

Acts 2:40-47

The Locomotive Train of the Church

August 18, 2024

**Main Point:** Because of the work of the Holy Spirit giving grace and bringing life, the early NT church was devoted, together, and fruitful. These are still the distinguishing characteristics of the Church, and each local church. As the church stays connected to the Locomotive Engine of Jesus, she will thrive.

**SI:** The Holy Spirit is at work, giving grace – showing His unmerited favor and undeserved gifting to these Jewish believers who had gotten it all wrong about Jesus. They had a majorly erroneous view of what the Messiah was going to be like – they were expecting a king to overthrow the Roman government and return them to power in Jerusalem. But when they are cut to the heart over what they had done (v. 37), they said, ‘what shall we do?’ Peter says, ‘Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus, the Messiah, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ And then what happened?

This... Read Acts 2:40-47.

“Christianity is not for strong people who try hard. It’s for weak people who finally give up.” - this is what happened in the previous passage, and now this is the fruit.

**Intro:** This is right after ‘and there were added that day about 3,000 souls.’ Luke’s summary statement of the early NT church.

The Church is like a freight train – A freight train carries a heavy load, rides on narrow rails, has an outsized impact on the economy and health of everyone, has a much bigger impact than most people realize or think much about.

The Church carries a heavy load – the truth of God  
Rides on narrow rails – the narrow way of following Christ and His Word  
Has an outsized impact on the world – the Church is a minority with major influence  
Much bigger impact – what if the church was gone from this community?

What’s the locomotive/engine? The apostles’ teaching – that they received from Jesus – 3 years with Him, and for 40 days prior to this. Jesus as King and Head of the Church is the Engine, the Locomotive.

What are the cars? What the engine is pulling in order to deliver to the world. As we are devoted to, dependent upon the locomotive engine, we see The Spirit working to deliver what He wants to give to bless His people and to bless the world.

3 things: Devotion, Togetherness, and Fruitfulness

**1 Devoted** (v. 40-42)

4 things – fruit of a grace changed community.

Summary - this is 3000 people!

Apostles' teaching – been with the Messiah, attested to the truth by signs and miracles

Fellowship – largely around meals, including The Lord's Supper

The Prayers

Togetherness

Yes, devoted to these 4 things, but let's look at this word, devoted –

v. 42 and v. 46

v. 42 – devoted themselves to

v. 46 – attending together

Acts 6:4 – devote ourselves to prayer and to the min of the Word

What is devotion? - The Greek - To persist in adherence to a thing; to be intently engaged in, attend constantly to.

How did they get devoted? Heart level is most important. Not merely description, but motivation – God knows we need awe and wonder and fear to motivate us! What had just happened in vs 40-41? Hearts cracked open to receive His Word.

\*They rescued themselves from religious duty-driven legalism to receive the grace of Jesus Christ who accomplished all the requirements of the law and sacrificed Himself to pay their debt (and yours too) for their falling short of the perfection God's Law requires.

They were devoted to:

The Apostles' Teaching – what was their teaching? What Jesus had taught them. What had Jesus taught them?

Receive His Grace. Receive His work. John 6:29 The work of God is this, that you believe in He Whom God has sent. Live out of this foundation, live out of what you have seen. They were to be witnesses – messengers, proclaimers, tellers, journalists, newscasters of Jesus the King. Jesus spent 40 days with them in this Master Class

Grace comes first, always. Then actions out of thanksgiving for grace.

We want to celebrate the grace of Jesus, bask in His grace, rejoice in it, tell it to each other. Use the 'means of grace' as the roots that nourish our lives.

They were devoted -

The motivation is the most important. We are not instinctual animals, we are created in the image of God – we have agency to choose, we have hearts – the center of our motivation, our drive, our desires.

Ah... here is something bigger than me that answers my questions, my doubts, and I've seen it over and over and heard it – it's a Person, a Savior, a Hero, and I want to give my life to this – to Him, to know the power of His Resurrection

Beware of losing these. These are the means of grace, the cars of the train bringing life to the church so that the church can stay alive, thrive, and be witnesses to the world.

This is Chaos Vaccination / Chaos Prevention

If we move away from these 4 priorities of the church, (the apostles' teaching, fellowship, prayers, togetherness) we wreck the train.

Because of the work of the Holy Spirit to give grace, bringing life, the early NT church was devoted, and together:

## **2 Together** (v. 43-46) / In Community

Together in worship, in watching God work, common sharing, in community with one another's material needs, in celebrating and partying. (which we get to do tonight)

I know you have questions about this – is this communism/socialism? No. This was community, not communism where all property is publicly owned.

- Private property is assumed in the Ten Commandments not to steal or covet
- V. 46 – 'their homes' (3000 people! – these were house gatherings, early house churches)
- Many thousands of Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost who needed food and shelter
- The sale of property was purely voluntary and given joyfully (Acts 4:32-37)
- They were living out Deut 15:7-11 – if anyone of your brothers is in need, open your heart and hands to him
- Principles:
  - o What we own is not our own – it is for us and for us to help others' with (see Acts 20:35) – from the world's perspective, this is radical, head-turning generosity! The Church has always led the way in mercy to the poor, and every Christian's life still today can be judged by a heart of generosity, or not.
  - o We are expected to receive everything good as gift, and even to expect that the bad things will be turned to good use in our lives and the lives of others.

Fellowship –

Sometimes we joke about this – all these meals. All the work that goes into preparing. This is one of God’s primary ways for us to enjoy one another, and to enjoy Him. Socializing is not to be frowned upon as if it is not fellowship. Nor are you to be frowned upon if you are a severe introvert and you can’t even begin to think of walking into the Fellowship Hall. Take it slow, but know that God has made you a social being and you even being here is evidence that you know that and long for it.

The church is God’s primary ways to provide community, togetherness with other lonely people who have been rescued by His grace.

We are seeing a renewal in such togetherness in the American Church – less and less about attending bc it gives you societal benefits towards upward mobility. More and more about authentic Christian community.

In our church, Stories from our teenagers – pummeled in school and our youth group and church is a refuge for them. And in Bridge Nights – kids want to hear about the hope that Jesus brings and that they bring to each other. And from Cahaba Ridge – satellite campus out our back door

Notice how these are slow gifts – devoted to anything takes time – listening to teaching, fellowshiping with people, meals take time to prepare and cook and eat, praying takes time.

For AVPC -

Together in prayer – Boiler Room

Small groups – house churches

Willing to be vulnerable enough to admit need – we are under intense pressure to get by on our own, to bear our own burdens

ILLUS of a football team – it’s a slow game and a Team game - TEAM me – one sport where all work for the same goal, one play at a time. One guy per play carries the ball, but all of them are working to help him get over the next line.

Overall – to summarize - Together – Luke highlights this – mentions the word twice in this short passage - why? To emphasize unity in direction – towards God, towards others. Stewarding God’s grace. Responding in Love for God and Love for others. God had saved them, rescued them from the surrounding crooked generation of greed for earthly power and self-centered consumption. Now they, and we, strive for togetherness. And the world notices and rejoices.

Because of the work of the Holy Spirit to give grace, bringing life, the early NT church was devoted, together, and fruitful:

### **3 Fruitful** (v. 47)

They did not retreat into holy huddles. They went out and enjoyed the favor of all the people. (Later they will be severely persecuted)

They weren't afraid of people.

They were generous. This is what grace does! This is what grace has done and is doing in our midst and what the Spirit keeps doing through us – so many stories – coming alongside, jumping into the miry pit with people, not turning difficult people or situations away or for somebody else to handle, entering in with confidence that b/c God has saved you from this crooked generation, He can save anybody, and He can and will and is using you to do it. B/c you are somebody? Hardly! b/c you are nobody! You, me, we are just a caboose tacked on to the back of the train with this goofy guy in the window waving and enjoying the ride.

Hitched to Jesus we point to the Engine, we stay connected to the Engine, we enjoy the ride and watch the Engine do all the work that really matters – the heart work – the cut to the heart work to bring genuine repentance and faith so that the resulting overflow of good works happens and the Spirit gets all the credit.

#### **Conc:**

Protect and prosper and nurture the institution of the Church

How AVPC is good at this... you/we are a healthy church

We've seen it described, now go and keep being the church

A train is only a train when it is connected to an engine with power to make it roll on the tracks. We are part of this long, long train, connected, staying on the tracks, dependent on the engine.

Stay connected to Jesus. Yes, every church needs a pastor. But a pastor is not the engine. Jesus is. And by His Spirit, He is empowering, enabling, and equipping His church to be like this – an agent of His great grace to bring life to us and to the world.

**Bene:** Jude 24-25