

## The “Where” of the Gospel – Community

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Part I

One of the most revolutionary facts about the Gospel, and about the ministry of Jesus in general, is that it both breaks down and rises above all kinds of barriers we associate with religion. So many religious traditions, including first-century Judaism, are bound to a particular language or location in ways that often place God out of reach for anyone who lives in the wrong place or speaks the wrong language. But Jesus was all about establishing a kingdom – a community of the King – made up of people from every tribe and tongue and nation. And it is this community, the church, that becomes the “where” of the Gospel – the “place” where people encounter the presence and power of the living God and are invited to become fellow citizens with them. It is the *community itself* – not a nation or a city or a temple or a shrine – that God both gathers from the world and sends back to the world for His sake, and that becomes His “temple,” the epicenter of His presence and activity in the world. This week we will talk about that community, and how we have the privilege of being invited by God to participate in this wonderful place of His grace – the real “where” of the Gospel.

#### Part II

The text we’ll be looking at this week is taken from Acts chapter 2, where we encounter the first real critical mass Christian community after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. The setting is the exciting days following the Day of Pentecost, where Luke tells us that the fledgling church was “all together in one place” when the Spirit of God fell upon them. When that happened, this little group of believers began to speak in other languages. Both the news and the noise of this spread, and soon a large crowd had gathered – a multilingual crowd of Jews from all around the ancient world, yet all of them hearing the praises of God declared by people who were miraculously speaking languages they had never learned. The Apostle Peter was on hand as this crowd gathered, and he preached Jesus to them and called them to repentance. Many in that crowd believed and were baptized, and Luke tells us that 3000 people were added to their number on that one day.

But as exciting and important as these events are, what comes next is for our purposes also of great importance, for in the days to follow we see this newly birthed church of many thousands of diverse people finding their way forward in being the people of Jesus – the church – the kingdom community where Jesus Himself had promised He would dwell. And in and through this newly born community God was pleased to work, not only building a place of fellowship and support for those who already knew Jesus, but also a place of proclamation, where others heard about Jesus, responded to Him, and joined with His people. The early church was truly the “where” of the Gospel.

Christian community today is meant to be all these things as well. As I mention in the brief video to follow, Christian community is an orienting place for our entire lives – a sort of “hitching post” (or “picket line,” in a different sense than most of us know it) that keeps us from wandering too far, but gives us room to move and flourish and give our lives away to others. Take a few minutes to watch the short video below, consider the group question that follows, and then walk through this week’s study with your group.

**[Watch the short video] - if showing the video during the small group meeting**

**Group question:** When the church is working the way it should, its members are connected *upwardly* to God; they let God change them *inwardly*; they live their lives rooted *among* the people of God; and they impact the world *outwardly* for Jesus’ sake. Think about your own life, and consider one way that you are presently experiencing each of these four dimensions of kingdom life. Then consider one way that you would like to grow in each of these four areas.

## **ENCOUNTERING THE WORD**

**Read: Acts 2:1, 42-47**

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. (Acts 2:1)

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

<sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

<sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common.

<sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

<sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

<sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

## Discuss:

1. In verse 42, we are told that the church was devoted (literally, “continually devoting themselves to”) to four things. What four things was the church devoted to? As you consider these four things, how would you say they connect with the “upward, inward, among, outward” framework mentioned in the opening question above?
2. What does it mean to be “devoted to” something? Give an example of something you or someone you know is devoted to, and tell what it is about your or their behavior that indicates devotion.
3. Go through this passage and find other specific examples of how the church was connecting upwardly to God, how they were opening themselves up to Him; how they were sharing life together among the people of God; and how God was impacting the world outwardly through them.
4. Find as many instances of the words “everyone, all, every, anyone,” etc. in this passage and share a few things you notice about how these words describe the actions and experience of the early church. In what ways do the things you notice show that the church was *devoted to* the four things mentioned in verse 42, and how do these “every and all” words indicate that devotion?
5. Look through this passage again and share a couple things you notice about the *emotional atmosphere* of the early church. What specific words in Luke’s account best express how the church *felt* in these early days together? Why do you think Luke made a point of mentioning these emotional aspects of the church’s experience? Do you think this affected the impact the church had on their surrounding community? Why or why not? What impact do you think the presence of signs and wonders had on this emotional atmosphere?
6. In verses 44 and 45, Luke briefly discusses how this early gathering of believers handled their possessions and wealth. What are a few words you might use to describe the early church in regard to their possessions? How does this make you feel? Why?
7. Name two places Luke mentions that the church met together in these early days. What kinds of things could best happen in the temple courts? What gatherings at Vineyard Columbus are most like the temple courts? What kinds of things could

best happen in people's homes? What gatherings at Vineyard Columbus life are most like the early church in this regard?

8. Verse 47 focuses on some of the outward impact the early church had on the surrounding community. How would you describe that impact? What does it mean to "have favor" with people? How can God use that favor for His purposes? How often were people coming to faith and being added to the church?
9. As you consider this passage overall, what stands out most to you personally? Why?

## **RESPONDING TO JESUS**

### **Personal response(s):**

Spend a few minutes before God this week to consider your own experience of and participation in Christian community in the present season of your life. Tell God what you notice or how you feel as you reflect on these things. Then ask Him to show you one step to take, either publicly or privately, to strengthen the community you are part of, and its impact on the world around you.

### **Group response(s):**

Spend a few minutes discussing as a group which of the four areas (upward, inward, among, outward) are strongest in your group. Which are weakest? Thank God together for what is strongest in your group. Then decide together on one or two simple, concrete steps you can take as a group to grow in the area that is weakest.

**Group prayer:** Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of being among your people, and for the treasure of Your presence in our midst. Truly, Lord, You are the King, and we belong to You. Even as in the days of old, Lord, would you lead us in the ways of knowing Your Word, of sharing our lives and possessions freely with one another, and of connecting with You in prayer? And as we walk in these things, Lord, fill us with joy and awe, and use us, God, to gather more and more people to true faith in You, and to an experience of the very things You have given so freely to us. We love You, Lord, and we thank You, and we pray these things together in Your name. Amen.