

# Keynotes from Pastor Tim's am Sermon on 13/09/2020

## Mini Series – “God's new community”

### Part Two - “When God comes near”

*Acts 2:42-47 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

From the beginning of time to the end of time, the Bible highlights the presence of God among his people. It begins with a world created by God, with two humans created by him and with whom he has fellowship, and ends with a city built by God where a huge crowd of people, whose sins have been forgiven, have fellowship with God. Everything between the beginning and the end shows how a holy God reaches out to sinful, rebellious people to make peace with them. Through the sacrifice of his own perfect Son on the cross, he forgives their sin, and comes to live with them and to fellowship with them. We were all made by God and for God. The ultimate purpose of life is not any of the earthly aims we may aspire to.

**The ultimate purpose of life is to come to know God through his Son the Lord Jesus Christ, by the work of the Spirit of God in our hearts, and to enjoy God forever.** God is building a people called the church. The church is a community of his people who enjoy him through a personal relationship with Jesus, united together in Christ. One day, we will all be together in God's presence to enjoy and worship him forever.

That work of God is in evidence even now in the church, especially in local church gatherings, though, because of the effects of sin, they are only a pale reflection of that final gathering when Jesus comes back for his church, and fellowships with us face-to-face. Last week, this definition of church was given:

**A people united around the Gospel, by Christ Jesus, through the power of the Spirit and the Word of God, enjoying all the blessings of the Gospel and fulfilling the responsibilities of the Gospel.**

The church becomes this by being devoted to the four activities in **Acts 2:42** (the apostle's teaching, the fellowship, breaking of bread and the prayers) and to the one who is at the centre of all these activities – the Lord Jesus Christ. This devotion will have a noticeable effect on our church, so that we show the following four marks of a genuine church.

1. **Awe - vv42-43** .....And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

In the early church, the apostles were performing signs and wonders, as Jesus had once done, proving that they were Christ's messengers on earth. God was at work through the apostles.

**Acts 3:16** And his name—by faith in his name (Jesus)—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Luke wants us to see that:

- God has come near
- God is among his people
- God is present with them by his Spirit, through the person of his Son

**Where God is present, people are in awe**

One of the marks of a genuine church is a genuine sense of the presence of God amongst us. So you might find that:

- During the preaching of the word, God speaks directly into situations in your life that only you know about

- As you gather round the Lord's Table, you experience deep conviction of sin, and great awareness of the cost to our Saviour, leading to a deep sense of gratitude for Christ and assurance of his forgiveness
- Sinful habits you've been unable to break by your own strength begin to loosen their hold on you. You come to hate sin more and more and to love Christ more and more.

We become aware that God is present, and so we begin to be in awe of God, with a holy fear. Without that sense of God's presence, none of the other marks of a true church will exist in a genuine and lasting way.

**Where God is, he is at work to bless and to change. The result will be a godly reverence that will drive away so much of the triviality that marks our lives, changing how we spend our time and what we feed our minds with.**

**2. Unity - vv44-45** And all who believed were together and had all things in common...

This early church was a people united in Christ around the Gospel, but it was also a lived out unity, which showed in two practical ways.

- They physically met together and enjoyed being together – for us at the moment this is difficult, but where there are ways to meet, let's make the most of them, whether it is gathering on Zoom or meeting in small groups, all the while grieving that we can't do more.
- They showed their unity in their generosity to one another, sharing what they had with those in need. (More on this in the lead up to the Gift Day on 27<sup>th</sup> September). It can be hard to take what you own and offer it up to meet the needs of others yet we are called to follow Christ who offered himself up to meet our need of salvation, giving his own righteous life to meet our need for a righteousness to commend us to God.

**For us to truly follow Christ will mean using what God has given us for his purposes**

**3. Gladness vv46-47** And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God.....

- This early church met as a large gathering in the temple, where teaching took place and evangelism happened, showing us that gathering as the whole church is important. It is where we are taught what Christ commands us, and where we publicly share the gospel.
- They also met in small groups, in each other's homes. Ironically, it may be that Covid 19 is forcing us back to New Testament patterns! In their homes, they ate meals together and praised God – here were a group of **people who were glad to be able to meet and their gladness was directed to God as praise.**

What do we talk about when we have people over?

- Do we look for ways to strengthen faith or use the time as an opportunity for gossip?
- Do we express gladness that God has saved us and united us together?
- Are our conversations full of grumbling or full of thankfulness?
- If unbelievers joined us would they envy what we have or be glad they don't belong?

We have many good things to chat about (our families, work, social lives etc) but we need to find ways to turn those into joy filled praise.

**As we leave the home where we have shared a meal, we ought to be thanking God, with joy in our hearts, for having been together and for the opportunity to praise him, just as we would do when we leave our large gathering.**

**4. Growth – v47** And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

As these believers devoted themselves to Christ and to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers, and as the sense of God's presence filled them with awe, so people were being saved every day. We all want the best for our families and so it is with God. As he saves people, they become his family and out of his love for them,

he will put them in a place where they will be properly cared for and nurtured to bring out the best in them. He will choose a church devoted to Christ, like the one described, where he is glad to be present and work.

**He will choose a church where there is unity expressed in togetherness and generosity, all done with gladness.**

From the beginning of time to the end of time, the Bible highlights the presence of God amongst his people. Where his presence is, he is at work to form people into the kind of church we have heard about here. We might think we can make this happen by setting up programmes and running courses, but that is fleshly and won't last. The only way this will happen is by each of us determining to seek God's presence in our lives, so that Broadstone Baptist Church becomes a church where God chooses to place those he saves.

- When we gather, in the limited ways open to us, let us seek God, expecting him to draw near to us so that we will know his presence.
- In our private lives, let us make the pursuit of God the highest priority. Let us be intentional, taking time out to pursue God through his word, and seeking him above all else.

As we do that, he will be at work to form us into this sort of church. That's what happens when God draws near and when he fellowships. We are changed and transformed in his presence. One day that will take on a whole new reality that we've never experienced here on earth. There is a day coming when Jesus Christ will return and John tells us that when we see him, we shall be like him because we shall be with him.

**When we are in the presence of the living God, he changes us into the people we are meant to be.**

**As individuals and as a church, we need to seek the presence of the living God amongst us and then we will see what happens when God draws near.**