

October 25, 2009

Vision Series – Biblical Community

Alright good morning again. Take your Bibles and turn to the book of Acts. This morning is going to be different in many ways and yet we are still in the midst of our vision series where God is showing us how to fulfill His purpose for us as a church. If we are going to move people to life in Christ one step at a time together, what are those steps? What must we be about?

Last week we began looking at the 3rd area that is necessary to be a disciple of Jesus Christ – to do life in Christ – the issue of community and if you missed that introduction, you really need to go back and catch that online as well as the rest of the series so far. But this morning we are going to briefly develop that theme a little more before expressing it by celebrating the Lord's Supper together. That theme is the understanding that **living in community as the church is a COMMAND of God because we were never meant to do life in Christ, to walk with Jesus, ALONE.**

So in the book of Acts, which as soon as you figured out we would be talking about the community of the church I'm sure you expected to end up in Acts, but I encourage you to really let yourself hear it with a fresh perspective. **Acts chapter 2 beginning in verse 41.**

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

As we read that today I want you to make sure you understand that this group absolutely changed their culture – they changed the world day to day. Now it is not unusual to live differently than the culture. That's why there are subcultures all over the place trying to find community within the larger society but based on some twist on the norm.

But these people's lives were so compelling – so compellingly different that the culture stopped and looked at them and became interested in their message and Acts 2 shows us what was so counter culture to make that happen.

Look back through those verses and we see several things.

They worshipped together.

They did so daily – shows their passion for the Lord.

They ate meals together – they actually liked each other.

They suffered together for Jesus.

This idea of living this authentic daily Christianity together was so woven into their understanding of what it means to be a Christ follower that if a 1st century Christian were to look at our lives – at 21st century Christians – as we live our lives – segmented and fragmented – I have a feeling that they would look at us as a whole and wonder if what we live is even Christianity at all.

The idea of living out their faith TOGETHER was at the core value of what it meant to be a Christian for them.

I shared last week about how many different excuses I hear – and you probably hear as well – that people give for not connecting – not getting into community – doing life with others in Christ. Remember – things like scheduling, no group we really like yet, it's just the stage of life we are in, those kind of things, but I thought of another one this week that I didn't mention last week that just cracks me up. Several times when I've asked someone about trying plug into community in one form

or another, I've been told "well, we're kind of taking a break right now – we've been in and involved and all that and we just need a break."

And I just find that funny a little bit. I mean there is no other biblical principle – much less command – that we would be ok saying "I'm taking a break from that." Is there? I mean take prayer. If I were to ask you how your prayer life is going, you'd never hear someone say, "yeah I've been involved in that but I'm just kind of taking a break from prayer right now." What?

And like we saw last week in Hebrews 10:24 and 25, this is not an option for us either. **God through the author of Hebrews said make sure you do not ABANDON an environment where you are spurring and encouraging ONE ANOTHER on to love and good deeds.** And that verse is not limited to talking about church services, but biblical community.

And that's what I want us to address this morning right quick. In the midst of learning what God is showing us, **we cannot afford to mistake community for BIBLICAL community.**

Almost everyone desires community. Friends – people to hang out with – to share life with – people that know you and like you. Everybody desires and longs for community at some level.

Think back to the 1980s. What was the number one tv show in the 1980s? Cheers. Cheers was the number one rated show in the 80s. Remember? A show about a bunch of fat guys in a bar. The whole premise was in the theme song – "some times you want to go where every body knows your name." And there was this big guy named "Norm" who would walk in the door and everyone would yell "Norm." Number 1 show in the 80s.

Then you go to the 90s and what comes out? What were the number one shows in the 90s? Friends and Seinfeld. Remember: "I'll be there for you." What was Friends? A group of 20 somethings hanging out together. What was Seinfeld? A group of 30 somethings hanging out together.

Then in the 2000s what was the number 1 show? 24 – Jack Bauer and the terrorists, hanging out together.

It's all about community!

Why is that? Because all of us want it and some of us have it but **the calling on our lives as DISCIPLES is not to live in community but in biblical community.** Life in Christ must be done in biblical community. Well what's the difference?

There are probably several things you could think of. Let me just point out a few: the differences between worldly and biblical community.

- 1) **The goal of worldly community is you are there to receive from others.** Biblical community we saw in Hebrews 10 – to love and spur each other on to good deeds. **Biblical community has a goal where you can GIVE to others as well.**
- 2) Goal of Cheers, Friends, Seinfeld kind of community is **to have a group you can complain to and they can hear you out and show you empathy.** Biblical community is a group **that yes listens to you and empathizes with you but also makes sure you are CHALLENGED to look and be more like Jesus.**
- 3) The goal of worldly community is **to have a group you can share your burdens with.** Biblical community is a group who will **not only let you share your burdens, but will actually walk with you and help you CARRY your burdens.**
- 4) Worldly community is about **a group you can hang out with.** Biblical community is **a group you can CHANGE the world with.**

But at the heart of all those things is what makes biblical community really different. **At the heart of biblical community there is UNITY. What unifies us is the TRUTH of Jesus Christ** – it's not personality or similar phases of life or location or same interests or whatever – at the heart of biblical community what unifies us is the truth of Jesus Christ - a common faith, a common belief, a common anchor of truth. And at the core of this unity – this truth – you find something like what is printed in your message map. Read it with me:

That God – the creator of heaven and earth against whom we have all sinned, was in Christ, reconciling to Himself all who believe in Him, not counting their sins against them, but forgiving them through the redemption that is found in the sinless life and atoning death of Christ and received by faith alone, calling for obedience to Christ as Lord under the authority of His Word in the Holy Scriptures.

That came from an article I read last month by Dr. Mark Ross. And it was followed by the key statement – that **where CHRIST is truly preached, there is the gospel. And where the gospel is truly believed, there is the CHURCH.**

Folks this is what we celebrate today – this is what the Lord's Supper is all about. That Jesus Christ is God. And that as God He has done some amazing things on our behalf. God has made us complete in Christ. Not to repeat everything we've been talking about, but this news is so amazing I just can't say it enough.

Our salvation is complete in Christ. There is no one and nothing that we need to add to what God has done in Jesus – no ritual that can make us more saved. And that includes what we do today. We don't get more grace through the bread and cup today. We simply celebrate and remember that our salvation is complete already because of Jesus.

Along with that our forgiveness is complete in Christ. All our sins – all our debt – all the guilt of breaking God's law – of being less than perfect – is not only paid for, but is wiped clean by the cross. And praise God that's not just the past – that's everything we're ever going to do. Forgiven, forgotten in Christ.

And our victory is complete in Christ. Having been set free from the control of sin - from the domain of death – there is now no enemy, no devil, no demon that has any power over us unless we choose to give it to them. Christ's victory at the cross is our victory every day.

That's what we celebrate today. That's why we worship Jesus. That's the truth that we learn together. That's the heart of biblical community. And that's what the Lord's Supper is all about.

Celebration of Communion...

We've talked the past couple of weeks about the nature of the salvation that we are celebrating at the Lord's table. That not only is our salvation complete in Christ – but if it is complete in us through Christ, it will be a transforming salvation. That a truly saved person will be a disciple – will be intent on being like Jesus – will live life in Christ. And that is what we are about – moving to life in Christ one step at a time. Worshipping Jesus. Learning Truth. And as we continued to see today – doing so in biblical community.