

# A Healthy Church and Prayer

**Acts 1:1-12:1 Acts 1:12-14, 2:42-47, 4:23-31, 12:1-5**

**Sunday January 9<sup>th</sup> 2011 Morning Service**

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We will look at the place of prayer in Jerusalem church as recorded in Acts 1-12. We need to be

1) to be careful: some unusual things going on in early chapters of Acts: the Temple is still operating & the apostles of Christ are present working miracles to validate the message: that is not our situation today. But this church was wonderfully alive & must be recorded for us to learn from.

2) to inspire not condemn: we've all failed to pray as might & should. We need to see what could be.

3) to change: we each need God's word to change & shape way we think & act about prayer. Prayer is at heart of what we are about as Christians & as a church.

## 1. Church Began In Prayer

1:14 'They all joined together constantly in prayer'. Why this praying together?

Corporate prayer binds us to Jesus: heart of prayer is not 'I want this & I want that': but 'we want You'. We are not just individual Christians; we are a church brought together by one person: Jesus.

Corporate prayer binds together. In Greek it says 'these all were devoting themselves with one mind to prayer': many of them yet in prayer their minds were bound together. The church that prays together is much more likely to stay together.

It was on this praying group that the Holy Spirit was poured out in Acts 2. This chapter sets out some of the characteristics of a healthy church.

1) **The Proclamation of Jesus** by the church: Peter preaches about death & resurrection of Jesus: that is his great theme v.36-40

2) **The Life of the Holy Spirit** in the church: set out in v42-47. V42 'They devoted themselves'

:to the apostles' teaching:

:to the fellowship: rich NT word about sharing or participating in the life of God & therefore sharing in relationship with each other. Some of the ways that worked out are spelled out. Key word is 'together': v44-47

:to the breaking of bread: kept the Cross central: kept remembering what Jesus has done. And how we must forgive each other because God has forgiven us.

:to prayer:

:to others: see v41 & end v47 not inward looking or self-occupied. These are the marks of a healthy church. Prayer is there among those key marks. Not the only mark. But it is key. There are 21 references to prayer in Acts 1 to 12. Are we devoting selves to prayer?

## 2. The Church Continued In Prayer

**1. Pattern of joining with others to pray:** 3:1 'One day Peter & John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer, at three in the afternoon'. It was the practice of devout Jews to join with others at the times of prayer. In the same way churches all over world organise specific regular occasions to pray together.

**2. People of prayer together:** in Acts 4 after the apostles were threatened v24 'they raised their voices together in prayer to God'. They could have all gone home to pray. But they prayed together. Why?

1) they belonged together: v23 'Peter & John went back to their own people'. To talk & pray together was the natural expression of their belonging together.

2) they identified with each other: What encouragement it must have been to Peter & John after threats & hostility to have believers gather around them in prayer.

3) they wanted to move forward together: v29 'Now Lord consider their threats & enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness'.

4) there is power in corporate prayer: v31 'after they prayed the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit & spoke the word of God boldly'. There is something exciting about a group believers praying together to the living God.

**3. Priority of prayer in service.** The ministry of the apostles is unique in some ways, but is also an example to us all. The key task of apostles was to teach God's truth. But in their service of Christ, they prioritised prayer. See 6:4 'we will give our attention to prayer & the ministry of the word'. Note that they put prayer first. That is good pattern for all Christian service. When Peter raises Tabitha from the dead in 9:40 we read first 'he got down on his knees and prayed'. They prayed & then they taught. The apostles had a special role in prayer but prayer is the seedbed of all Christian service. Paul tells whole church at Colossae 'Devote yourselves to prayer being watchful & thankful' Col 4:2. All of us, if we are serving Christ, must bathe whatever we do in prayer, just as the apostles did showing us by their example. Col 3:17 'Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him'.

### 4. Personal prayer.

See Stephen facing death 7:59

See Saul praying when he had been blinded 9:11

See Peter in Joppa who 'went up on the roof to pray' 10:9.

See Cornelius in prayer 'he prayed to God regularly' 10:2.

**5. People of prayer together:** at the beginning in Acts 4 & at the ending of the account of the Jerusalem church in Acts 12 we read of the church in prayer together. James has been executed by Herod & Peter is awaiting execution. 'But', v5, 'the church was earnestly praying to God for him'. & v12 'many people had gathered & were praying' Natural response of the church to come together to pray in the light of the spiritual battle. And we are in a spiritual battle and need to pray. Satan's greatest victory is this: when we don't feel that we need pray. It's somebody else's job.

The Jerusalem church shouts out to us across the centuries, 'Brothers & sisters in Bath, pray.'

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