

God's People Offer Praise

"Hey man, you never hang out with us anymore?" Salim hassled. "How far are you going to take this?"

"He's going to some woman's house," teased Tyrell.

Rodell looked at his two cousins. The three of them, all close in age, had always been inseparable. Rodell had changed that in recent months, after being involved in and around too many violent episodes and crazy dramas. He was getting too old for that foolishness! Rodell ended up going to church with one of his girl cousins. The next thing Rodell knew, he was singing a new song!

"It's Sister Marie, and she leads one of our home Bible study groups," Rodell smiled politely.

"So, miss a session. It won't kill you," said Salim.

"We can go and get some beers and come back to the house," said Tyrell expectantly.

"He doesn't drink anymore, remember?" Salim sniffed.

"Sorry, guys," Rodell interjected. "Sister Marie is a gifted Bible teacher, Ladonna leads us singing, James brings food. Everybody share their gifts and talents."

"So, you don't want to hang with us?" Tyrell said.

"Yes, but just not right now. How about you both coming with me?" offered Rodell. "We love having visitors."

"I don't think so, man," Salim said sarcastically.

"What about you, Tyrell?" asked Rodell.

"No way!" Salim screeched when he saw Tyrell's head nod in agreement.

1. *What gifts and talents do you have? What are some you don't have?*

2. *Why do we depend on each other's gifts to better serve Christ?*

3. *Why should we be both humble and repentant when we work as the Body of Christ?*

Jesus Is Exalted

Acts 2:32-33, KJV

32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

Acts 2:32-33, NIV

³²God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. ³³Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

The events of this week's lesson began on the day of Pentecost. According to Jewish tradition, at Pentecost, Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of stone. Jesus' followers, however, associated Pentecost with the advent of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, at Pentecost, the Spirit descended in a dramatic way upon the Christians gathered in the holy city. As they praised God in other "tongues," or languages, ethnic Jews from across the Roman Empire marveled that they heard the believers "declaring the wonders of God in our tongues!" (Acts 2:1-13). Peter, led by the Spirit, explained to the crowd that this phenomenon was evidence of God fulfilling His promise to pour out His Spirit upon people (vss. 14-21).

Jesus' resurrection was the central topic of Peter's sermon. Peter said that he and the rest of the disciples had witnessed Jesus' bodily resurrection. The apostles also testified that the Father "exalted" (vs. 33) His Son to the place of highest power and authority at the Father's "right hand" in heaven. Moreover, as the Father "promised," the Son "poured out" the Spirit upon Jesus' followers, which those present could "see and hear" for themselves. Though some in the crowd probably disputed Peter's statement about Jesus' resurrection, Peter and the rest of the disciples were willing to courageously testify to Jesus' lordship and messiahship (vss. 34-36).

4. *What was the Good News that Peter proclaimed?*

The Exhortation to Repent

Acts 2:37-41, KJV

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Acts 2:37-41, NIV

³⁷When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

³⁸Peter replied, “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. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

The crowd, upon hearing Peter’s declaration, was “cut to the heart” (vs. 37). Their intense distress and deep remorse over rejecting the Messiah prompted them to ask what was necessary for them to get right with God. Peter’s message had convicted his hearers of their sin and then spoke about the Father’s provision of mercy and love.

Peter told them to “repent and be baptized” (vs. 38). “Repent” implies a complete change of mind. Instead of rejecting Jesus, they needed to trust in Him. In Bible times,

religious rites involving water were commonplace. For example, baptism was a requirement for Gentile proselytes to Judaism. By being baptized, Peter's listeners publicly acknowledged their intent to become faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Those who trusted in Jesus for salvation would be forgiven of all their transgressions and experience God's favor. Peter assured his listeners they would also "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). God's promise of the Spirit was not meant just for those listening to Peter. It was also intended for people in distant places (such as Gentiles) who would receive Jesus by faith.

The apostle ended with a stern warning and exhortation for the audience to be saved from the perverse "generation" in which they lived. Pilgrims who heard God being praised in their own languages were among that day's 3,000 converts, and they would take the good news of salvation in Christ with them back to their homelands.

5. *How did the crowd respond to Peter?*

6. *What did Peter exhort the attendees to do?*

7. *What plea did Peter make to the crowd?*

The Unity of Jesus' Followers

Acts 2:42-47, KJV

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

Acts 2:42-47, NIV

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

⁴³Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common.

⁴⁵They sold property and

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The Spirit gave profound unity and joy to the early believers. The large group listened to the “apostles’ teaching” (vs. 42), which emphasized Jesus’ death, resurrection, and exaltation. His followers also gave themselves to fellowshiping and spent hours in prayer. The Spirit gave further vindication of the Pentecost events by empowering the apostles to perform “wonders and signs” (vs. 43).

All those who had trusted in Jesus not only stayed together, but also shared their belongings with one another. In fact, the believers were willing to sell their “property and possessions” (vs. 45). The mutual generosity of the believers ensured that those who were in need of essentials had them fully met.

The new converts had no official meeting place, so they gathered every day in the temple courts and met in private homes to share meals. The disciples joined together in “praising God” (vs. 47) as well as enjoying the approval of “people” in general. The English word *praise* comes from a Latin verb that means “to value” or “to price.” So, to give praise to God is to proclaim His merit or worth.

8. *What activities did the apostles perform among Jesus’ followers?*

9. *What were the hallmarks of the believers’ unity?*

Square One

When the people heard Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whose crucifixion they had supported, was the Christ, they were cut to the heart. When they asked Peter what they needed to do, he told them to repent and be baptized, and they would receive the Holy Spirit.

Repentance is more than just saying "I'm sorry for what I've done." It involves a life change, a new heart and a new outlook on life that includes serving Christ. Repentance joined with belief in Christ says, "I am totally responsible for the damage I have caused in my relationships—both with God and with others. But God in His mercy is willing to save me, and to allow the atoning work of Jesus to cleanse my soul and make me right with Him."

That change of heart helped create a new community of caring and sharing. All the believers became devoted to Christ and not to themselves. They listened to the apostles' teaching, ate, and prayed together every day, and devoted themselves to building the kingdom of God. That can only happen when a group of people are focused on the same goal and purpose—serving others.

This is why it's so important that square one of a healthy church community is starting from a place of repentance and humility—especially when it comes to doing Kingdom work together and depending upon one another's gifts.

10. *When people say repentance means "changing one's mind," what are they changing their minds about?*

11. *When it comes to saving faith, how are true repentance and belief dependent upon one another?*

12. *How does the humility that comes from repentance help church communities grow and become more effective together?*

13. *In what ways are you dependent upon the spiritual gifts of others in your church community?*

Repenting and Sharing

As a result of their genuine repentance, the new believers in Acts 2 formed a community that worshiped together, served together, and shared with one another. Once they had owned up to their specific sins, they were free to forgive themselves, and one another, and move forward together for the good of God's kingdom.

► *Have you experienced saving faith? If not, ask a mature believer to explain the Gospel to you. If you have, are there things for which you need to own up that might be holding you back in your ability to work with others in the church? If so, own those, and seek to rebuild trust with others.*

KEY VERSE

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. — Acts 2:42, KJV

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. —Acts 2:42, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of September 27 through October 3

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 95—Praise the Rock of Our Salvation.
- Tues.** Luke 19:28, 36-40—Stones Shout Out!
- Wed.** 1 Peter 1:3-9—Indescribable and Glorious Joy.
- Thurs.** Psalm 98—Sing to God a New Song.
- Fri.** Hebrews 13:12-16—A Continuous Sacrifice of Praise.
- Sat.** Psalm 66:1-7—Rejoice in God's Mighty Rule.
- Sun.** Psalm 100—Enter God's Courts with Praise.