

Becoming Uncommonly Common

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Thank you so much. You may be seated. What a joy it is, a privilege to be at First Baptist this morning to worship together and what a privilege it is for me to welcome Jason and Heather St. Clair and this is Walker Wade. They call him Walker. He was born on January 20, 2016 and he is joining his big sister, Scarlett, who has a pretty blue bow in her hair this morning. And I love this family, I love the way that today you are putting spiritual markers down in your lives. And I want to remind you that there are two spiritual markers being placed. I think Walker wants to grab maybe the guitar and help Jeffrey play back here. There you go. There we go. But you guys are putting spiritual markers down in your lives as parents but you're also putting a spiritual marker down in Walker's life as well, and in the years to come, you will take time to talk with him about what you're doing today and to help him to understand that what you're doing today is not about salvation, this is not about him becoming a Christian today, this is about him being given back to the Lord from whence he came. You know that he's a precious gift that God has entrusted to you and we look forward to that day when he will embrace Christ as his personal Lord and Savior.

I love the verse that you picked out today for Walker's dedication because this is a verse that takes us back to the Old Testament and reminds us that you are participating in a long-standing time of, an event, a tradition, if you will, of dedicating children to the Lord. It's from 1 Samuel 1:27-28. This is what was prayed over Samuel, "I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there." What a beautiful reminder that he is a gift, that Walker is a gift from the Lord to you all.

Let me remind you of what your responsibilities are as parents as well. God tells us in his word that you are "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." What a beautiful reminder of your responsibility as parents. So let me just ask you this morning, Jason and Heather, will you accept the magnificent responsibility God has given you to be parents to Walker and do you commit yourselves afresh and anew to the Lord to be the godly parents he needs for you to be? Is that your commitment? I know it is. And will you protect and nurture this precious gift that God has given you and will you teach Walker

through godly living the ways of the Lord that are consistent with his word? Is that your commitment? Absolutely. And you have family here that are with you and I want to remind you all that you have a very important role in this process as well. You have instilled and guided your children to faith in the Lord Jesus and you have an opportunity to continue that legacy as you encourage them and support them as they pour into little Walker's life. So I want to ask you as a family and to us as a church body, a church family, will you join with me in saying to them that we will be everything they need for us to be as they grow little Walker up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? If so, say, "We will." We will.

Let's pray together.

God, we love you. Thank you for loving us. Thank you for Jason and Heather. Thank you for their commitment to you, for their commitment to establish their home on the absolute foundation of Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives. Thank you for Walker that has been born to them, Father. Thank you for his little life and the joy that he has brought to their home. I pray right now that you would rest your hand in his little life, Lord. I pray that as he grows up that he will learn of the ways of the Lord; that he will learn to be a warrior for you; that he will grow up to be a godly man who pursues you with every ounce of his being. Lord, we will rejoice the day that he places his faith and trust in you, and until that time, Father, protect him, nurture him, guide, honor and direct him, Father. It's our prayer in Christ's name. Amen.

God bless you all. Well, thank you so much for being here as a part of our worship experience today on this day of adjustments in the life of First Baptist, Opelika. This is the very first day, obviously, of our schedule change and I really appreciate you all being with us today and of being a part of this worship experience.

There are several of you, many of you I know that our guests of our fellowship this morning and we are so excited that you are here and so glad that you have made the decision to be a part of First Baptist this morning. You have honored us by doing that. We want to know that you're here, guests. The way that we do that here at First Baptist is there a detachable card on the worship guide that you were given this morning. If you'll detach that and fill it out and place it in the offering plate a little bit later in the service, that would help us immensely unless you are a very very first time guest. If you're a first time guest, would you detach that card, fill it out, and at the end of the service we are inviting you to come across near our Welcome Center over to our Connection Center, we're calling that now, and have the opportunity to meet some folks there and dialogue with them, to meet Pastor Jeff personally. We have a gift for you, one of his books that he'll be glad to sign for you and just have some time to interact and get to know you a little bit.

First time guests, we would love for you to do that and I will remind you of that at the end of the service but we are so glad to be able to just take a moment and worship the Lord in every way through this worship experience and right now we are going to worship in the giving of our tithes and offerings. The Bible teaches us that we are to do

that. It is an act of worship. It is a privilege for us to bring resources that God has entrusted us back to him. So let's pause for a moment and just dedicate this time to the Lord.

Father, thank you that you have graced us with your enormous blessings and now during this time, Father, we recognize that all things are yours. You entrust us with resources. We are to be good stewards of those resources and so, Father, we bring back to you today as an act of worship, as an act of obedience, as an act of praise and worship and adoration of your name, resources that you have given to us. Thank you for them, Father. Use them. May what we do today in bringing back to you make people be reached throughout this world with the good news of Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly trust on Jesus' name.
Christ alone,
Cornerstone,
Weak made strong
In the Savior's love.
Through the storm,
He is Lord,
Lord of all.

"When darkness seems to hide its face,
I rest on his unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.
Christ alone,
Cornerstone,
Weak made strong,
In the Savior's love.
Through the storm,
He is Lord,
Lord of all."

This morning as we prepare to be challenged by the word of God, today's message is a message of introspection. It's not a message that we necessarily want to hear but it is a message that we need to hear. So I'm going to ask you this morning if you'll just join me in a time of quiet or silent prayer as we just go before the Lord and ask him to give us a heart that is prepared to hear what we need to hear, not necessarily what we want to hear.

Let's pray together.

Lord, we come this morning and we admit and we confess that we have spent the better part of days gone by seeking and bargaining and doing all that we can expending energy

to experience or to have what we want to have. Lord, we recognize this morning that you have a message that we need to have. Lord, I pray that you would give us open minds, give us open hearts, not just to hear but to do what James 1 says, to be a doer of the word. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Acts 2 and as we gather today, whether you're a long-term member or a first time guest, I want to welcome you today as we begin a journey. It's really a journey of preparation. In fact, I'm going to allude more to this at the end of the message but today we are about one year out from an exciting opportunity, a discipleship adventure together as a church body that will involve everyone from senior adults to the preschool and everything in between. I'll get to those details a little bit later but as we go on this journey, as we prepare together as a church body as a fellowship, oftentimes we have opinions or ideas of what we think it should or should not be and so I thought it would be fitting today to go back to the first church, to go back to where we started, because every church, every church in every city, in every place, has a date in which the congregation was formed and every one of us as individual believers, we have a date and a time in which our testimony began when we were saved, but no matter who you are as an individual or what church you currently or at times past have attended, we all go back to Acts 2.

In fact, let me set up Acts 2 before we read it. We know about the ministry of Jesus Christ, 3 1/2 years in length. We know that he was crucified on a cruel cross. We know that three days later he rose from the dead. Then the Bible records that for about 40 days he met with, he taught and he preached to the apostles and to others. Then we know from Acts 1, the Bible made it very clear that he ascended on high and Hebrews 7 says, "to ever make intercession on our behalf." But Jesus left them some instructions. He said, "I need you to wait here." He didn't tell them how long though we discover later it was about seven days. He said, "I need you to wait in this place for the Holy Spirit is going to come and visit you and you're never going to be the same again."

Acts 2 is the feast of Pentecost. The Bible says that there were representatives from every people group, every nation under heaven, who had gathered for this religious experience. But rather than a religious experience, on that hillside with the apostles, they discovered there was a relationship experience with Jesus Christ that was about to take place and what we know as the visible manifestation of the church of Jesus Christ was initiated there in Acts 2. And I want us to go to the end of Acts 2, I want us to see what did we look like when we began, and not so much to go back in time but more of a rediscovery that we as individual believers, as family members, as church members, as the community of faith universal, this journey that we're going on is to recapture or possibly even rediscover who we were all along meant to be.

Beginning in Acts 2:42 it says,

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. 44 And all

that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Now, this is an account of where every single one of us came from as individuals and as a local church. This is where we started and what we see is that the early church, the first church, had a common experience. What I mean by that is they were all on the same page spiritually which is later going to manifest to being on the same page physically. Something changed that day, something happened in their lives that changed them, not just forever but in their following days on planet earth.

The first change or the first common experience that they had was inward. Something happened on the inside. It wasn't just an expression of religious endeavor, something happened inside of each and every person there in Acts 2 and Jesus said it was going to happen. In Luke 9:23, he made this very prophetic statement, he said, "If anyone come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." I want you to think about that statement: deny one's self. That means it's got to change on the inside. If we want to see a change on the outside, it has to begin on the inside and Jesus said if we follow him, if we are his disciples, if we are going to do what he said that we need to do, we first must deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him daily. That's an inward change that must take place.

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus has what we call the farewell discourse. It begins at about John 12 and 13 and goes up to the point of the crucifixion. Here he is in the upper room, he's washing the apostles' feet and after doing so in chapter 15, he makes this very stark statement, he says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him will bear much fruit for apart from me you can do nothing." Now, we love that last statement. I love that last statement, "apart from Jesus we can do nothing," but notice what he said, "If you abide in me and I abide in you." You see, when we come to that point in our lives where we understand that we've sinned, when we come to that point when we realize we have rebelled against the things of God and we understand that Jesus is the only means of salvation and Jesus is the only means of forgiveness and we call out to him and we cry out to him, we don't just "take it up a religious notch," something happens on the inside. He abides in us. That's why 1 Corinthians 6 makes it very clear that we are the temple and the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

You know, this would manifest itself some days later in Acts 5. We go through a string of persecution where there is actual persecution for them preaching and teaching the name of Jesus Christ and times are difficult. But in Acts 5 in the midst of persecution, in the midst of all kinds of struggles, there is a statement made in verse 29 that cannot occur unless something has changed on the inside. It says there in Acts 5:29, "we would rather obey God than man." That only happens on the outside when something has changed on the inside. And when it says here that they continued in the apostles' doctrine, they

continued in their fellowship and the breaking of bread, this was not a religious expression, this was not a religious service, something had happened, something had changed on the inside that was now manifesting itself on the outside.

It started on the inside and then I like to call it the upwardness. In other words, their relationship to God changed. How they related to God changed. In fact, how they spoke to and heard from and obeyed, it all changed. This inward transformation turned into an outward change of expression. Jesus had made a statement earlier in John 8:31 and 32, he said, "If you continue in my word, you are my disciples indeed. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." What's interesting is just a few days earlier, just a few months earlier, these individuals here in Acts 2 that make up what we know as the first church, they lived their entire life surrounded by being in the right city on the right day with the right number of certain animals for a sacrifice. It was all about checking off a box. It was all about crossing off a T. And all of a sudden what Jesus said had come true, "If you continue in my word." No longer was it about religion. It was now about relationship.

Then in that farewell discourse, he made this statement, "If you continue in my word, then you shall ask what you will and it will be given unto you." Think about that for just a moment. If we continue in his word, then whatever it is that we feel that we have need of him, he will provide. How many times have you wondered, "God, why is it that I feel like my prayers are hitting the ceiling? Why is it that I feel like there is just a staleness to this?" Is it possible because you're not in his word? Is it possible because you're not doing what he's asked you to do and being what he has called you to be? And if we don't continue in his word, how can we expect to receive what we need?

You know, later in Acts 4, one of my favorite verses in the Bible is Acts 4:31. Now, let me give you a little context here. Again, a wave of persecution. The early church having ups and downs and struggles and difficulties. They are released from prison. They go back to the fellowship, they go back to the church body at large and they share with them what's happened to them. Then a prayer meeting commences and if you read Acts 4, there is a prayer that is offered that I daresay I don't know if I have the guts to ever pray. I mean, the reason I say I don't have the guts to pray it is I know that lightning has a 12 foot radius and I'm scared sometimes because in Acts 4, here's what the prayer is. Here is the New Revised Jeff paraphrased version of it, "God, you told us if we did what you told us to do, you would show up in a supernatural fashion. We have done what you've told us to do, you haven't showed up, what's wrong with you, God?" Can you imagine praying that prayer? Can you imagine literally getting in the face of God and saying, "I've done everything you've asked me to do, why don't you hold up your end of the bargain?" Do you know what the Bible says in Acts 4:31? It says, "the building shook." I bet it did. I mean, if you've got that kind of prayer life, if you've got that kind where you can say, "God, I've done what you've told me to do, where are you?" It says, "the building shook, they were filled with the Holy Ghost and they spoke the word of God with boldness." The building didn't shake because of judgment or condemnation, the building shook with the blessings and the favor and the boldness of God.

You see, what happened is when this early church gathered together, yes, there was this common inward experience but it changed how they related to God. You see, no longer did they have to go to a certain building at a certain time with a certain object, no longer did a certain person from a certain tribe have to give them the thumbs up or the thumbs down on whatever they had brought on that specific feast. Now they could go directly into the throne room of God. They had a personal relationship with the one who formed and fashioned them. You see, it changed everything.

It also changed outwardly. Notice it says they continued in fellowship, they continued in the breaking of bread. Their relationship not just with God changed, their relationship with each other did. You know, Jesus in the farewell discourse made this statement in John 13:34 and 35, he said, "A new commandment that I give unto you, that you love one another as I have loved you and by this all men will know that you are my disciples." I mean, it changed everything. The way they treated each other. I mean, just think back just a couple weeks ago in this story, and what we know as the famous Passover event, there were people who were making a profit and using what the Bible calls filthy lucre and extreme interest rates to take advantage of their fellow individuals when they came on that feast. Now these people who took advantage of them, these individuals who were making a profit of them are now beside them kneeling together as a church body. It changed how they related to each other.

It also changed how they related to the world. You know, in Acts 2 it says that all the nations gathered. Those nations not only had sovereign states represented, they had various tribes of Judaism represented. It was a group who often identify themselves as "us and them." But Galatians 3 said that that wall of partition had been broken down; there was no longer a Jew or a Gentile, a male or a female. That in Christ Jesus we are simply his children.

You see, when this inward transformation happened, it changed how they related to God, it changed how they related to each other and when you get to Acts 17, something occurs there in verse 6 that I long to see in our day as well. Let me set up Acts 17 for just a moment. It's not the story of the apostles, it's not the story of the early deacons, it's a story of a man by the name of Jason. You may not have realized there is a character in the Bible by the name of Jason. Jason shows up and the governmental leaders and the political elite in his day, they are frustrated and they are upset and they are bothered by the name of Jesus and the church and the impact and the influence that it's making. And there in Acts 17:6, listen to this accusation, listen to this crime, listen to what the church is accused of doing. Are you ready for this? "They have turned the world upside down." I've got news for you, church, we need some Acts 17:6 today. The world turned upside down, not for a political agenda, not for a program or a procedure, but the person of Jesus Christ, because in Acts 17, all they did was live for Jesus, all they did was preach Jesus, all they did was teach Jesus and, listen, Jesus changes us on the inside which then translates to a change on the outside and it changes everything. That's what their experience was. This is what happened in Acts 2 when it says they had all these things in common.

You know, if you have a common experience, you're going to have a common expression. You're going to use the same words, you're going to have the same vocabulary and verbiage and as we continue the story in Acts 2:44, notice it says this, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple." What did this common expression look like? How did they live their faith out just day after day after day? Well, the first thing we see is there was an inward change within the body of believers, within what we call the church of Jesus Christ. Notice it says that they sold, they parted, they gave to those that were in need. Now, I'm going to be very clear this morning: this verse is not a defense of what we might call Christian communism. This is not a defense of biblical Marxism where there are no levels or degrees or such but everybody is on the same plane and there are no differences between this and that.

No, that's not the picture that we get. In fact, much contrary, the picture is probably best clearly understood in light of Acts 5. Acts 5, we have a couple by the name of Ananias and Sapphira. The Bible makes it clear that they came and they had sold a piece of property and they had sold that property and they were going to give the goods to those that it said that were in need. But the Bible records that they lied about it and when they lied about it, they were struck dead on the spot. I'm not here to talk about the being struck dead part, what I'm interested in is the part that they came not to tithe, not to give an offering, but they came to give the entire thing because they knew there were others who needed it more than they did. There was a complete change. It went from being self-ish to self-less, from making sure I brought the right sacrifice to do you have what you need. Can you imagine what that would have looked like? Now, it's not that everybody had the same economic level, it's the fact that if somebody had an abundance and somebody had a lack thereof, they were willing to assist and help out. It really isn't about the stuff as it is about their selflessness. It was more important that somebody else have what they need than I have what I want. Do you realize that's how we started? That's how we began, that other people and their needs were more important than myself and my wants.

I remember some years ago I had the privilege of seeing a man who was very successful in life, very much wealthy economically, had a lot of stuff, but he was a brand-new believer in Jesus Christ and he was learning to be selfless. He was a man that by his own admittance had been incredibly selfish. It was all about how much can I gain? How much can I have? How much can I acquire? I'll never forget the day that he stopped by the church office, he knocked on my door and he said, "Jeff, man, I've got something I've got to show you. You're not going to believe it." Now, he understood what some of you are learning about me, I've got a car problem. I've got a car fetish, to be honest with you. Some guys struggle with two legs, I struggle with four tires. I'm just being honest. I have an issue and he knew I was a big car guy and so I went out in the parking lot and there stood before me one of the most beautiful brand-new exotic Porsche sports cars I've ever seen. It was just incredible. But he wasn't talking about the car. He wasn't talking about the horsepower. He wasn't talking about the 0 to 60 time. He was talking about what God was doing in his life and I said, "Friend, what do you mean? What is God doing in your life?" He said, "Jeff, you don't get it." I said, "What?" He said, "I traded my Ferrari in on

this." A couple of months later, the Porsche was traded, and a couple of years later, he was driving a normal SUV like many of you. Why? Because as he began to see what Jesus had done in him, it was more important that others' needs be met than his wants be satisfied and Jesus changed him from the inside out.

So when it says they had all things in common, it wasn't just a renouncing of material items as much as it was a perspective of what others need is more important than what I want. But then we also see that this common expression wasn't just inwardly within the church but it was how they related to God. It was upward. Notice it says they met daily in the temple. Now, let me explore that for just a moment. You have accounts over and over in the Bible about where they met in the synagogues or they met in the temple on a weekly basis, much like you and I would today, but it says they met daily in the temple. So what we see is their relationship to God wasn't just an every seven day thing for a few moments, it was an every day thing.

A few years ago I had the privilege of going on an evangelistic trip. Now, it wasn't a mission trip. A mission trip typically you provide services or means or educational things so as to share the Gospel. This wasn't so much missional, it was just pure evangelism. We went into an area that was very unchurched, unchristian. We gathered in athletic arenas for the sole purpose of just sharing the Gospel. The reason I share that with you is every night we were in these large athletic stadiums, actually they were cricket stadiums, and I still don't understand the rules of cricket. If you do, help me out. I've watched hours of that sport and it's like baseball with...never mind. Okay, that's a whole other issue. I'm sorry, cricket bothers me because I don't get it. It's a great sport, I just don't get it. How do those games last like for weeks? I mean, it's just amazing. And how do they keep their uniforms so white? Have y'all ever thought about that? Okay, I digress. I apologize for that.

But I'm over there in this place and it's not the large crusade, it's not the big athletic arena, it's a small little church. In fact, it's the living room of a pastor's house. It's where they gathered every Sunday morning to worship. We went and we began the worship service and one of the things I like to do when I'm a guest, I like to say, "Well, pastor, how long do you normally preach?" Because I like to go about the same length so that people are used to it. And he said, "Oh, I go about three or four hours." I said, "You preach for three or four hours?" I said, "I'll do my best." I went 90 minutes. I mean, that's all the gas I had in the tank. I went 90 minutes. Some of you are thinking, "I'm glad you don't go 90 here." I went 90 minutes. I'll never forget it, he put his arm around me and he said, "Oh, don't worry, preacher," he said, "you went longer than any other white man." I took it as a compliment.

We then followed the service by what we technically would call lunch but by the time of the day, it was almost supper. We had been there for about four hours and I asked him, I said, "Are your services this long every week?" He said, "Oh, not just every week, every day." I said, "Every day?" He said, "Oh yeah, tomorrow night we're going to gather for a prayer meeting and then the next night we'll have a worship service, then prayer meeting. We alternate every day." I said, "You mean to tell me that your church," this was about

30 or 40 people, "you mean every single day of the week?" He said, "Every day." I said, "How long do those services last?" He said, "Three or four hours." I said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa," I said, "In America, we are fortunate to get together for about 60 minutes once a week, much less hours every day." And he shared something with me that night, one of the most profound things that I have ever heard theologically in my life. Listen to what he said, he said, "Jeff, let me share something with you. Over in America you all want Jesus, over here we need him." Now, I'm going to let that sink in for just a moment. In America we want Jesus, over here we need him.

I want you to think about what was happening in Acts 2 when it says they gathered daily. Many of these individuals because they believed in Jesus, they had lost their family. Many had lost their finances. Many had lost their reputation. They had now become outcasts. No longer was Jesus the proverbial icing on their cake, he was the whole cake. It wasn't just a matter of, "I want him," they needed him. So what we see is that the way they express themselves, not only was it an attitude of inward selflessness but it changed how they related to God. It wasn't something or God wasn't just something they wanted, he was somebody they desperately needed.

Then outwardly. Notice it says they continued and they went about and that the Lord added every day to the church. Now, they began with about 3,000 folks and then there in verse 47 it says that the Lord added every single day. Now, I want you to imagine what this would have looked like because it's not hard to on this campus. If you were to take a survey of this campus on any given weekend from our nursery to our college students to those in our worship services all over campus, any given weekend we have roughly about 3,000 people that are on this campus. We have about the number of people that they had there in Acts 2 and it says that the Lord added daily to them. I want you to imagine with me, just think about this: what would your church experience look like, what would this campus look like, how would it affect you if next week when you showed up there were twice as many people on campus as there are today? I know what some of you are thinking, "Where am I going to park?" That's a really good question. I mean, you might have to park on the other side of the interstate. I don't know. Some of you are thinking, "Well, where am I going to sit? How are we going to get around?" It would create chaos here and chaos there but wouldn't it be wonderful? Wouldn't it be amazing? You see, here's the problem: in Acts 2 it was a blessing to be inconvenienced by the crowds, today oftentimes we see it as an inconvenience to be blessed. "Where am I going to sit? Where am I going to park?" I've got news for you and this may not be well received: the longer you have to walk to church from a parking space is the better that things are happening because that means that there are people that are coming and people that are being ministered to and being ministers thereof. 3,000+ added daily.

Some years ago I had a friend of mine, I met with him for lunch one day and he said, "Do you mind if I bring kind of a third wheel?" I said, "That's fine." He brought one of his mentors, not just a spiritual mentor, he brought a business mentor. This guy was a businessman and real good with money and finances and such. So we got to talking and this man was faithful in his local church and just loved the things of God and he posed a question to me that day that I hope you'll find as intriguing as I did. He said, "Jeff, if I

wrote you a check for \$10 million right now, what would you do with it?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "That's why I'm not writing it because you don't know what to do with it." Let me say that question spiritually in this place: what would you do if you showed up next week and there were 6,000 people? What would you do if you showed up next week and there were 10,000 people? You say, "Well, I don't know what I'd do." And that's why it's not happening. You see, their mentality was, "God, bring them and keep bringing them and we'll just figure out a way. If we've got to sell some property, we'll do it. If we have to rearrange our schedule, if we have to park further away, move our seats or, God forbid, come at a time that seems a little bit inconvenient, we'll do it if you'll add to the church daily."

Do you see what was happening? It wasn't about their preferences and what they wanted, it was about making sure that everybody heard the message of Jesus Christ. You see, they had a common experience that resulted in a common expression. But I daresay what happens in Acts 2 were very uncommon results. What we've just read, what we've just looked at, is not the norm today. It's not something that we see on a regular basis whether here in America or anywhere else. It's just not common. Why? Because what we see in Acts 2 is a people yielded, surrendered and abandoned to the things and the person of God so as to allow God to do whatever he wants in their life.

So how does this translate to us? How does this translate, what is our inwardness? I mentioned at the beginning of the message today is kind of day one in preparation for a journey together. It is our desire as a church about a year from now that no matter where you are in life, no matter what age or what stage, that we're going to come together as an entire church body for a 13 week study, a discipleship study together where you and I are going to be memorizing the same verses, studying the same passages of Scripture, being challenged by the same message and the same word.

For formality's sake, many of you may or may not have heard, it's a discipleship plan entitled "Master Life." It was written by a man who was an international missionary to Indonesia and there he was among people who had never heard the name of Jesus, never held a Bible in their hand, and he wanted to take them from knowing nothing to being able to reach their own people. Isn't that where we are today? Among a people who oftentimes have never heard the name of Jesus, held a Bible in their hand, and yet we need to reach them. And so what happened is he moved back to the United States, he retired and he realized that we had the same problem here as they had there. So as we prepare over the next year, as we begin to walk beginning next week the Gospel of John because Master Life is based on John 15 so we need to prepare with the first 14 chapters, as we begin to walk toward this where we come together, where children and parents and grandparents and neighbors and coworkers all get on the same page with what God is doing in their life to see what is he going to do in our lives. That's our inwardness as we come together to do that.

How about our upward change? I've got news for you: I don't know but I do have a hint. Revelation 5:9. Everything had changed for the believers there. These people who had been walking near the Sea of Galilee, these people who had been in what we call the

Middle East all of a sudden found themselves around the throne of God, they found themselves at the crystal sea, there is everything that we've hoped of and sung about and Revelation 5:9, something amazing happens. Are you ready for this? It says they sang a new song. You say, "Why did they sing a new song?" Because they had had a new experience. They had seen the Lord differently than they had before. So when we talk about how will we relate to God, how will our upwardness change after doing this, I don't know what it's going to look like but there is the opportunity that it's going to be new.

Now, let me be literal for just a moment: when you hear the phrase "new song," is that a chorus or a hymn? I can tell you what you're thinking: what you prefer. Do you know that the Bible doesn't tell us what they sang. Was it a verse? Was it a chorus? Was it a praise hymn? Was it an old Southern Gospel? We don't know what it was because what happened was when they got in the presence of God around the throne of God, it changed how they expressed themselves to God with the sole purpose of saying, "God, however we express ourselves, however we live, we just want it to be directed toward you and not be about what we desire or prefer."

Then finally, outwardly, what will our outward look like? I've got news for you: I don't know. But wouldn't it be amazing, wouldn't it be incredible if by us getting all on the same page, by us coming together in that format, wouldn't it be incredible to see what kind of beacon of light, what kind of lighthouse we could become not just to this community and not just to this area but to the world. You see, in Acts 17, a few individuals yielded to God, turned the entire world upside down. It can happen here too but you and I have got to be the people that they were in Acts 2, we've got to have an inward transformation that changes or translates into an upward transformation, that then spreads itself outwardly.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe you're that person today as we talk about a journey, it's not about a year from now, it's not about a discipleship program, it's about right here and right now, and maybe today you realize that you've never begun that journey with Jesus Christ; you've never had that moment in your life where you've called upon him to be your Savior. Boy, do I have some great news today. You don't have to go through a course, you don't have to check off a box, you don't have to cross a T or dot an I, you just need to have a very serious conversation with God. You don't need to have this conversation out loud, you don't even need to say the same things that I would say but maybe that prayer, maybe that conversation would go a little something like this, "God, I know that you know me better than I even know myself but I want to share with you, I want to tell you what I've discovered about myself. I'm the problem. I've messed up and I've sinned and I realize that that has created a chasm between you and myself. I realize that because of that, the Bible says my wages of my sin is death, not just death in eternity but death in the here and now. But God, I realize today, I realize that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was born on my behalf. I realize he loved me so much he lived a sinless life on my behalf. He loved me so much he went to the cross on my behalf. He loved me so much he rose from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't know the answers to all the problems of life but I do know that Jesus Christ is the answer to my sin problem so I'm asking you to

forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. In the best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, if you're that person today that had that conversation with God, I want to encourage you just to step out and step forward in just a moment after I pray. We want to celebrate with you. We want to know what the Lord has done in your life. Or maybe today that journey has already happened in your life, you've already been saved and forgiven but you've never followed in believers' baptism or maybe you've done that but you know you need to be a part of this great Bible believing church. Whatever that means, in just a moment after I pray, we're going to stand together and you have the opportunity to respond, whatever that decision may be.

Lord, as we come to this time of decision, as we come to this time of invitation, Lord, how comforting it is to know that you're not satisfied with where we came from but you're looking forward to what you have planned for us; that your desire is to transform us and to change us from the inside out; status quo is not verbiage that you use for our lives. So God, I pray whether it's a first time decision or whether it's following in believers' baptism or joining this great church or just needing to pray with somebody, God, I pray that you would remove the hindrances, I pray that you would remove the obstacles and that we would be like they were in Acts 5:29, we wouldn't care what others think, what our neighbors think, what our friends think, what our family thinks, but we would rather obey you than man. Help us, O God, at this time to have that approach. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me. Whatever decision, we'll be here at the front.

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly trust on Jesus' name.
Christ alone,
Cornerstone,
Weak made strong
In the Savior's love.
Through the storm,
He is Lord,
Lord of all."

What a challenge that Jesus Christ would be our cornerstone, that foundation, that part of which everything else is built upon. In just a moment, I'm going to ask Jeffrey just to sig, do this little verse and chorus again. We're going to open up the invitation. Whatever decision as those are even coming as I'm speaking, maybe today is the day that you finally make that decision you know you've been needing to make because you need to obey God rather than man. We want to encourage you just to come forward. In just a moment, I'm going to ask him to sing. If nobody else comes forward, we're going to close it out and we'll be done but if you need to come, we are going to continue. We want to be

here. We want to celebrate what God is doing in your life, that he can be your cornerstone that you build everything else on. Whatever decision, we'll be here at the front.

"When darkness seems to hide its face,
I rest on his unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.
Christ alone,
Cornerstone,
Weak made strong,
In the Savior's love.
Through the storm,
He is Lord,
Lord of all."

Church, I'm going to ask you to be seated for just a few moments. I know Mike is going to explain in further detail. I'm about to make my way to our guest reception. If you are a first-time guest, I'd love the opportunity just to meet with you face-to-face, share a cup of coffee, sign a book, whatever that may be. But all the activities and ministries of our church are available in your worship guide, the website, the app, but what we want to do today is kind of give you a little video clip, just kind of some of the highlights of the things that are upcoming and then we've got an exciting decision to share with you. So look at the screens for just a few moments and then Mike will be back with you.