a friend, saying, “Hey, let’s read Scripture together.” I know that might seem really even odd to some folks, but that’s kind of the idea of this early church. It’s simple. What we’re going to be about when we have conversations is we’re going to bring up God’s Word and we’re going to listen to Him together. If we have a meal together, it shouldn’t be odd for one of us to say, “I was reading something in the Scriptures. Can I read it at this time?” That may seem really odd, strange and foreign to some of you, but I think that’s what was happening in the early church. It’s just simple. This is a main part of our conversation. It’s listening to God’s Word together. We’re not going to be primarily about being devoted to whatever happens to be our interest, whether it’s sports or the news or politics or whether it’s kids and their activities. The first thing we’re devoted to is to talking about and listening to God’s Word together. Let’s apply that.

The second application is let us obey the truth that we do know, that we’re learning. Let’s obey the truth together. As we listen, it’s not enough to be a hearer only. But it’s saying we’re all about receiving God’s Word and then acting upon God’s Word. Hearing is not the same as doing. That’s true again, when we gather together corporately on Sunday morning. It’s true when we gather for family devotions, or when we’re talking to a friend or a brother or sister, in formal and informal settings, in our Small Groups or otherwise. But let’s spur one another on to obedience as well.

**Simple Commitment #2: Fellowship**

***42*** *And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship,*

Fellowship simply means common participation in God. So the Holy Spirit gives us life through Jesus. And this new spiritual life is shared. We hold it in common. The life I have in my soul is not different than the life that you have in your soul as a believer in Jesus. We have a shared common life in God.

Now, we don’t create this fellowship that we have with each other through just saying, “I’m going to be intentional about building relationship,” because we can’t create a common participation in God. Only the Holy Spirit gives that to us. Now, once God gives us this common participation, we are right to devote ourselves to it. So while we do not produce fellowship, we do participate in the fellowship together. And that’s the idea. We read this beautiful description of the fellowship in verses 44-47. What a lovely thing God created here in this fellowship!

***44*** *And all who believed were together*

So there was a proximity that they met often together. They gathered together. They were together.

*and had all things in common.* ***45*** *And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

They didn’t let others’ needs go unmet when they had resources to provide.

***46*** *And day by day, attending the temple together*

Again, they were gathering.

*and breaking bread in their homes,*

So again, there was formal and informal gathering.

*they received their food with glad and generous hearts,*

This indicates they were sharing meals with one another.

***47*** *praising God and having favor with all the people.*

What a great description of fellowship! They were doing all these activities together and they were all focused on the Lord and this new life, this common life they have with God. They prayed with one another. They prayed for one another. They sang songs of praise together. They talked about Jesus together. They confessed sins together. They cheered one another on. They wept with one another. They challenged one another. They took care of one another. They ate meals with one another. They enjoyed walking with God together. All of these things are what it means to have fellowship. It’s holding all these things related to God in common.

This is not some cold community where they came together for a worship service and heard some nice songs and listened to a nice message and then went home their separate ways. This is about coming together to have the life of God in common. And they were devoted to that kind of relationship. Family closeness and love requires that family members determine to devote themselves to one another. It’s that they won’t let life sort of pull them apart through neglect and through distraction. They’re going to come together and hold this most important matter, the bond of Christ that they have in common, together.

Many believers say, especially in this season, “Boy, I miss the fellowship of the church.” That’s really good. I’m so thankful to hear that. It’s a common theme. I miss it, too. But I think it’s better to say, “I miss giving fellowship.” Oftentimes, I think when we say that, we’re saying, “I miss receiving it.” I do miss receiving it. There is a right give and take in the fellowship of the church. But being devoted to the fellowship is more about giving fellowship. It’s giving that prayer, giving that encouragement, giving that cheer, giving that correction, giving that transparency, that relationship, that love. That’s how fellowship in the church is established. It’s not enough for us to long for fellowship and to receive it.

As members, to be devoted to the fellowship means we’re coming with a view that I’m having my eyes wide open to what I can give so that others would receive the benefit of this common life that we share together in Christ Jesus. One way that we can be part of being devoted to the fellowship is just simply by giving thanks to God for this fellowship and for specific people. I think that sort of sets the foundation for us being ready. If we’re not grateful for the fellowship, for the people that we have opportunities to give and contribute to, then it’s going to be hard for us to act in ways that give and that share. So the fellowship in a church family is produced by a group of people who long to give it and long for other people to enjoy it.

**Simple Commitment #3: Worship**

***42*** *And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread*

I believe this is a reference to the worship associated with the Lord’s Supper. When we worship, we’re going to be about Christ. He’s going to be the center and His atoning work on the cross is going to be in view. They devoted themselves to coming together to give praise to God and specifically to focus upon Jesus together. God intends for worship to be a team sport. Now, private personal worship is essential. That is good. That is lovely. But it’s not sufficient of itself. God rejoices in His people coming together with this common life, not just sharing the common life, but expressing praise to God to Him for this common life.

I love the hymn that Charles Wesley wrote as he reflects upon this devotion to the breaking of bread, to worship of God together. He writes (Check the lyrics!)

O for a thousand tongues to sing

My great Redeemer’s praise,

The glories of my God and King,

The triumphs of His grace.

I can imagine he’s sitting in the sanctuary thinking, “Okay, I’m giving praise to God.” And he’s looking around and thinking, “Oh, I would love for ten; no, I would love for a hundred people; I would love for a thousand people to be with me because God is so exciting! I want to give praise together with God’s people.” That’s the idea. It’s simple church. We’re committed to listening to the Word together. We’re committed to fellowship together. And we’re committed to worshiping God together.

**Psalm 150:6** Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!

That’s the heart of a person who has been made alive through Christ, by the Holy Spirit. God is worthy!

The energy of the church is not produced by these complexities; the beautiful sanctuary, the lighting, the sound equipment, even the instrumentation, the melodies. All these things are sweet. All the complexities are right and good, but they’re not the essence. The essence is a group of people saying, “I’ve been changed by Jesus Christ. And what I really want is I want to sing about God together with other people who share the life of God in their soul in common with me.” That is the simplicity of the church. It’s wonderful to have all these complexities, but we’re not dependent upon them. If we can’t have them, then we can still experience church as God intended in all of its simplicity.

**Simple Commitment #4: Prayer**

I don’t think anything is more simple than prayer. What do we need to have a wonderful, sweet prayer meeting? Well, I think you really need just two things. You need a place to meet. It can be indoors or outdoors. And then some people whose hearts have been changed by the Holy Spirit, who say, “We’re just utterly dependent upon God for everything and we want to call upon God together.” That’s the essence of a successful, exciting time of prayer.

There are a lot of aspects that churches have today to make their prayer meetings more exciting. And again, I’m not against the extra complexities. We have a lot of them here at Bethany and we think they can be used for God’s glory. But if we’re dependent upon these things, we’ve lost what the church really is and what we’re about.

As I think about these 3,120 people who are devoted to prayer in this very first century, I don’t think, because it’s not recorded…I don’t think this is kind of the essence of the story is that they had a group of them get around and say, “Do you know what? What we really need is to make our prayer meetings more exciting. What can we do to make them more exciting? Maybe do prayer circles. Maybe have candles. Maybe we should have meditation music.” I don’t think that happened. I think what happened is the Holy Spirit filled these people with such life and they shared this life in common and they began to sense an utter dependence upon God. They said, “What we really need to do is we really need to pray for one another and we really need to pray with one another. That’s what we need to do.” That’s very simple, isn’t it?

The last idea that we want to express is the simplicity of the purpose. In essence, the simple purpose, why the church exists is

**Simple Purpose: Jesus’ church exists to glorify God.**

We get to be part of the blessing of God when He is glorified. So our needs are met when God is glorified. But the church doesn’t exist to meet my needs. The church exists to glorify God. And as God is glorified, all my needs are met in Christ. That’s the issue. We never want to lose sight…verse 47 says they were

***47*** *praising God and having favor with all the people.*

The central question is not, is this group pleased with what we’re doing? Is that group pleased? And it’s easy for church leaders to start fixating on those kinds of matters, especially when people in the church disagree about what should happen. Church leaders and church members are right to say, “Is God pleased? If He’s pleased, then we’re pleased. If He is pleased, He is glorified, and that’s all we need! That’s really all we need. It’s pretty simple. So let’s ask the question: Is God pleased? We have His Word, we have fellowship, we have worship, we have prayer to discern those things. Is God pleased? Is He smiling upon us as a church? So by way of application, let’s devote ourselves to be a simple church. Let’s pursue the glory of God in our spiritual family. Let’s not become distracted by lesser things, things that are complex. Let’s not be distracted by those.

First I want to ask you, are you a member of Jesus’ church? To become a member of Jesus’ church, we have to do what Peter says must be done.

***38*** *And Peter said to them, “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.*

It’s that simple. Are you a member of Jesus’ church? It’s the community that possesses life in God. It’s a community that has a future forever with God. It’s a community that offers this love of God together with one another. It’s a community that has a purpose to do the work of God. Are you a member of Jesus’ church? Have you been born again? Have you received the life of God in your soul? Repent of your sin and believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord. This is an offer, a promise that God makes to everyone.

And then for those of you who are members of the church, I just want to leave with a simple statement. How do we get back to simple church? Some complexities I think are right, good, wise, noble. But how do we make sure we never lose the simple, the essential? Well if you’re a member of Jesus’ church, I would say treasure her. Treasure that she is a work of God of which we get to be a part. Treasure these moments when we can be together. Treasure one another when we can’t be together. Treasure the idea that we share a common life. We share a common purpose of glorifying God. Devote yourself to these four simple commitments and be content with them and rejoice in them. Encourage others to join you in that same devotion, and rejoice in Jesus. He’s our Savior. He’s our Messiah. What a Savior He is! May God bless you!