

Subject: *Marks of a Healthy Church*

Scripture: *Acts 2:22-47*

In Matthew 16 we find that Jesus is the one foundation of the church. He said, “Upon this rock I will build my church.” Jesus is not only the foundation, but He is also the builder. In Acts 2 we have the actual formation of the first church. The church is described as a building in which Jesus is the foundation and corner stone and believers are living stones built upon Him. The church is described as a bride and Jesus is the bridegroom. He loved the church and gave Himself for it. The church is also described as the body of Christ. He is the head and believers make up the body. The church has never been perfect, but at the beginning the church was healthy. Some churches are big and some churches are small, but what’s really important is whether a church is healthy. When you go to the doctor for a check-up he doesn’t look at you and say that’s a nice shirt you’re wearing today or I like what you’ve done to your hair. He’s interested in your health, not your appearance. The Lord is not interested in the outside appearance, but He’s interested in the health of the church. What are the marks of a healthy church?

1. Clear preaching of the Scriptures (vs. 22-36)

The Book of Acts contains 10 major sermons (3 by Peter, 1 by Stephen, and 6 by Paul). On this occasion Peter was the preacher. One thing stands out in this sermon and in all 10 of the sermons in Acts. Each message was an exposition of the Scripture. Exposition means to expose the text, to read it, explain it, and apply it to the congregation. Peter’s message was all about Jesus showing from the OT Scripture that Jesus was the Christ.

- Christ was crucified as God planned (vs. 23) – fulfillment of Isa. 53 and others
- Christ was raised from the dead as God predicted (vs. 24-32) – fulfillment of Ps. 16
- Christ was exalted to God’s right hand as God said (vs. 33-35) – fulfillment of Ps. 110
- Christ sent the Holy Spirit as He promised (vs. 33) – fulfillment of Joel 2
- God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ (vs. 36) – this was the grand conclusion

Peter’s message was clear and to the point. His sermon was bold, and it was based on Scripture. By nature, preaching the Bible is direct and convicting. Preaching is declaring and explaining what God says. Too much preaching can be described as a mild-mannered man telling mild-mannered people how to be more mild-mannered. Bible preaching disturbs the comfortable and it comforts the disturbed. Bible preaching will humble you and then it will lift you up.

Acts 20:32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

A healthy church is a Bible-preaching, Bible-teaching church.

2. Converted membership (vs. 37-41)

You can't have a healthy church unless you have saved members. This first church already had about 120 members (Acts 1:15, called "disciples" or followers of Christ). On this day after Peter preached they had 3,000 new members, and all of them were new converts! As Peter closed his sermon three things took place:

- **Conviction (vs. 37)** – They knew they were guilty of sin, especially the sin of rejecting Christ. The greatest sin is unbelief. The greatest sin is the sin of omission, failure to honor Christ and submit to Him as Lord.
- **Conversion (vs. 38)** – Repent (a change of heart, will, and action – Peter made it clear that every one of them must repent if they were to receive forgiveness of their sins. He told them that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (His presence in them). He made it clear that God promised to save them if they would come on His terms. He also made it clear that it was God's sovereign call to salvation (vs. 39). He pleaded with them to repent (vs. 40), but he stopped short of manipulation.
- **Confession (vs. 41)** – Each of these converts was baptized without delay. This was an outward sign of their faith and repentance. They gladly received the truth of Peter's message and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, which mean they identified with Him as their Savior and Lord. Scripture tells us the motive, the method, and the meaning of baptism. The motive is simply to obey Christ. The method is immersion. The meaning of baptism is to identify with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Romans 6:4 *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, said: "The chief danger of the 20th century will be religion without the Holy Spirit, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God, and heaven without hell." You can't have a healthy church without a converted membership.

3. Continuing obedience (vs. 42)

They continued steadfastly after their conversion. They understood that salvation is not like crossing the finish line, but like leaving the starting line. They were serious about living the Christian life. They were consistently learning and obeying, sharing fellowship, observing the Lord's Supper, and praying. All these are marks of a healthy church. In those days church was simple. They didn't have any programs or special groups. John Snyder, the author of *Behold Your God*, tells of the time he lived in Wales. He said that he saw what a church could be like when God was the only attraction. Christ told His disciples to continue learning and obeying His words.

John 8:31 *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.*

Continuation is a sign of genuine salvation. A healthy church has members that are committed to learn and to obey. This is part of Christ's Great Commission.

Matthew 28:20 *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

We have forgotten two words in that commission: “to observe” (keep, obey). We are satisfied to teach the truth and hear the truth, but not obey the truth. Some other things are mentioned in verse 41: fellowship (sharing life together), breaking of bread (Lord’s Supper), and prayers. All of these are important parts of a healthy church. The church does all these things together. The church recognized the authority of the apostles and had respect for God’s men and their ministry (vs. 43). The text is careful to say that many wonders and signs were done by the apostles, not the rank and file members of the church. These miraculous signs confirmed their ministry and their message, and the church was in awe of God’s work.

4. Compassionate giving (vs. 44-45)

Contrary to what some have said, this is not an early form of communism. Their giving was voluntary and not compelled by anyone. People still had personal possessions because they still met in houses and owned their homes. In Acts 5 Peter told Ananias and Sapphira that they did not have an obligation to sell their property and give away the money. This is strictly giving from the heart to those who were in need. The church ought to be known for its giving. Christian people should be the most generous people. The Bible teaches us that we are all stewards (managers) of our time, our talents, and our treasure. Jesus said, “Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.” The Bible teaches two financial principles for the church: tithes and offerings. The tithe is required giving and offerings are sacrificial giving over and above our tithes.

5. Common bond of unity (vs. 46)

These believers met daily in the temple and met for fellowship in homes. They met “with one accord.” This is what Christ prayed for His church.

John 17:20-23 ²⁰ *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;* ²¹ *That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.* ²² *And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:* ²³ *I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.*

This is the same kind of unity that binds the Father and the Son. This kind of unity is real, spiritual unity (not uniformity where everyone looks alike and acts alike). This is unity of heart and purpose based on our mutual love of Christ and one another. This kind of unity convinces the world that Christ is God’s Son sent from heaven.

John 13:34-35 ³⁴ *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.* ³⁵ *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.* When you truly love someone, you want to be with them.

Hebrews 10:25 *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

Christ is coming for us and is taking us together. We are going to be with Him together forever, and we need to be together now to encourage one another.

6. Constant growth (vs. 47)

In verse 46, the church continued daily in fellowship. In verse 47, the Lord continues daily in saving the lost. The Lord builds His church. He is the only one who can change the heart and enable us to repent and believe. He saves the lost and then they are added to the church. God's children need a church home to love and care for them. God never intends for any of His children to live the Christian life alone. Every person needs three homes: an earthly home, a heavenly home, and a church home.

A body is healthy only if the members of that body are contributing to the overall health of the body. Ask yourself if you are helping to make the church more or less healthy. Are you *fully* committed to these marks of a healthy church? Are you *personally* committed?