



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



HG43: Growing The Church (1/6) *Growth In Numbers*

Acts 2:1-41

Home Group Study Notes

23rd January 2011 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources that might be helpful.



Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

If you could speak one other language what would it be and why?



Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise, or listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers; etc.





Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study Acts 2:1-41, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers with your Home Group.

1) This is a great opportunity just to chat amongst yourselves and talk about how you feel about the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. How do you think you would you have felt as an onlooker on that day as the believers, acted strangely spoke in a different language and appeared drunk and how would you feel if that happened at a meeting you were at today?

2) The disciples and others were told to wait on the promised Holy Spirit. 10 days is a lot of waiting. How easy do you find it to wait on the Holy Spirit?

3) Graham Tomlin says: *“Without actions no one listens. Without words no one understands.”* Its not easy getting it right, sometimes we rush to give answers before someone has even asked a question. How easy do you find it to share and live out your faith?

If the people of God professes to follow Christ yet live as if they don't then what kind of witness is that, who will believe that Christ is worth following? If we belong to the community of Christ yet worship him as and when it suits our lifestyle what does that say about what or who is first in our lives? If the church's worship is cold, unenthusiastic, joyless and there are people in church visiting, what does that say to them? Who will believe that we are excited about being followers of the Risen Christ, who will believe that the Holy Spirit lives in us and has the power to transform us and our worship, why would they want what we have if even we don't look happy about it at times?

Summary

The first Christians were committed to outreach and they were motivated buy several factors. They did it in response to their Lord's command, he had told them to wait for the promised Holy Spirit and then to take the gospel worldwide. They did it because they loved Jesus. They were full of undying gratitude to Him and for his sacrifice for them and because if this they were passionate about sharing this good news with others so they could know Jesus themselves. They did it because they were moved by the plight of those around them, people trapped by superstition and belief in pagan gods and held captive by demonic forces. They had compassion and wanted people to experience the freedom that Christ brings.

They were motivated by joy, think back to a time when you have helped someone come to know the Lord, there is no joy like it. The first Christians knew this joy. There was joy on the face of the martyr Stephen as he died for the Lord, Acts 7:54, there was joy in the prison cell when after having endured a flogging Paul and Silas sat in the cell singing praises for all they were worth, Acts 16.25. The greatest motivation of course was down to the work of the Holy Spirit. It was they Spirit who thrust the first Christians on the streets and gifted them with other languages, he sustained their evangelistic efforts, he inspired their worship and freed them up to worship from their hearts, he anointed Peter with boldness and gave him the courage that he must have needed to get up and talk to the crowd that day, and it was the Spirit who brought the Scriptures to life bringing understanding to passages they had known from childhood. It was the power of the Spirit that transformed the first Christians lives and brought about the growth in numbers.

Michael Green says *“...we in the west have a modern church that knows little of the joy of evangelism and little of the power of the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit of God, and indeed the joy of the Lord, are reserved for those who, in obedience to the Master's command, venture out and risk”*

Acts 2 is a message of hope for us, one to be excited about. The Holy Spirit is the same today as he was on the Day of Pentecost, his mission is the same, to glorify Jesus and make him known but he needs people who are wholeheartedly obedient to the head of the church, Jesus Christ, who make His priorities theirs and who will live in total dependence on Him, relying on and seeking His Spirit's power, and trusting in Him rather than on their own efforts.

He empowers and enables the believers to speak about him with extraordinary boldness which is what happened to Peter. The Holy Spirit made His presence and power known in his preaching. Acts 2 records the apostle Peter's first sermon and he preached by the power of the Holy Spirit. He spoke in response to questions he was asked, people saw what was going on and they were interested, they were attracted to the people and their message they said, *"What does this mean?"* Acts 2:12 and so Peter took his opportunity. He preached out of the Old Testament Scriptures, both Joel 2 and Psalm 16. He explained the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the resurrection of Christ. This was the first ever seeker service, the first ever seeker service sermon and obviously no-one one had ever told Peter about being sensitive or going gently where seekers may be enquiring because he confronted the onlookers with their sin. Many would have been the very same Jews who had crucified Christ. He eloquently and boldly spoke the gospel message *"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"* Acts 2:37. People were convicted, more lives were transformed as the Holy Spirit made His presence and power known through Peter's preaching, and 3000 became believes that day. That was one sermon, we have all listened to a few sermons but its unlikely that any of us have ever listened to one as powerful and as productive as that one.

William Beckham says this about our services: *"The meeting format should not be changed to convert them (newcomers) or focus on them. They should be allowed to sit and watch God at work in his people.... The New Testament church knew the most powerful witness was the community of believers living in the presence power and purpose of Christ ... Through the imperfection of Christians, God reveals his power to those who observe."*

Transformation

If we were to use one word to describe the lives of the disciples before and after Pentecost surely the word *transformed* comes to mind. They lives were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The first disciples were a bunch of young men who either fished for a living or counted money and when the going got tough most of them got going. Even after 3 years in the company of Jesus they still didn't know what he was about nor did they understand his message and yet at the end of Matthew we see that Jesus entrusted the most important work of his mission to this small group of very ordinary flawed people. Peter is a perfect example of someone whose life was totally changed after his encounter with the Holy Spirit. Prior to the Day of Pentecost he had been a volatile, fickle character known for his error of judgement on several occasions but in Acts we see him totally changed as a confident leader and preacher. One of the most powerful evidences of the truth of the gospel is transformation and it is the reason for the growth in numbers and the spread of the gospel

Before and After

Up to the Day of Pentecost the believers waited together in a room away from people but when the Holy Spirit came they got out on to the streets and proclaimed Jesus as Lord to an international crowd. Their witness was bold, enthusiastic, joyful and unselfconscious as they claimed the ancient prophecies of Joel. Their joy, enthusiasm and certainty was magnetic and onlookers were intrigued, they wanted to find out more because God had revealed his power at work in those first Christians to all who observed them. When people have something they are enthusiastic and excited about particularly in an indifferent culture, then those around observing them become curious and they want to find out about it. As we read the book of Acts we will see that how the first Christians lived was an important factor in the spread of the gospel. How they lived alongside each other, their unity, how they shared all they had, how they worshipped together, and how they withstood suffering and death, all these things were their witness to those who watched and it was this that attracted people to them making them wanting to know more about who it was they followed and who brought about such changes in them. Graham Tomlin says *"When the church begins to be truly itself, it will not be able to stop being evangelistic."*

4) I listened to a speaker on God TV recently and he talked boldly on life-style and judgement and he left me feeling quite uncomfortable. Peter spoke boldly and accused the crowd of crucifying Jesus (Acts 2 23). The Spirit brings about transformation. How open are you to the Spirit when He wants to talk to you about difficult issues surrounding your lifestyle, character and faith?

5) There was a lot of noticeable joy around in the early church particularly during their worship. Taking into account that we are all different and we can be joyful inside without actually showing it do you think it is important that our worship together reflects the joy we have in knowing Christ as our Saviour? Do you think it does?

6) If the Holy Spirit would do one thing a) for you, and b) for us at Emmanuel, what would it be? What are the chances that He would do whatever it is you have asked if we just waited on Him, asked Him and worshipped Him? Find out by ending your discussions and spending time worshipping and waiting on the Holy Spirit.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG43: Growing The Church (1/6) *Growth In Numbers*

Acts 2:1-41

Home Group Sermon Notes

23rd January 2011 - Pauline Woolnough

Introduction

The rest of our HG studies in this series are based on the book of Acts which was written by Luke and the first study concentrates on Growth in Numbers. The early Christians in the Acts of the Apostles turned the world upside down in a very short space of time, and although our world and circumstances are very different they have much to teach us. The church's membership consisted solely of unschooled laymen, they were ordinary men and women with a basic education, there wasn't a rabbi among them. They had had an irresistible message with scant resources, yet see what they accomplished. We have the same irresistible message and untold resources so it has to make us wonder what God might do through us if we could only capture their joy their vision, passion, faith and dedication. There is just the possibility that at the end of our series we may even end up believing that what God did through them he can do through us, after all one of Luke's reasons for writing the book, was to encourage us and show us what Jesus continued to do after his resurrection through his Holy Spirit.

The Great Commission

Before Jesus left he announced that he had all authority in heaven and on earth and he was calling the disciples to go out into all nations and preach the gospel message. He didn't expect them to go on their own nor did he expect them to do the work alone. Instead he told them that he would be with them always, they would never be without him. He sent them out and he promised to be with them. The Great Commission meant they were to be a mobile and travelling people, an apostolic church. The day of Pentecost occurred ten days after the Ascension of Jesus when Jesus appeared to the disciples for the last time and told them in Luke 24:49: *"I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

They Waited and they Prayed

They had been instructed to wait, and so they waited and while they waited they prayed. *"They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."* Acts 1:14. They had to elect a replacement for Judas so they prayed. *"Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs."* Acts 1:24. They committed their actions to God in prayer as the various groups came together, and any differences the disciples and the family of Jesus may have had were put aside for the sake of unity.

They Waited and they Praised

The Ascension of Jesus *"While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God."* Luke 24:51-53. After Jesus left them for the last time they waited together and whilst waiting they praised and worshipped, and they did it with great joy.

The meaning of joy: *the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying; keen pleasure; elation.* Does that description from the dictionary accurately describe the Church of God today at worship? Its impossible to describe the early church without using the word joy, (2:46). The fruit of the Spirit is always joy and the early Christians praised God with exuberance for his mighty works through Jesus Christ. Geoffrey Fisher, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, said: *"The longer I live the more convinced I am that Christianity is one long shout of joy."*

They Waited and so He Came

They waited together, they prayed together, they praised together and the Holy Spirit came. His presence and power manifested itself in the three characteristic signs of Pentecost, the sound like that of a mighty rushing wind, the tongues of fire appearing upon the heads of the disciples, and their speaking with other tongues or other languages. The Spirit enabled the believers to speak in the languages of those in the crowd so people around heard the gospel preached in their own language. It was the birth of mission, initiated by the Holy Spirit, he initiated it and they participated in it. Mission is God's project initiated and orchestrated by the Spirit, he leads and we're meant to follow.

How often have you been at a prayer meeting and been encouraged to wait on the Holy Spirit? How hard did you find the wait? How long did you wait before your mind wandered? How long were you able to praise? Being Anglican its unlikely that many of us have waited much beyond the witching hour of 10pm, if we have ever waited that long, but if we want to meet with the Holy Spirit we, like the early disciples may have to wait, and wait some more. Then we may find that its those who wait after most people have given up and gone home that are rewarded with an encounter with the Holy Spirit.

Thank You but No Thank You

Strangely enough, not everyone was impressed because although many who heard the disciples speak their language and were amazed, some were not so keen, they were wary, they scoffed, they didn't like what was going on and they accused the people of being drunk. We should perhaps take this as a caution because today many people are a bit wary when things of the Spirit occur or are talked about. Perhaps when someone behaves in a different manner, speaks in tongues, is overcome when being prayed for. It's a sad fact that whenever the Holy Spirit is poured out in extraordinary measure the church is divided. Some people genuinely want to find out what is happening, they test all things, and hold on to what is good and are careful never to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit. Others however look on and mock and dismiss the enthusiasm as merely human but it is God's will for every believer *"be filled with the Spirit"* Eph. 5:18.

God's Spirit was poured out that day and Jesus Christ blessed His church with power. Joel says that one feature of the last days will be the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on people of every kind - men and women, young and old, high and low. God's people will receive power. Previously the Spirit had been given to the few and for the special occasion but now God poured His Spirit out on all flesh permanently and abundantly. His Spirit is for all people who wish to receive Him. God says, *"your sons and your daughters... your young men and your old men... even on my male servants and female servants... in those days I will pour out my Spirit."* Acts 2:17-18. Sex, age, and position in life make no difference. Anyone who has accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour has had the Spirit of God poured upon them and empowered to serve Him as part of His people.

Anointed Preaching

This chapter brings another work of the Holy Spirit to the church which is bold, prophetic speech. The authentic work of the Holy Spirit always glorifies Jesus and makes Him known.