

Armagh Baptist Church
Sunday 10th May 2009 – 11:30am
Acts 1:12-26 – Prepare to Receive the Blessing

Introduction

We have already read our main passage in Acts ch.1 this morning, but let me read two more verses to you:

2 Chronicles 7:14 -

'If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.'

Acts 3:19 – *'Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.'*

Are God's people responsible for spiritual blessing – or the lack of it?

That's the question I want to consider this morning.

Are God's people in some way responsible for spiritual blessing – or the lack of it?

That first verse I read to you from 2 Chronicles 7:14 was said to God's people, Israel in O.T. times:

'If **my people**... called by my name... will humble themselves, etc'

God's people had to seek the blessing, if it was to come.

God's people had to sort out their lives first, if God was going to use them to bless others.

God's people had to humble themselves and pray, and seek God's face, if times of blessing were to come!

That second verse I read to you was also spoken to God's people, Israel, even though it was now in early N.T. times:

'Repent, then, and turn to God, so that **your** sins may be wiped out, **that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.'**

Both verses challenge **God's people** to get right with Him.

- To sort out our own lives first
- To repent of any un-confessed sin first
- To seek God's face earnestly in prayer

...if we want to see spiritual blessing in our area, in our day.

In Acts ch.1 the Lord Jesus Christ had promised the apostles, just before he left them, that blessing was going to come in a few days time (vs.4-5). So they knew that the Holy Spirit was going to be poured out very soon.

So what did they do?

Did they just carry on their everyday lives, getting up to all the things they normally got up to?

Did they say to themselves, 'Oh, the Lord's going to bless us – He's promised it, so He'll **have** to do it now, so we can just live as we like!'

Is that what they did?

Not at all!

What did they do?

See Acts ch.1 vs.12-26

What preparations did the early church make in order to receive the spiritual blessings of Pentecost?

Before we answer that question, let me ask you a question...

What are we as a church going to do to prepare the way for God to bless in this area in the coming days?

Now I know that it's not a matter of us living as good lives as possible over the next few months and hopefully by doing so we'll twist God's arm to give us some blessing before the end of the year.

But I do know this, down through the centuries God has poured out revival blessing on whole communities and nations whenever a few of his people earnestly sought God's face in prayer for that blessing:

Whenever God's people pray, God listens!

In a couple of weeks' time I will be speaking at the Irish Baptist Historical Society meeting on 'The Effect of the 1859 Revival on Mission'.

This year is the 150th Anniversary of the 1859 Revival. It started in Kells, Co Antrim in a school house when 4 men met to pray and about 100,000 people from the 9 counties of Ulster got saved in the 2 years that followed!

All that happened when a handful of God's people took God seriously and started to pray for revival.

The same was true of the Cambuslang Revival in Scotland, and the Evangelical Revival in Wales – in 1858-60, and again in 1904.

But God is still the same today. Their God is still our God.

The question is, are we preparing to receive the blessing?

How did these early believers in Acts ch.1 prepare to receive the blessing?

1. Unity Was Evident (v.14)

*'They all **joined together** constantly in prayer' (NIV)*

*'These all continued **with one accord** in prayer' (NKJV)*

*'All these **with one accord** were devoting themselves to prayer' (ESV)*

They were in one accord, they were of the same mind, they were living at peace with each other – **Unity was Evident among them.**

But the early church was anything but a recipe for unity!
It was a recipe for disaster!

Just look for a minute at who was in it:

(v.13) – **The Eleven Disciples**

- one of them, Judas, had betrayed Jesus, and now was no more.
- but the others hadn't been much better – they had all fled and left Jesus alone!
- **Peter** - had openly denied knowing Jesus at all!
- These were the disciples that Jesus had hand-picked, but they were all so different!
- **James & John** – they longed for the best seats in the Kingdom when it would be set up. One of them wanted to sit on the Messiah's right hand, the other wanted to sit on his left – they were jostling for position. They thought they were a cut above the rest!
- **Thomas** – the one who seemed to be so doubtful & uncertain.
- **Matthew** – the greedy tax-collector, who was hated by so many of the others – none more so than by...
- **Simon the Zealot** – Simon was anti-Rome, whereas Matthew had collaborated with Rome collecting taxes for Caesar. It would have been like a Republican & a Loyalist, members of the same church!

What a bunch of mis-fits, and yet we read that...

*'these all continued **with one accord** in prayer!'*

Who else was in the early church?

(v.14) – **'The Women including Mary the mother of Jesus.'**

- Women had no position whatsoever in any Jewish synagogue or religious gathering, and yet here they are in the early church *'in one accord in prayer'* - **with the men!**
- Have we any idea how counter-cultural that would have been!!
Men & women sitting together and men & women praying together!
Some of the disciples had been very traditional Jews – they could have kicked up about that development – but they didn't!

I wonder are you one of the more traditional people here this morning? Do you tend to kick up when things aren't going your way in church? When new things are being introduced and you just don't like it. Does that prevent you from *continuing with one accord in prayer* with your brothers and sisters in Christ!? It shouldn't!

And what about **Mary the mother of Jesus** in v.14?

She could have taken it into her head that because she was the mother of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that she could have sought extra-special prominence for herself in the church (just like the Roman Catholic Church has gone so overboard in doing).

But Mary never sought that prominence. In fact this is the last mention of Mary in the New Testament. And what does it say?

She continued ***with one accord in prayer*** with the disciples:

- No special prominence
- No special treatment
- She's not being prayed **to**, she's praying **with** the disciples.
- She's just one among the rest.

(Those who exalt Mary should take note of this verse!)

And who else was there?

(v.14) The brothers of Jesus

Mary had other children with Joseph, after she had Jesus.

Again this is something denied by the R.C. Church.

But the Bible clearly teaches that she did have other children:

- Acts 1:14, Mark 3:31-33 and John 7:1-5.

And what is interesting about these references is that the brothers had refused to believe in Jesus as the Messiah until after the Resurrection!

- Only then were they convinced
- And here they are in Acts ch.1 – in the church!

They too could have sought extra special treatment – but they didn't!

'They all continued with one accord in prayer' (v.14)

And how do you think the rest of them felt, when in v.15, Peter, the biggest failure of the lot, stood up and took on the leadership role!!

They could have thought to themselves,

'Who does he think he is telling us what to do?'

- *Sure he's the one who denied knowing Jesus with oaths and curses! Who does he think he is! I'm not going to accept him!*

But remember John ch.21 – Jesus gave Peter a pastoral role, when he reinstated him at that breakfast by the lakeshore.

Peter hadn't usurped authority, Jesus had told him to shepherd the flock.

But do you see the point I'm trying to make?

In the early church there was every reason for disunity in the fellowship, but there wasn't – instead **Unity was very evident!**

Listen to me this morning - In any church, at any time, there is every conceivable reason and opportunity for us to fall out with each other and not get on – the devil actually schemes it that way!

But if we want to see this church and district blessed by God's Spirit in the coming days, then Unity must be evident in Armagh Baptist Church!

If God's people are in any way responsible for God's blessing, then I plead with you, make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace! (Ephesians ch.4:3 – preached to you at my induction last Friday!)

1. Unity was Evident, as they prepared for blessing,

2. Prayer was Constant (v.14)

*'They all joined together **constantly** in prayer' (NIV)*

*'These all **continued** with one accord in prayer' (NKJV)*

Prayer was constant – they desired God's blessing more than anything else. Do we?

These people believed in prayer!

They had asked Jesus on one occasion to teach them how to pray – now they were practising it, like never before!

Compare that to 2 Chronicles 7:14

*'If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and **pray** and **seek my face**... then I will hear...'*

That's a promise if we pray – if we humble ourselves and pray, He will hear.

True prayer like that needs humility.

We're really saying, **'Lord, we need You! We need this blessing!**

The people all around us here need You!

If we really pray and seek God's face He will hear and answer our prayers just like He did for those 4 men in Kells, in 1859.

But these early disciples were doing no more and no less than what Jesus told them to do in Acts 1:4 – *'Don't leave Jerusalem, but **wait** for the gift my Father promised.'* The most natural thing to do while *waiting* for God is to *pray* to God – for blessing.

Will we take this to our hearts over the coming weeks and months and will we earnestly begin to pray for God's blessing on this church and district? As I started out in ministry in Mullaghmeen almost 20 years ago, God very clearly gave me a promise to hold onto. In fact when it came to the day of my induction to Mullaghmeen, Derek Hutchinson preached on that verse without knowing its significance to me already. The verse was Gal 6:9

'Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.'

I don't know about you, but I'm going to claim that promise again for Armagh, and hold onto it, and not give up, until that harvest comes.

So, Unity was Evident, Prayer was Constant, and thirdly:

3. God's Word was Honoured (v.16)

...as they waited for the blessing.

They believed in the power of God's Word, and they were faithful to God's Word. How do I know? Well, look at v.16

They believed that Scripture had to be fulfilled.

They were people who took God at his Word, and believed it had to come to pass, otherwise God wasn't God.

Do we? What about the verse I just referred to?

Do you believe that if we keep on faithfully preaching God's Word, and faithfully bathing all that we do together as a church in prayer, that God will keep his promise and in due season He will give the increase, He will give us a time of harvest, if we don't give up hoping and praying for it?

As many of you will know, Derek Bingham has been quite ill recently with cancer, but I remember going along to **Tuesday Night at the Crescent** in my College days in Belfast, and the Crescent being packed out with 1000-2000 students. In those days he was often asked about the 'success' of that church. How they as a small congregation – the old 'Victoria Hall' I believe, took over an old large church building that was about to close its doors – one of the mainline denominations – and how it was that it could now attract and hold well over 1000 young people every Tuesday night? Derek Bingham's answer was always the same. It was because God's Word was being faithfully preached – that was the key to blessing.

People tell us today, that if you want your church to grow, you've got to loosen up a wee bit, you've got to accommodate or compromise on something. But that's not true – in fact the opposite will happen.

If God's Word is faithfully and *relevantly* preached, God will bless and God will honour His Word. So while we wait for the blessing we will continue to honour God's Word here in Armagh.

These early disciples believed three things when it came to God's Word:

1. They believed Scripture **had** to be fulfilled (v.16)
2. They believed Scripture was **inspired** by the Holy Spirit through the original writers (v.16)
3. They believed Scripture had to be **applied** to their up-to-date situation (v.20-21)

Peter read God's Word to them, and then applied it to their given situation – sometimes that's the hard part. That takes wisdom and discernment, and it takes tact and grace to apply it.

But the Holy Spirit who inspired those verses also guided Peter in his interpretation and understanding (cf John 16:12-13).

So God's Word was honoured among them, and finally...

4. God's Will was done:

- Not Peter's Will
- Not Mary's Will
- Not what the brothers of Jesus wanted to happen
- Not the will of James or John either
- But God's Will was done among them, as God's Word was applied to their given situation.

You see, Christ was the Head of the early church.

He was exalted in Heaven, but they still sought His Will, for His Church, through prayer, and so His Will was done.

Read vs.21-26 highlighting v.24.

Conclusion:

So as the early church waited for the blessing to come, what did they do?

1. Unity was evident among them
2. Prayer was constant among them
3. God's Word was honoured among them, and
4. God's Will was done among them.

Our greatest desire is to see men and women of all ages coming to know Christ as their own and personal Saviour, and for new believers to be built up and disciplined in their faith. We'd love to see that happen even today.

But before the blessing can come, God's people must prepare for it.
So let's be united, let's be constant in prayer, let's continue to honour God's
Word, and so let us find out and do God's Will here in Armagh. Amen.
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