



**The Church ... The Beauty of the Bride**  
Acts 2:42-47

The Church at Canyon Creek, Austin, Texas  
©Monty Watson, September 9, 2018

---

**THE CHURCH ... THE BEAUTY OF THE BRIDE**  
**Acts 2:42-47**

One of the most beautiful moments in life is a wedding day. As a pastor, I have the best seat in the house. I get to see the bride and groom looking into each other's eyes on the happiest day of their lives. And what makes that moment so beautiful is not the flowers or the dress or the music. It's something else. That moment is beautiful because of the love that radiates between the bride and groom.

The church is the bride of Christ. That's how the Bible describes our relationship with Him. And at the culmination of human history, when Christ returns, an angel will summon all of heaven together saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Revelation 21:9, NAS). And all of heaven and earth will worship at the marriage feast of Christ and His church.<sup>1</sup> The church is the bride of Christ.

Yet too often, when people think of the church it's nothing like the beauty of a bride. Too often, when people think of the church they think of rules, formality, hypocrisy, and irrelevance. And this perception makes it harder for people to see the love of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last thirty years, the church has tried many things to be attractive and relevant to the culture. We've created celebrity pastors, we've tried smoke machines and drama, we've turned down the lights and turned worship into a concert, and one church in Atlanta now has aerialists swinging over the congregation during worship. By trying to be attractive, we have become consumers. Instead of leaving church with a greater burden for our lost neighbor, too often we leave saying, "I didn't like that song they sang this morning." Or, if we don't like the preaching or the music in one church, we go to another one down the street. In too many places, the church in America has become a church of personal preferences. When Christians from other parts of the world visit America, they can't believe our version of church. They see little brokenness for sin, little reverence for the holiness of God, little praying to God, and little zeal for the gospel.

The church in America, and our church too, needs to repent of our drift and return to our roots. And, remember what being a church is all about. So, why church?

- To worship God and to glorify His name
- To learn more about Him, and to delight in who He is
- To express our gratitude for grace
- To acknowledge our dependence on Him
- To sing songs and praises to Him, and to each other
- To remind each other of God's truth and God's majesty
- To hear the will of God, to be inspired to walk in obedience and glorify Him with our lives
- To belong, to be a part of a spiritual family, of God's family
- To love and be loved

- To encourage someone who is discouraged, and be encouraged when we are discouraged
- To comfort someone who is hurting, and be comforted when we are hurting
- To submit to the challenge of others, to be held accountable
- To grow in sanctification and be conformed to the image of Christ
- To serve, to use our spiritual gifts and make a contribution to His kingdom
- To be inspired to live on mission, to take the gospel across the street and around the world
- To be a force for good and compassion in our community
- To hear the word of God, the voice of God, louder than all the other voices in our culture
- To hear the truth of God to avoid theological drift
- To recalibrate our hearts to avoid spiritual drift
- To pray as one body, asking God to work in our midst
- To bring our friends to hear the gospel, to experience and investigate Christianity
- To model faith and commitment to our children, to pass our faith to the next generation
- To remember, together, that Jesus is coming again

The book of Acts records the birth of the Church and the thirty-year period following the resurrection of Jesus. Acts 2 is a portrait of the bride of Christ, the beauty of the bride. The first chapter in every book written about the church starts with Acts 2. This is what every church in every generation should look like. Acts 2 outlines the values, activities, and strategy for the church. But this morning, I don't want to look at the strategy of the church, I want to look at the spirit of the church. It's spirit of the church at Jerusalem that was attractive to so many.

So what made the church attractive then and what makes the church attractive today? What makes a wedding beautiful is not the flowers or the dress or the music. That moment is beautiful because of the love that radiates between the bride and groom. The church is beautiful and attractive when we radiate with love for our Savior. Every attitude and action we see in the Acts 2 church was the outflow of their love for Jesus.

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, and praising God. And having favor with all the people, the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47, NAS).

That is the beauty of the bride, the bride of Christ. I want to be a part of a church like that, and we want our church to be like that. So, this morning, I want to turn Acts 2 into a prayer for our

church, and at the end of this message, we're going to pray that our church will look more and more like this.

### HUNGRY

To be an Acts 2 church, and to be the church we want to be, we must pray, ***“Lord, make us hungry for You.”***

Luke described the hunger of the first Christians. “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). This describes one of their gatherings. This is not a strategy list, this is what they actually did when they got together. They listened to the apostles’ teaching. Then they fellowshiped together. They talked about what they were learning. They talked about their problems and comforted and encouraged each other. Then they shared a meal together, often with the Lord’s Supper at the end. And of course, they prayed together and they prayed for each other. All of this depicts the spirit of the new church.

Together they had a hunger for God. “They were continually devoting themselves.” The word devotion carries two ideas – love and commitment. Devotion is loving commitment. The first Christians were hungry and thirsty for more of God because of their love for Him.

King David had this thirst. “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:1-2, NAS). The prophet Jeremiah knew this hunger. “When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart’s delight” (Jeremiah 15:16, NLT). Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6, NAS).

“They were continually devoting themselves.” To be an Acts 2 church, and to be the church we want to be, we must pray, ***“Lord, make us hungry for You.”***

### AWE

To be an Acts 2 church, and to be the church we want to be, we must pray, ***“Lord, let us see Your power.”*** These first Christians experienced a sense of awe in the power and presence of God.

“Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles” (Acts 2:43). They were experiencing God in ways other people did not. Not through cool songs or lighting effects, but through “wonders and signs,” through miracles, through the power and presence of God. They went to bed at night amazed. “Can you believe what God did today?”

Why were they experiencing God’s power? Because “they were continually devoting themselves ... to prayer.”

Jesus promised, “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it” (John 14:13, NIV). Jesus invites us to “ask.” “Ask Me anything, and I will do it ... Just tell me what you need and I’ll take care of it.” He promised His disciples, and the promise is still valid for us, “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works” (John 14:12, NLT).

One of the most prolific authors on prayer was Civil War chaplain E. M. Bounds, who wrote this about God’s promise to answer prayer.<sup>3</sup>

“The promise makes prayer irresistible.<sup>4</sup> ... Each believer can claim the promise as his own.<sup>5</sup> ... Either this is so or it’s not. If not, then there is nothing in prayer. Then prayer is nothing but words, a verbal performance, an empty, useless exercise. But if it is true, then how vast are the possibilities.<sup>6</sup> ... The answer to prayer is the evidence of God’s being. It proves that God lives, that there is a God, who is interested in His creatures, and who listens to them. There is no proof so clear that God exists than prayer and its answer.<sup>7</sup> ... The promises pledge (obligate) Almighty God to answer prayer.<sup>8</sup> ... (When we pray) His word is at stake.”

If we want to be an Acts 2 church, what is our prayer? (1) ***“Lord, make us hungry for You.”*** (2) ***“Lord, let us see Your power.”***

## LOVE

To be an Acts 2 church, and to be the church we want to be, we must pray, ***“Lord, fill our hearts with a sacrificial and forgiving love for each other.”*** The most attractive feature of the early church was how they loved each other. Luke tells us how much they loved each other. “All those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need” (Acts 2:45).

Their attitude was “what’s mine is yours.” They reacted spontaneously and sacrificially, “as anyone had need.” They liquidated their assets to help people. And later on, Acts 4:32 states that “there was not a needy person among them.” They practiced what Jesus preached. “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry” (Luke 3:11, NLT).

Why did they do that? Because they were one family. Paul said of the church, “In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Romans 12:5, NIV).

The problem is that families can be dysfunctional, and so can churches. Too often churches are known for their flaws. Gossip, hypocrisy, division, distrust, moral failure, lack of forgiveness. And we wonder why more people are not attracted to church.

We are one family, and families are supposed to love each other. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35, ESV). The most attractive feature of the early church was how they loved each other.

The New Testament is filled with “one another” commands like “love one another.” This is what the church is supposed to look like. This is what family is supposed to look like. How we love each other is what makes us different from the world and attractive to the world. The 1st century Christians were often ridiculed for what they believed, but their love for each other was undeniable.

To be the church we want to be, we must ... “love one another<sup>9</sup> ... serve one another<sup>10</sup> ... be patient, bearing with one another<sup>11</sup> ... forgive one another, just as God in Christ has forgiven you<sup>12</sup> ... comfort one another<sup>13</sup> ... encourage one another, and build one another up<sup>14</sup> ... pray for one another.”<sup>15</sup>

This is what the church is supposed to look like. This is what family is supposed to look like. How we love each other is what makes us different from the world and attractive to the world. So, what is our prayer? (1) ***“Lord, make us hungry for You.”*** (2) ***“Lord, let us see Your power.”*** (3) ***“Lord, fill our hearts with a sacrificial and forgiving love for each other.”***

## JOY

To be an Acts 2 church, and to be the church we want to be, we must pray, ***“Lord, fill us with the joy of Jesus so others are attracted to Jesus.”*** “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, and praising God” (Acts 2:46-47).

“Day by day ... with gladness.” Again, I’m not looking at the strategy of the church, I’m looking at the spirit of the church. “Day by day ... with gladness.” People wondered, “Why do they sing? Why do they have such peace? Why do they have no fear of death?” It was because of the joy of Jesus.

In John 15, Jesus said, “(Everything I have spoken to you is so) that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11, ESV). Jesus later prayed for this. In the garden, the night of His arrest, He prayed to His Father, “I am coming to you, (and this is what I pray), that while they are in the world, they would be filled with my joy” (John 17:13, NLT). His prayer is that we would be filled with joy. Not just when we get to heaven, but now, while we are still in this world.

Joy is gratitude for waking up every morning and being alive. “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24, ESV). Joy is the pleasure of God’s presence. David said, “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11, ESV). Joy is gratitude for our salvation, the thrill of our new relationship with God. “We have been justified by faith, and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2, ESV). Joy is our hope of heaven, of spending eternity with Him. The Bible says, one day, we will “stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy” (Jude 24, NAS).

Joy is proof that Christ lives in us. We ought to be the happiest, most joyful people in the world. We are the most blessed people in the world, and we should look like it!

To be an Acts 2 church, to be the church we really want to be, we must pray, (1) ***“Lord, make us hungry for You.”*** (2) ***“Lord, let us see Your power.”*** (3) ***“Lord, fill our hearts with a sacrificial and forgiving love for each other.”*** (4) ***“Lord, fill us with the joy of Jesus so others are attracted to Jesus.”***

#### FAVOR

To be an Acts 2 church, and to be the church we want to be, we must pray, ***“Lord, give us for favor and open doors for us to share the gospel with our family, friends, and neighbors, across the street and around the world.”*** The Acts 2 church was so genuine and so attractive that the church was “having favor with all the people, and the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). More and more people were attracted to Jesus because of the way these first Christians lived their lives.

As a historian and author of Acts, Luke was often inserted one verse status reports. Acts 2:47 is one of them. “The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” Also Acts 4:4, “Many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.” Acts 5:14, “More believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.” Acts 6:7, “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem.” Acts 11:21, “The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number believed and turned to the Lord.” The church expanded dramatically, and lives were changed.

***“Lord, give us favor and open doors for us to share the gospel with our family, friends, and neighbors, across the street and around the world.”***

#### CONCLUSION

The church is the bride of Christ. We are the bride of Christ. And the church is beautiful and attractive when we radiate with love for our Savior.

Being an Acts 2 church, and being the church we want to be, begins with prayer. So, I want to urge us to pray for our church. To pray for our church to look like this. Pray this for yourself. And pray this for our church.

*Lord, make us hungry for You. Give us a fresh hunger for You, for Your Word, for Your presence.*

*Lord, let us see Your power. Let us see You work in our homes, in our church, in our community.*

*Lord, fill our hearts with sacrificial and forgiving love for each other.*

*Lord, fill us with the joy of Jesus so others are attracted to Jesus.*

*Lord, give us favor and open doors for us to share the gospel with our family, friends, and neighbors, across the street and around the world.*

## NOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> See Revelation 19:7-8.

<sup>2</sup> In the words of John Stott, the church was created to be a “counterculture”; offering an attractive, beautiful, God-filled alternative to what the world offers. But not a legalistic, militant, or pietistic alternative. The Greek word for church is ekklesia and means the “called out ones.” We are called out of the world and yet also sent into the world; sent into the world to model this attractive, beautiful, God-filled alternative (see John 17:15, 16, 20:21). [John Stott, *The Living Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), page 12.]

<sup>3</sup> E. M. Bounds, *The Possibilities of Prayer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980 edition), some quotes have been modified with updated language.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, page 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, page 26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pages 40-41.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, page 86.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, page 96.

<sup>9</sup> John 13:34.

<sup>10</sup> Galatians 5:13.

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 4:2.

<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 4:32.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:18.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

<sup>15</sup> James 5:16.