

Sermon: What It Looks Like to Be The Church

January 12, 2020

Text: Acts 2:42-47

Discussion Questions:

We all have our own personal ideas of what a “perfect church” would look and feel like—and how it would function. And the truth is—it would be a little different for each person (perhaps even a LOT different!).

Let’s begin our discussion today by talking about what some of your ideas might be.

- Take some time to describe to the group (or perhaps write down on a separate piece of paper) what your idea of the “perfect church” would be—
 - How big would it be? How many people would attend?
 - What would the building and sanctuary look like? Would it have a big theater...with theater seating and a big stage? Would it feel more “traditional” ...with stained glass and a high, towering ceiling? Or perhaps just a very small space such as a living room...very cozy with only one or two dozen people?
 - Does the pastor need to preach from the Bible in any certain way (or even use the Bible at all?). Does it matter what translation of the Bible is used (eg. King James, or NIV, or ESV)? Is there a certain length of sermon that you prefer?
 - What kind of music would be sung? Would there be modern choruses led by a band—or hymns accompanied by an organ—or perhaps a mixture of both?
 - Does it matter to you if hymnals are used...or is it best for the words to appear on a screen?
 - How important is it to you that the church is focused on reaching out beyond its walls...and has a “missional” (external) vision?
 - What kind of kids/youth ministry does the church have? Is this important to you?
 - Does coffee factor into the equation at all?
 - Would it matter to you if the church offered small groups for you to connect with?
 - Are there other factors that come to you mind when you think about the perfect church?

OK—now for the even bigger question: Which of the things you just described fall into the category of “*essential*” when it comes to what a church MUST be or do? Or to put it another way—how much of what you just described boils down to personal preference?

- Does a church have to be a certain size in order to be a church?
- Is there a certain kind of a building or location that the church needs to meet in in order for it to be a church?
- Are there certain songs that need to be sung—or does there have to be music or singing at all?
- What are the “non-negotiables” that church needs to do in order to actually “be” a church?

Examination:

- Read **Acts 2:42-47**

This is a foundational text describing the “birth” of what we now call “the church.”

Up to this point in time (33AD)—what we now think of as the church didn’t exist. We know that within the Jewish world at the time of Christ, local communities had synagogues (Jewish houses of worship). In order for a synagogue to exist, they had to have at least ten active male members, age 13 or older, who constituted a quorum. Services were held three times a day. A board of elders would be elected to supervise the religious practices and needs of the congregation. The elders would then appoint a teacher (or rabbi as they were later called) as well as direct the financial affairs of the synagogue. Priests didn’t serve in the synagogue—only at the temple in Jerusalem.

The synagogue services were patterned after some aspects of temple worship: 1) Services held three times a day at the same time that priests were offering sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem; 2) Men and women sat in different sections—with the women usually in the rear or in a special balcony section; 3) The Holy Ark, containing the Torah and other scriptures, was placed on the wall facing Jerusalem and the temple; 4) A vestibule (lobby) separated the main synagogue sanctuary from the street so that the thoughts and cares of the outer world would be shed before entering the holiness of the inner sanctuary; 5) Many psalms (songs) and prayers of the synagogue services were patterned after those of the temple.

The first part of Acts 2 describes the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit filled the first followers of Jesus (a group of 120 people gathered in the Upper Room). These Spirit-filled followers spilled out into the streets of Jerusalem, Peter preached a sermon, and 3,000 people were saved and baptized! Immediately there existed the need for some sort of organized way for these new believers to gather and grow in their faith. Acts 2:42-47 describes what this organized way functioned—

- According to verse 42, what were the four things that were essential components of their gatherings? What was “carried over” from what happened in the synagogues—and what were new things that were done?
- What strikes you about verse 43? What do you think it means that “awe came upon every soul”? Did everyone perform miraculous signs? Why or why not?
- Verses 44-45 describes how all the believers “were together” and “had all things in common.” This was done, apparently, so that needs could be met. Why do you think this happened? Does this still happen today? Was there a male/female distinction?
- Church doesn’t seem to be just a “Sunday thing.” It was a daily thing. And there were two primary venues where things happened. What are those two venues? Why do you think they continued to gather at the temple? Does this speak to the importance of what we now call “home groups”?
- Did the church grow? How? What does verse 47 say to us today?

Application:

All of us have our preconceived notions of what “church” ought to be. How does this passage impact your conceptions? How do we move out of a “consumer” mindset regarding church?