

BACK TO THE FUTURE

INTRODUCTION

Here we are in the new year 2020. New year is a time for making resolutions. Here's a fun example:

Bill called his parents to wish them a happy New Year, and his dad answered the phone. "Well, Dad, what's your New Year's resolution?" Bill asked him. "To make your mother as happy as I can all year," his Dad answered. When mom got on the phone, Bill said, "What's your resolution, Mom?" She answered, "To see that your dad keeps his New Year's resolution."

It's also a time of opportunity. Here's a poem written by an unknown author:

*I am the New Year. I am an unspoiled page in your book of time.
I am your next chance at the art of living. I am your opportunity to practice
what you have learned about life during the last twelve months.
All that you sought and didn't find is hidden in me, waiting for you to search it
but with more determination.
All the good that you tried for and didn't achieve is mine to grant when you
have fewer conflicting desires.
All that you dreamed but didn't dare to do, all that you hoped but did not will,
all the faith that you claimed but did not have—these slumber lightly, waiting
to be awakened by the touch of a strong purpose.*

*I am your opportunity to renew your allegiance to Him who said, "Behold, I
make all things new."*

As we begin this year, it's a great time to review our strategy as a church too. Our strategy is what we do to achieve our vision and goals. I actually did this toward the end of last year and realised there are some changes required if we want to grow as a church. To do this, we need look back to the first century church and see what strategy they used to enable them to grow so prolifically.

This morning I want to briefly review the first 7 chapters of the book of Acts where we can learn how the early church began, how it grew, and what we can learn and apply as we enter this new year and decade to make us more effective as a church that desires to grow God's Kingdom and be a church of irresistible influence.

MESSAGE

Acts 1

Here we read of Jesus ascension and His final instruction to the disciples.

- The disciples had spent time with Jesus since His resurrection.

- He had instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the "Promise of the Father", which we know as the Holy Spirit.
- The most famous verse from acts 1 is: **Acts 1:8** But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
- They were united in their devotion to prayer: **Acts 1:14** (NKJV) These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

These were a people who had a relationship with Jesus and who were obediently anticipating the "Promise of the Father". They were a people who Jesus had instructed to be His witnesses. They were willing to pray together as one in one place!

Nothing has changed, the call is the same today. We are to be Christ's witnesses, but to do that we must be in unity, willing to gather in one place being devoted to prayer!

Acts 2

Acts 2:1 (NKJV) When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

- These people were in unity! This was evidenced by the fact that they were in accord and in one place. They were not all running in different directions with different agendas.
- Then it happened, Pentecost! They were ALL baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues.
- This was followed by powerful Holy Spirit inspired evangelism and as Peter preached 3000.
- The promise from Acts 1:8 became a reality, they were empowered to witness!.
- The message of the first two thirds of Acts two is characterised by these words: **Acts 2:21** And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the Lord Shall be saved.'
- Those who got saved were also water baptized.

Church, this is in line with what I believe the Lord impressed on my heart for 2020. This is a year of salvation and grace.

Now the message changes and we get a picture of the nature of the church that had been birthed.

Acts 2:41-47 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness

and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

- There was a togetherness – that unity and one-accord had remained.
- They had all things in common – they were willing to share even if it meant selling property! They distributed to those who had need.
- They were **daily in the temple** and **breaking bread from house to house**. This church had **lots of fellowship** and meals together and regularly shared Holy Communion.
- **They were devoted to prayer.**
- They had a gladness and simplicity of heart – this speaks of a contentedness!
- They had favour with the people.
- And... the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Christian Heritage, this is a picture of what Biblical church must look like. Lots of fellowship, at church and in homes, lots of prayer and a willingness to help those in need. We may do some of it, but we are actually far from this picture of true church!

Acts 3

In acts 3 we read the account of Peter and John going to the temple at the 9th hour as was their custom, and the account of them raising up the lame beggar. **Acts 3:6** Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

Emphasis is then placed on the name of Jesus and how faith in His name grants us perfect soundness.

Acts 4

Acts 4 continues with:

- Continual attending of the temple at the hour of prayer.
- Miracles, signs and wonders taking place.
- The people were witnessing to the power of the name of Jesus.
- The message was, "repent and be converted".
- Their behaviour resulted in people glorifying God for what had been done.
- Persecution began but the people persevered, praying for boldness to proclaim the word of God. As they prayed, they were once-again visited by the Holy Spirit and the place was shaken.
- They continued to share, sell property and have all things in common.
- There was great grace upon them.

Acts 5

In Acts 5, church discipline kicks in, sadly at the cost of Ananias and Sapphira's lives because they lied to the Holy Spirit. But that's not all:

- There are more accounts of the powerful ministry of the Apostles.
- The people were still gathering in one accord on Solomon's Porch.
- **Believers were continually being added to the Lord.**
- People now were coming from surrounding cities bringing the sick and demon possessed to receive healing.
- There was further persecution and a statement was made: **Acts 5:29** We ought to obey God rather than men.
- And more fellowship and ministry: **Acts 5:42** And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

Church, can you see the picture emerging here? Unity, daily fellowship, sharing, proclaiming, salvations, signs and wonders, faith amidst persecution and a growing church which was now reaching into a wider territory.

Is that not what we as Christian Heritage want? If it is, then we need to start doing what the early church did!

Acts 6

Acts 6 paints a picture of a growing church. With every growing church, administration becomes a reality. Earlier, the Apostles managed everything, the preaching and teaching, the organisation and the distribution to the needy. Now as the church grew, it was not so simple, and Peter tells the church its time for people to be appointed to do the daily distribution.

Acts 6:1-4 (NKJV) Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

- They appointed 7 men to deal with the administration.
- The Apostles focused on prayer and the ministry of the word.
- In vs.7 we see the result – Then the word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.

Church, the pastors cannot handle everything if we want church growth. It was when these other men were willing to take up the administrative load that the word of God spread more effectively, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly.

My question to you is this... are you willing to put your hand up and help with the ministry of Christian Heritage Church. I'm speaking of not just accepting a role, but taking on the responsibility that goes with it?

Two of those 7 men chosen are mentioned later in Acts. Stephen and Phillip. Both were full of the Holy Spirit and performed mighty works and miracles. It appears that God promoted them to have the characteristics of Apostles.

What about you? Maybe the Lord has been calling you to take a servant leader role and you have not risen to the challenge. Could it be that 2020 is your year to stand up and be counted for God's kingdom?

CONCLUSION

We need to go "back to the future" to bring us to a new era of growth, both personally, and as a church. When we look back and learn from the first century church, and apply what we have learned and live it out, our future will be established, we will grow, we will see signs and wonders and the church will explode with new life.

In summary, this church did these things:

- They had a relationship with Jesus and were obedient.
- They were filled with the Holy Spirit.
- They were devoted to prayer.
- They were in one accord and served together in the temple and in their homes.
- They shared meals and the Lord's Supper regularly.
- They did what was required to take care of the needy in their midst.
- They witnessed boldly regardless of persecution.
- They accepted church discipline.
- They understood that the Apostles role was prayer and the preaching of the word.
- They were willing to assist with the administrative tasks of the church.

And this church grew and multiplied, even reaching other nations.

I encourage you to join me as we work together in applying these same principles to enable us to grow the Kingdom of God in 2020.