

# A Gospel Church

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Good morning. Get myself situated here and settled in. How's everybody doing this morning?

Thank you, Ryan. Ryan's doing well. That's good to know. So for those of you who don't know me or are really bad with names and faces, my name is Tim.

And if you're really bad with names and faces, your memory might not be great. I'm not the regular preacher here. But I was asked to speak to you today. And if you've been coming to Steadfast for the last few weeks, you might have heard that we are preaching through some of our Statement of Faith items.

And today I'll be speaking about item number 13, a gospel church. I'll read it here in a minute. I don't discuss every item within the statement.

And the text that I'm gonna be preaching from is Acts 2, 42 through 47. It's a footnote passage used to support what we believe. For those keeping track, I'm gonna have three main points.

[ 1 : 07 ]     Kind of one of them is more of a sub point, but it's still a main point. And sometimes it's just kind of nice to know these things going in. In case we get off track, you guys can help bring me back. Or if you're keeping track at home, it's kind of nice to know.

So our Statement of Faith says this. We believe that a visible church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the ordinances of Christ governed by his laws and exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by his word.

That is, only scriptural officers are elders or pastors and deacons whose qualifications, claims, and duties are defined in the epistles to Timothy, Titus, and to 1 Peter.

Let's pray before we get started. God, I thank you for this time that we can come together. I thank you for your word and Acts.

And I pray that you can use today, this morning, as a tool to glorify your name and encourage your people. Keep me from error, from anything unhelpful, and help me to be what you need me to be, the tool of the mouthpiece for you.

[ 2 : 29 ]     Help us, help me from getting distracted this morning and help us from being distracted from you and keeping our eyes on you this morning and in general in life.

In your name we pray, amen. So, how many of you like to play games? This is the interactive portion. All right. I like to play games.

How many of you, like me, have opened up a game from a while ago? A while ago, I'm like, I don't remember how we start this. I don't remember where the pieces begin. Yes, yes. Or how the game ends, even.

Yep. How many of you have then opened up the rule book and like, oh, there's a rule I didn't remember about. We've been playing this wrong, apparently. Something is, we're not doing this right.

Yes. We've all kind of been there. This morning is supposed to be something kind of like that. This like, oh yeah, there's this thing, and there's that thing.

[ 3 : 24 ] It's sort of like picking up the game of sequence, and you can't remember, do we start with five cards or seven cards? That's what this morning is supposed to be. It's meant to be an encouragement to push us forward, and I'm not here because I've noticed an action that we need to correct.

I think we usually do a pretty good job of adhering to what our statement says. That being said, there's always room for improvement, and I know I could certainly do better or more in some areas.

So with those caveats said, let's recap Acts, where we're going to be preaching from. We're at the end of Acts 2, but things have happened already.

So Acts, the book of Acts, is Luke's sequel. It did so well at the box office, he wrote a second book, and it follows the Acts of the Apostles. We see immediately after Jesus' ascension, the apostles snapping right into action.

We see the Holy Spirit come as Jesus promised. Peter preaches, and 3,000 people come to Christ. We see the Holy Spirit working powerfully among the apostles. Then our passage, our passage today is going to be a fantastic summary paragraph on the early church.

[ 4 : 34 ] And that is our text for today. Emily has said that she would come and read. It's Acts 2, 42 through 47. Amen. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

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 and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

I like to eat. And in my opinion, there are a few things better than a grilled burger. Put some barbecue sauce on it, a fried onion, a little cheese, maybe some lettuce.

Give or take the lettuce. It's great. Emily and I like to eat out together. And we've been doing it for 15 years. We've got set. I was listing the places to Emily, and she's like, that's a long list. It's a long list.

[ 5 : 46 ] We like to eat Granite City, Lila Thai, Hu Hot, No Bull. Blarney's, Chili's, there's some great places out there. Yes. Kids, when you guys go to a restaurant, what do you expect to see?

I've got some hands. Shout it out. People. People, okay. Tables and chairs. Yes, tables and chairs. A menu. A menu, exactly, yes. What about your silverware? How will you get your silverware?

Exactly, yes. These would be marks you might see at restaurants when you go to eat, and it doesn't matter which restaurant. And then if you were to go to, say, Granite City, most Granite Cities look the same.

Most Chili's look the same. That might be a chain restaurant thing. They tend to look the same. Those would be what you would say are marks of a restaurant. There are certain things you would expect to see.

Tablecloths, booths, people, silverware wrapped in the napkin. This is like the church also. The church should have certain marks as well. What marks are we known for?

[ 6 : 55 ] What marks do we want to be known for? What marks do we not want to be known for? Our church is the local expression of a larger global church. While I'm hoping to be describing the global church, I'm mostly wanting to be describing steadfast church today.

Our statement of faith says we're a gospel church. What is a gospel church? Verse 42 says, And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the churches.

Sorry, I got ahead of myself. The breaking of... Let me start over. Verse 42 says, This is a summary verse.

If this first verse were to describe steadfast, we would all be ecstatic. Any gospel church would be and should be. Here the word devoted is translated using the Step Bible from the word EMI.

E-I-M-I. I don't know if I'm pronouncing that right. I've only ever read it. EMI. It means to be and would mean I exist. Used only when emphatic. And I love this meaning.

[ 8 : 05 ] Some other uses of this word EMI would be found in Matthew 5, verse 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is EMI, the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5, 10.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is EMI, the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5, 13. You are, EMI, the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. And then my favorite is Matthew 3, 17. And behold, a voice from heaven said, this is, Emi, my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

I'm not a language nerd. For me, language is more of a means to an end. But when we look at other uses of the same word, it helps define the word more for us. With those other uses in mind, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.

The study of the apostles' teaching was such a part of who they were. This devoted, I think of myself as a devoted 49ers fan, and it consumes who I am at times.

[ 9 : 10 ] We've all probably seen photos of people's houses that have their team's paraphernalia, crazy in the front yard. They've got tattoos, and they only wear the apparel.

That's a part of who they are. That is more devoted and more consuming than what I am as a fan, but that's what they were for this. It was consuming.

They were wearing the apparel. It was a part of who they were, and it was all they could think about and talk about. Since the New Testament hadn't been written yet, many of these people had never heard Jesus' words, or at least not to the full extent that we have gotten today.

They would have only read the Old Testament, and now the apostles' teaching and the newly descended Holy Spirit to use as their guidance. They devoted themselves to these teachings. Can you imagine what it would have been like to hear Peter talking about walking on water, or John telling about Lazarus coming out of the grave, or James talking about the transfiguration?

These men, with their firsthand accounts of Jesus and his ministry, I'm sure there were many things they saw that were never recorded, and these stories would have been incredible.

[ 10 : 18 ] Their lives were marked by the study of God's word. It was a part of who they were. R. Kent Hughes in the Church of Fire says that when the Spirit reigns, God's people continually devote themselves to the study of his word.

This is the first characteristic, but more than study is needed. Once, in introducing Richard Wurmbrandt, who was another preacher of his day, he described his church as a Bible-believing church.

Wurmbrandt stopped him and paused and said slowly, are you a Bible-living church? It's also worth noting that the early church submitted themselves to the church leaders.

In devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, they are submitting themselves to the apostles' leadership. It's a very good example for us to see. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, continuing on in verse 2.

The and here is connecting the apostles' teaching with the fellowship. To me, those feel like they should be on different playing fields. The apostles' teaching, and then there's fellowship when there's time.

[ 11 : 27 ] That's what my brain tells me should happen. But for them, the and connects. This fellowship also defined them.

The word fellowship here is koinonia. It means participation. Fellowship and close association between persons, emphasizing what is common between them by extension, participation, sharing, contribution, gift, the outcome of such close relationship.

The word doesn't appear in the Gospels. The Greek that was spoken out in the streets of the day was called koin Greek because it was the common Greek. It's the same root word and the idea of commonness. The same word is used again in our passage in verse 44 and 45.

And all who believed were together and had all things in common, koin. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributed the proceeds to all as any had need. We see in this passage that this isn't the same type of fellowship that is often talked about in church today.

It wasn't two guys shooting the breeze over coffee and cookies in the sanctuary talking about who's going to make the playoffs. Or two women discussing the latest shoe or purse fashions. I don't know what women talk about.

[ 12 : 38 ] That's my guess in my mind. They had a commonness. They shared. Their parents would be proud of them. They shared.

When I say they shared, we see that they shared their possessions and the proceeds from selling their possessions. But that word commonness isn't limited to possessions. It means they shared who they were.

In addition to opening up to each other, they were being together. I can think of a lot of things that this might have included, this sharing. Sharing stories.

Sharing a meal. Lending a hand. Lending a shoulder to cry on, perhaps. In our day, age, and culture, it's easy to write a check and forget about it. Admittedly, when my kids need to do a fundraiser, I would so much rather write a check and go on about my day rather than working the snack shack with whoever might be there, the other parents, and shame on me.

I don't want to be inconvenienced with the work or the effort, but not the early church. They were willing to cut the check, but they were also willing to do the work. They broke bread in their homes together.

[ 13 : 47 ] Fellowship was costly. It cost them time, resources, and effort. At the end of verse 47, we see and the Lord added to their number day by day those that were being saved.

It was costly, but those that were added to the number would agree that it was worth the time, money, and effort. Again, at the end of chapter 4 of Acts, we can see another summary text.

Acts 4, verses 32 through 37 says, Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

With great power, the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Thus Joseph, who was also called the apostle Barnabas, which means son of encouragement, a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

[ 14 : 56 ] It's so similar to our passage today also. And as a side note, in verse 42, that same Greek word, coin, they had all things in common, was there as well. For me, this point, this costly fellowship is the one that convicts me the most.

I'm an introvert, and as an introvert, I love solitude, I love peace and quiet, I love sitting quietly at home in the dark. I even have a rally cry with a few of my close friends that are also introverts.

Introverts unite, alone and in separate rooms. This passage rips my natural tendency to shreds, not just the devotion to fellowship that we see in verse 42, but also in verse 44.

All who believed were together. And again in verse 47, day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes. In verse 47, having favor with all the people.

It implies that they were with all the people. It's unlikely they were as isolated from other believers the way that we tend to be as the American church. When I was asked to preach this passage, I was talking about it with my nephew, and he pointed me out to, pointed out this following connection as we were talking.

[ 16 : 07 ] And I think there's some wisdom here. As I fight the tendency to sit quietly in my own home, alone in the dark, he was pointing me to 2 Kings chapter two. Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophet cried to Elisha, Your servant, my husband, is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.

And Elisha said to her, What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house? And she said, Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil. Then he said, Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbors, empty the vessels, and not too few.

Then go in and shut the door behind yourself. and your sons, and pour into all the vessels. And when one is full, set it aside. So she went from him, shut the door behind herself and her sons.

And as she poured them, brought the vessel, and as they brought the vessel, and she poured that, I'm sorry. And as she poured, they brought the vessels to her. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, Bring me another vessel.

And he said to her, There is not another. Then the oil stopped flowing. She came and told the man of God, and he said, Go sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest. That's 2 Kings 4 verses 1 through 7.

[ 17 : 23 ] I trust that my creator and sustainer can fill me and my pots like he did for this widow and her pots of oil. In community, we are like these pots of oil that pour ourselves out to others, but we're still able to be full ourselves.

Because I know my audience and their enjoyment of the Old Testament, another Old Testament reference, Malachi chapter 3, talks about those that gather together making Jesus' name great.

I think it's important to mention that this passage isn't talking about believers praying together. I'll read it. Malachi 3, 16 through 18. Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another.

The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son and serves him.

Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. And again, I want to point out that these believers aren't praying together.

[ 18 : 33 ] They're talking about God together. And so I'll read that first verse again. Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them. A book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name.

These believers were together talking about God. They were having a small group or Bible study or they just couldn't stop talking about the Lord. Together, when God hears them, God hears us when we are making his name great.

A book of remembrance was written for God of those who feared him and esteemed his name. Does that make anybody else want to have a small group tonight and maybe even every other night this week? I think we can notice these are people that God calls his treasured possessions.

They are the ones he spares. These are the people God pays attention to and are written in his book of remembrance. Going back to verse 42.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread. Some scholars are divided on whether this breaking of bread means communion or if it's sharing a meal.

[ 19 : 45 ] I'm not a scholar or even a smart man. And I certainly don't know more than the scholars, so I don't really know which it means. But when you look later on, verse 46 mentions the breaking of bread again, but separates, receive their food.

So it seems to be referring to two separate things. So I'm going to kind of proceed as if it is two separate things. Now the early Christians chose to focus on remembering Christ's shed blood.

Of course it was a focus of the apostles' teaching, and I'm sure it was front of mind during fellowship. Luke recognizes the importance of drawing attention to intentional time the early church spent following Jesus' command and remembering his sacrifice.

We see both their obedience and their emphasis on Jesus' atoning work. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers.

This is yet another example of how the early church connected themselves to Christ. While these would have been individual prayers, there was probably also some repeated memorized prayer. And we see earlier in Acts 1, verses 12 through 14, then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath-day journey away.

[ 21 : 00 ] And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the southerer of Alphaeus and Simon the zealot and Judas the son of James.

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus and his brothers. We see the early church devoting themselves to prayer.

The early church and early Christians are modeling Daniel's consistency. They are continually devoting themselves to prayer. Like Daniel in his book in the sixth chapter with the lion's den, Ryan preached that Daniel's prayer was an act of consistency instead of an act of defiance.

We see this consistency once again lived out, but this time it's in the lives of the apostles in the early church. The Holy Spirit had just descended on the apostles and the early church. We can see that when the Holy Spirit is active and working in his early church, the believers studied, loved, and cared for others, obeyed, and worshipped.

I think that it's a template worth noticing and worth following. When a template like this is followed, we can see what God chose to do in his church at that time. The Lord added to their number day by day.

[ 22 : 15 ] In Matthew 16, 18, Jesus says to Peter, and I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Jesus promised to build his church.

I want to be careful and clear that I'm not making if this, then that type of statements here. God can build his church in many different ways. One important thing to point out is that it was the Lord adding to their numbers.

It wasn't the cool light show or good music, the riveting playoff conversation and shoe and purse fashions. God remembered his promise to build his church.

Here we have a template for how it was done in the early church. Ryan also pointed out in Daniel that our faith isn't a magic genie that causes our troubles to disappear. Similarly, having the Holy Spirit working amongst the church doesn't mean that we will be kept in unity with one another or have a loving community that is willing to sell their possessions for us.

This isn't the promise for us in this passage. This passage in Acts 2 is a descriptive passage. It isn't prescriptive. This isn't a math equation and if we follow the above model we'll end up with the correct numbers or more bodies in the chairs.

[ 23 : 25 ] But I think it is a model to look at closely and to follow their example. As Jeremy pointed out in Daniel 12, the wise are faithful. This is a model of a faithful church.

It's a model we can faithfully imitate similar to the way we are to imitate Paul as he imitates Jesus. When we live in such a way that we are devoted to the study of the word of God, when we are devoted to studying how God wants us to live, we will love God and love people.

We will want to become more obedient. We will want to worship. Living the type of life that God tells us to live is also the sort of life that attracts more people to his church. We are lucky today that we also get to partake in communion as we do every Sunday.

And so we get to live that model, part of that model today. And Mike Diley has graciously come, said he would be willing to lead us in communion.