

Main Idea: Jesus says we are the light of the world in Matthew 5:14, but what does being the light of the world look like? We begin to see the answer in the book of Acts. Specifically, we see three key evidences in the first church in Acts 2:42-47.

- I. Our priorities (42)
 - A. The first church valued God’s Word.
 - B. The first church valued one another.
 - C. The first church valued worship.
 - D. The first church valued prayer.
- II. Our practice (43-47a)
 - A. The believers were serious about God (43).
 1. The people were in awe.
 2. The apostles did wonders.
 - B. The believers were serious about each other (44-45).
 1. Christ changes the way you look at yourself.
 2. Christ changes the way you look at your possessions.
 - C. The believers were serious about church (46-47a).
 1. They met together daily.
 2. They broke bread together.
 3. They praised God together.
 4. They influenced their community together.
- III. Our progress (47b)
 - A. The church grew because of the Lord’s working.
 - B. The church grew because of the people’s witness.
 1. You can’t be part of the church unless you are saved.
 2. You need to be part of the church if you are saved.

Implications: Some lessons about being the light of the world...

1. Being the light of the world is something the Holy Spirit makes possible.
2. Being the light of the world is something we do together.
3. Being the light of the world shows up in practical, day to day living.

Two weeks ago we looked at Jesus’ teaching in the sermon on the mount and heard Him say that we are the light of the world. Let’s read that passage again, and then this morning let’s look at a passage which shows what it looks like when a church is functioning as the light of the world.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:13-16

You are the light of the world. That’s a fact, according to Jesus. It’s not something we strive to attain, but a reality by virtue of the fact that He, *the* Light of the world, lives in us.

Let your light shine before people that they may see your good deeds. So that which is a fact must be lived out. Jesus says that we, His followers, are to let our light shine before people so that they see our good works and glorify our Heavenly Father.

So what does being the light of the world look like? We need examples, and thankfully the Lord provides us with vivid examples in the book of Acts.

This morning I want us to look at what happened in Acts 2. In Acts 2, the Lord began to build His church. In Acts 2, the Lord began to shine through His followers to the onlooking world.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Acts series at WBC in 2001.

And what a day it was! It began quietly enough with the small group assembled in a secluded room, just 120 of them. Can God do anything with only 120 people? He did on this day two thousand years ago. By the end of the day the light grew from 120 Jesus-followers to 3,120!

What produced this massive increase in the display of light? To put it simply, God the Holy Spirit came.

I don't think most of us realize the significance of His coming. He is the Light agent, as it were. On the day of Pentecost God sent His Spirit to baptize the followers of Jesus into one body. He came just as Jesus promised, to indwell God's people during this phase of history between Jesus' first and second coming.

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." We might say the Holy Spirit came to provide the electricity. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you," said Jesus, "and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

You will be the light of the world. I will shine through you. How? Acts 2 shows us it's going to happen through the ministry of My Spirit.

And that's what began to happen. The Holy Spirit came. Why did He come? Jesus Himself tells us why in John 15:26, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify *about me*." And in John 16:14, "He will bring *glory to me* by taking what is mine and making it known to you."

He's going to turn on the light, says Jesus. And that's what He did.

But what does it look like. When the church is functioning as the light of the world, what does it look like? We see the answer all over the New Testament, but it begins in today's passage, Acts 2:42-47. When we are the light of the world it shows up in three very tangible ways: our priorities (42), our practice (43-47a), and our progress (47b).

I. Our priorities (42)

A group of friends went deer hunting and paired off in twos for the day. That night one of the hunters returned alone, staggering under an eight-point buck.

"Where's Harry?" he was asked.

"Harry had a stroke of some kind. He's a couple of miles back up the trail."

"You left Harry laying there, and carried the deer back?"

"Well," said the hunter, "I figured no one was going to steal Harry."²

Now there's a fellow with mixed-up priorities! When it comes to the first church, one thing is for sure. They knew their priorities. They were *devoted* to what really mattered.

Listen to the text, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (42)."

Keep in mind the context. In Acts 1:5 we see the Spirit promised. In Acts 2:4 we see the Spirit's arrival and the accompanying expression of tongues. In Acts 2:14-36 we see Peter's explanation of the Spirit's coming. But then we see the evidence that He has come. The light begins to shine. How? When the Holy Spirit came He began to sharpen into focus the priorities of Jesus' followers.

The author of Acts, Luke, says that the brand new church members "devoted themselves" (KJV "continued steadfastly") to something. The Spirit affected their

² *Bits & Pieces*, March 3, 1994, p. 5.

devotion. When the Spirit is present in a church's life, as well as in the lives of individuals, it shows up in the area of priorities.

A young believer said to me, "I didn't use to go to church, and when I did, it was because I had to. I didn't want to go. But now I *want* to go to church. I don't want to miss."

That's the evidence of the Holy Spirit, that the light is beginning to shine. He gives us a new "want to." He transforms our values. Take a look at the first church and what you'll see is this. These new believers began to value things they didn't value before. They devoted themselves to four priorities.

A. The first church valued God's Word. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching ['doctrine' in the KJV]." First of all, who is "they?" It refers to the individuals mentioned in verse 41, the 3,000 followers of Jesus who comprised the first church. They were the ones who'd been saved, baptized, and added to the church.

What did these people do? First and foremost, they devoted themselves to the "apostles' teaching." This is mentioned first because it must be priority #1 in the church.

A Spirit-led church will be a studying church. It will be full of learners—people who have an insatiable hunger to receive teaching.

But not just any kind of teaching. What was the content of the teaching to which the first church was devoted? They devoted themselves to the *apostles'* teaching.

Why? That was God's plan. When Jesus came to earth, He chose twelve men whom He designated "apostles" (Luke 6:13). He allowed them to spend three years with Him. He taught them. And then just before He left the earth, He told them—the apostles—to pass the baton to others.

"Go and make disciples of all nations," He said, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you* (Matt 28:19-20)."

And so they did. When the apostles led people to Christ, they taught them. They taught them the Old Testament Scriptures (as Peter did in his sermon), showing that Jesus fulfilled them, and of course, they taught them the words and works of Jesus, eventually writing down this teaching in what we call the "New Testament."

Let this sink in. The first evidence of a Spirit-controlled church, the first evidence that the light is shining, is a devotion to the Word of God. Its leaders have a passion to teach and its members a passion to learn the Word of God.

What does this say to us about a church where people do not spend focused time in this Book? It says many things, including that their light-shining capacity is being dimmed. Friends, a Spirit-filled church is always a Bible-cherishing church. The two go hand in hand. And what's true for churches is true for individuals as James Boice points out, "If you are Spirit-filled, then you will be drawn to this Book. If you are not drawn to this Book, if you do not really want to study it, if you say, 'Well, you know, I look at the Bible from time to time, but it seems rather boring to me: it never really does much for me,' you ought to question whether you are really born again. Or if you are born again, you at least ought to question whether you are filled by the Holy Spirit."³

Three thousand baby Christians devoted themselves to learning the Word of God. They were hungry. Yes, the first church valued God's Word. Secondly...

³ James Boice, *Acts*, p. 58.

B. The first church valued one another. Luke says, “They devoted themselves...to the fellowship.” The Greek term is *koinonia*. In its most basic sense it means “common.”

For instance, the language spoken by the world in Jesus’ day is called “Koine” Greek. It’s called such because it was “common Greek,” and was the universal language of the Roman Empire.

As followers of Christ we have something in common. True fellowship involves a partnership and sharing. The people who receive Jesus Christ become partners with Him and consequently with other believers (1 John 1:3).

It takes more a table of food to have true fellowship. The crowd at Buffalo Wild Wings can have a great time eating wings and watching the ballgames together, but that’s not biblical fellowship.

Kent Hughes is right when he says, “Fellowship comes through *giving*. Fellowship costs! So many people never know the joys of Christian fellowship because they have never learned to give themselves away. They visit a church or small study group with an eye only for their own needs (hardly aware of others) and go away saying, ‘There is no fellowship there.’ The truth is, we will have fellowship only when we make it a practice to reach out to others and give something of ourselves.”⁴

Realize this. Fellowship is a work of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 13:14, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship [*koinonia*] of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Listen. Do you want to have fellowship? Then you must learn to be a giver. And if you want to experience devotion to *the* fellowship, you must learn to be a giver in the body life of the local church where the Spirit placed you.

There’s actually a definite article in the Greek text. The believers devoted themselves to *the* fellowship, that is, to the common bond we have in Christ.

Too often today we see a very different view the church. For us, church is a place we go. For New Testament believers, church is who we are. For us, church is a piece of our lives. For New Testament believers, church was their life. For us, church is often viewed as a recreational center—and so we go to church to sort of relax and be inspired by a nice talk, some good music, and programs that make life better for us (and if that doesn’t happen, we’ll just leave and find a church where it does happen. That’s not church in the New Testament, and that’s not a church where the light is shining.

They were devoted to *the fellowship*. They saw church as their forever family.

C. The first church valued worship. “They devoted themselves...to the breaking of bread.” The phrase can refer to an ordinary meal as it does in verse 46, but here Luke has something else in mind. It’s *the Lord’s Supper*.

The first church members made the Lord’s Supper (or it’s also called “communion”), a high priority on their schedules. Why? For starters, because Jesus commanded them to do so. “Do this in remembrance of Me (Luke 22:19).” But it wasn’t just duty. They knew they needed to remember.

We’re so prone to forget, aren’t we? Why do we have eternal life when once we were heading for eternal condemnation? It’s because of what Jesus did for us. He died in our place. He shed His blood for the remission of our sins. He conquered death, and one day is coming again.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*, p. 49.

We must remember. The early church did. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. They made worshipping Christ a priority on their schedules. If our light is to shine, we must as well.

One of the things that thrills my heart as a pastor is when I see you showing how important worshipping Christ is to you. On more than one occasion I've heard someone say to me at the door on the way in, "I had to work all night, so I might be a little groggy this morning. But I just didn't want to miss church." The light is shining.

Do you value church? We show we value it by the way we treat the opportunities for the corporate worship of Jesus. Just a reminder, I'm convinced that the key to meaningful worship on Sunday takes place on Saturday evening (and even before). If I get to bed late Saturday night, I'm not going to be ready to worship Sunday morning. So let's start getting ready on Saturday evening. Lay out your clothes, and your children's clothes. Spend time in prayer Saturday before you go to bed. Pray for your Sunday School teacher, and pastor, and brothers and sisters. And God to bring new people who can get worship Jesus with us.

D. The first church valued prayer. "They devoted themselves to...prayer." Literally the text reads "the prayers." It's plural. The early church members devoted themselves to public prayer as well as private prayer.

The story goes that one time when Bill Moyers was a special assistant to President Lyndon B. Johnson, he was asked to say grace before a meal in the family quarters of the White House. As Moyers began praying softly, the President interrupted him with "Speak up, Bill! Speak up!"

The former Baptist minister from east Texas stopped in mid-sentence and without looking up replied steadily, "I wasn't addressing you, Mr. President."⁵

Beloved, when we gather as the people of God and pray, we are addressing the greatest Being in the universe. Because of Christ we get to talk to *God*! It's been well said that prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscles of omnipotence.⁶

Sadly, the contemporary church doesn't pray much. Offer a concert, and a crowd will come. Have a dinner, and the multitudes will show up. But have a prayer meeting and what happens?

If our light is shining brightly, you can be sure it began to shine in our times of prayer. The early church was a praying church. They made it a priority to talk often with their Master. And the presence of the Holy Spirit made it possible.

So here's the first evidence that a church is functioning as the light of the world. We see the evidence of the Spirit in our priorities. We devote ourselves to God's Word, to the fellowship, to worshipping Christ, and to prayer. Not just personally, but we devote ourselves to these activities *together*, as a congregation.

So stop and take inventory. Are you devoted to the church in which the Spirit has placed you? If I am I'll be faithful to it, support it, and attend its services regularly and cheerfully. I won't badmouth it nor stay in the company of those who do. When a problem arises—and problems do arise from time to time—I'll deal with it in a biblical manner rather than run from it.

⁵ Don Oberdorfer in *Washington Post. Reader's Digest*, April 1980.

⁶ John MacArthur, *Acts*, p. 85.

I'll use my gifts in it. I'll give my offerings to the Lord through it. I'll tell others about it and invite them to come and be a part of it. I will do these things... *if* I am exhibiting the type of devotion the early believers felt for the church.

May I ask a question? If you aren't doing these things, why not? I urge you to inventory of your priorities. If you are not devoted to the church, you're robbing yourself of something beautiful that God intends for your joy and His glory, the result of which is that His light begins to shine brightly for a world to see.

That brings us to our second evidence. When the light is shining, our priorities show up in our practice.

II. Our practice (43-47a)

If there's one word that sums up the practice of the first church, it's the word *serious*. Because the Holy Spirit was in control, the first church was serious about three things.

A. The believers were serious about God (43). "Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles." I see two indications that the first church was serious about God.

1. *The people were in awe.* The KJV states, "And fear came upon every soul." Does "every soul" refer to those within the church only, or does it also include those outside the church? I think it includes both groups.

A good test to determine if a work is from God is this. Does it cause people to fear God? If the work is from men, then men will be exalted. But if it's from God, then God will be exalted. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7)."

Throughout Acts we see this. "Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events (5:11)." "When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high esteem (19:17)."

Why are people filled with fear when the Holy Spirit works? It's because they are seeing something that's inexplicable humanly speaking. They're seeing God at work!

2. *The apostles did wonders.* Verse 43 again, "Many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles."

God didn't give everyone the ability to do miraculous wonders. He limited it to the apostles and their close associates as the text here clearly indicates—"done *by the apostles*." And why the apostles? God enabled the apostles to do miracles to substantiate the authority of their message. It's the message that saves, not the miracles.

Think of a problem that faced the first church. Suppose someone stood up in their assembly and said, "God gave me a new message, and He wanted me to pass it on to you. Jesus is no longer the only way to heaven." How could the early church tell if a person truly was a spokesman for God? Here's how. God authorized the apostolic message by giving the apostles the ability to perform miraculous signs and wonders (Heb 2:1-4).

Does God do miracles today? Sure He does. But is the gift of miracles still present? No. We don't need miraculous signs to confirm the messengers of God any longer. Why not? We can tell if a person is speaking for God by simply comparing what he says to the record of the completed Scriptures we possess.

But the point is this. In the first church the believers were serious about God. And when that's the case, it shows up in a second practice.

B. The believers were serious about each other (44-45). How serious? Notice verses 44-45, “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.”

Don’t misread this. The first church was not a commune, nor does this text support such a notion. MacArthur rightly observes, “The family, not the commune, is the basic social unit in God’s design.”⁷

Two things were true of the first church. First, they were *together*—that doesn’t mean they lived together, but they certainly spent a lot of time together. In practical terms what that means for us is this...

1. *Christ changes the way you look at yourself.* I’m not an island. There’s no place for the attitude, “The church doesn’t need me. I think I’ll stay home today.” No way. They were *together*. So must we be.

In addition, they had “everything in common.” Again, that doesn’t mean the people sold *all* their possessions and pooled their resources in a common pot. It’s clear from verse 46 that some still owned homes. No, the giving was purely voluntary. Later, Ananias and Saphira got into trouble, not because they didn’t give more but because they *lied* about what they gave.

So Christ changes not only the way you look at yourself, but...

2. *Christ changes the way you look at your possessions.* Remember, many Jews had come to Jerusalem from all over the world to observe the feast of Pentecost. I would assume that many didn’t go home right away after becoming Christians. That meant they needed lodging and meals. And so the believers who had the means to do so met needs.

Not *wants*, but needs, as the text clearly indicates. “They gave to anyone as he had *need*.” Food, clothing, and shelter.

Ponder this. Poverty was a big problem in the first century. There was no Social Security to care for the elderly and orphans. There were no unions to insure fair wages. There was no Appeals Court to prevent abuse. Instead there was high taxation in a system filled with corruption.

Having enough food to eat was a *big* challenge, a *daily* challenge. To complicate things many individuals lost their jobs when they became Christians. They were ostracized by their families. It’s a dog-eat-dog world out there. It’s every man for himself.

But not in the church. God expects His people to be serious about each other. When a brother can work, he should work and earn his own bread (2 Thes 3:10). But when a brother is in need and can’t do anything about it, those who can help him should do so. And they did in the early church—because they were serious about each other.

They were letting their light so shine. They didn’t manufacture this light. They possessed this light, for Christ who is the light was living in them. They simply were cooperating with His Spirit, and as they did the light began to shine brighter and brighter.

C. The believers were serious about church (46-47a). “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.”

Luke gives us a snapshot of the daily routine of the first church. He gives us four details which highlight how serious the believers were about church.

⁷ MacArthur, p. 88.

1. *They met together daily.* Let that sink in. They met together *every day!* Warren Wiersbe remarks, “The Christians you meet in the Book of Acts were not content to meet once a week for ‘services as usual.’ They met daily (Acts 2:46), cared daily (Acts 6:1), won souls daily (Acts 2:47), searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11), and increased in number daily (Acts 16:5). Their Christian faith was a day-to-day reality, not a once-a-week routine.”⁸

Where did they meet? According to verse 44, they met together in the temple courts. Why there? For one reason, it was the largest place in town, and you’d need it to accommodate 3,000 plus people!

What’s more it was a great place to evangelize. Why? Because every day the Jews met at the Temple for worship. In the morning and again in the afternoon the priests would offer a burnt offering and incense to God. There was always a congregation of people that gathered to watch the priests enter the sanctuary. What a great open door for evangelism!

2. *They broke bread together.* Where? In their homes. Here “breaking bread” doesn’t refer to Communion. We’re told specifically that they broke bread and “ate together.”

After meeting for instruction and evangelism in the temple courts, the people went home to eat. And they invited others to eat with them.

I hope you do that. It’s a privilege for Christians to eat together. How about inviting a family or two to your home this week, and spend time around the table sharing food together, and more importantly, sharing Christ together?

I’m impressed by the simplicity of the early church. They met in their homes. Not stained glass cathedrals. Not state of the art auditoriums. Nothing necessarily wrong with having more elaborate facilities, but the church isn’t dependent upon a particular type of facility in order for the light to shine.

3. *They praised God together.* No doubt they sang songs and shared testimonies together (see Eph 5:18-21 for later teaching on this). They gave God honor for what He had done in their lives.

4. *They influenced their community together.* Verse 47 says they “enjoyed the favor of all the people.” This is beautiful. God granted this favor. True, He doesn’t do so always. Sometimes He allows His people to feel the heat of persecution (as in Acts 8:1 & 12:1). But for now, there was favor in Jerusalem. The believers banded together and influenced their community together.

They let their light so shine before people, that they saw their good works, and began to glorify their Father in heaven.

God takes His church seriously, and so must we. I am so thankful for what God is doing in this local church. He continues to send new people our way, about 20 have visited since January. Currently we have ten people coming to our new members’ class and considering becoming a part of us. It’s a thrill to see God sending new faces our way.

Recently we received in the mail a bulletin from WBC for August 27, 1967. Pastor Grollimund was serving as pastor at the time and included a brief letter regarding what he called “A Challenging Opportunity.” I’d like to read it to you...

⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, p. 411.

It's God's intent for His church to grow. It's not supposed to be a clique or club. It's a vine that grows (John 15:1). It's a body that's being built up (Eph 4:12). It's a spiritual house that's being expanded living stone by living stone (1 Pet 2:5). It's a sheepfold concerning which the Good Shepherd said, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd (John 10:16)."

Perhaps you've been attending this church for awhile, but now want to go to the next "level." Maybe you've been hearing the Shepherd's voice saying, "Come into My fold," and are wondering what to do. We'd love to have you become a part of the family!

To discover what's involved look back at the three steps mentioned in verse 41. "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number."

The first step is to *accept the message*. What message? The message that Peter preached in verses 14-36, the message of Jesus Christ. Jesus was handed over to die for sinners by God's set purpose and foreknowledge (23). Then God raised Him from the dead, as witnessed by the apostles and others (32). God has made this Jesus, whom men crucified, both Lord and Christ (36).

Is He *your* Lord and Christ? You say, "What must I do for Jesus to become my Lord and Messiah?" That's what Peter's listeners wanted to know (37), and he told them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the Holy Spirit (38)."

In order for Jesus to become your Savior, you must repent and place your faith in Him. You must "accept" Peter's message, and in so doing you will experience God's amazing forgiveness.

Then, step #2, you must *be baptized*. Baptism is the first step of obedience a believer must take. It's not necessary for salvation, but it is necessary as the Scriptural means of expressing faith in Christ. To be baptized is to say outwardly what you've already said inwardly. "I believe in Jesus. He is my Savior and Lord. I want the world to know."

The third step is *church membership*. "About three thousand *were added to their number* that day." Just as you will search in vain to find an *unbaptized* Christian in the New Testament, so you will search in vain to find a *solo* Christian—a professing Christian who refuses to become part of a local church. Throughout Acts, right after people identified with Christ publicly through baptism, they were "added" to the church (2:47; 5:14).

If you have submitted your life to Christ, you need next to submit yourself to the authority of a local church. You need to be "added" to a local, Bible-teaching and Bible-living church.

When the Holy Spirit is in control of a church or a person's life, there will be evidence of it. The light will shine. We'll see it in our priorities, then our practice.

III. Our progress (47b)

"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." This was a growing church, and it grew for two reasons.

A. The church grew because of the Lord's working. "The *Lord* added to their number daily." F. F. Bruce offers this needed reminder, "It is the Lord whose prerogative

it is to add new members to His own community; it is the joyful duty of the community to welcome to their ranks those whom Christ has accepted.”⁹

Know this. God is sovereign in salvation. He adds to His church. The tense of the verb (imperfect), literally “was adding,” indicates that people were continually being saved and added to the church.

B. The church grew because of the people’s witness. The Lord added those who were “being saved.” How did they get saved? Someone told them they were *lost*.

Please don’t miss two key implications of this final verse.

1. *You can’t be part of the church unless you are saved.* The Lord added “saved” people to His church. Furthermore...

2. *You need to be part of the church if you are saved.* What happened to those who were saved? They were “added” to their number. It’s been well said that God knows nothing of solitary religion.

So what does it look like when a church is functioning as the light of the world? It looks like this. It shows up in our priorities, in our practice, and in our progress. To put it simply, when the light shines, people see it, and by God’s grace, some are drawn to it.

Implications: Some lessons about being the light of the world...

1. *Being the light of the world is something the Holy Spirit makes possible.* We are the light of the world. That’s what our Savior said. And He sent His Spirit to make it happen.

2. *Being the light of the world is something we do together.* I need you. You need me. Letting our light shine is something God intends to happen as we work together.

3. *Being the light of the world shows up in practical, day to day living.* I don’t see any lightning bolts in Acts 2, but we sure do see a lot of light shining. May it be so in and through us today.

⁹ F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 81.