

August 11, 2019 – Elmont Baptist Church

Text: Acts 2:42-47

Message Series: Church: A Disciple-Making Community

Week 2: “...They Devoted Themselves...”

Introduction:

Over the past week and a half students involved in band, volleyball, and football headed out to the practice areas and started back to work. Most likely on the first day a goal was set to win at the highest level. A speech was given to try to motivate students to devote themselves to certain habits and a certain work ethic needed to reach that goal. It would difficult to rally a team around the goal of “Be Mediocre”, or “Don’t Always Lose”. That wouldn’t move hearts and emotions to go all in. Instructors and coaches have to decide what the most important things are that they have to get these students to do in order to reach their goal. Doing everything perfectly is not realistic or even possible, so what are the most important things that each person must be committed to, and then how can they continually help motivate them to get better and better at those things? Good instructors and coaches know that the things we are devoted to are determined by our desires. A desire has to be awakened in these student athletes and band members if they are going to be devoted to the habits and work ethic needed to accomplish their goal. Coaches might say something like “you’ve got to have the ‘want to’!” To accomplish great things, external actions aren’t enough. There has to be a desire in the heart that drives new and right devotions. We see over and over again that...

Desires drive devotions.

We pursue what we are convinced will bring us pleasure.

Let’s read our text – Acts 2:42-47

When looking at or thinking about the church in its purest form, this is a passage that is often used. Here is the beginning of the redeemed community. Those who had just repented of their sin, believed on the name of Jesus, been baptized, received forgiveness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Described in this passage are their habits and activities at the very beginning. What we’re going to focus on today though more than their habits and activities is this phrase “...they devoted themselves...”. Devoted – dedicated themselves,

committed themselves. Something about being forgiven and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit caused them to be devoted to things they weren't before. They still had jobs to do, kids to raise, households to care for, but all of the sudden their lives centered on new devotions. Something from within fueled their actions and priorities. The early church didn't just do things with an attitude of duty or obligation, but they devoted themselves to certain things and those things bore certain fruit. Why did they devote themselves? Because their desires had been changed.

Ron Bloom of Desiring God ministries says...

It all begins with delight. The Christian life the New Testament describes simply cannot be lived if our hearts do not love and treasure God.

- ***No one sells all they own for a field, unless it holds a much more valuable treasure (Matthew 13:44).***
- ***No one forsakes sin to trust and obey Jesus, unless his salvation holds out far more pleasure than sin (Luke 19:8–10).***
- ***No one will — and no one can — draw near to God without believing he richly rewards those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6).***
- ***No one counts their own righteousness as loss, unless they believe Jesus's righteousness is the only thing that grants him the inexpressible joy of knowing the Father (Philippians 3:9–10).***
- ***No one leaves "houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands" for Jesus's sake without the incentive of a far greater reward (Matthew 19:29).***
- ***No one willingly suffers for Jesus's sake, unless he believes his afflictions aren't worthy to be compared with the eternal weight of glory awaiting him (2 Corinthians 4:17).***
- ***No one willingly embraces martyrdom for Jesus's sake, unless he considers death as gain (Philippians 1:21).***

Desires and Devotions

- **Jesus' Death and Resurrection Changes Our Desires** – By grace God gifted you faith to trust Jesus for forgiveness of sin and then through faith is continually transforming you to be more like Jesus. In theological terms, He has justified you and is now sanctifying you. God changes our eternal destiny to be with Him and changes our internal desires to want Him. Somehow we've come to think that you can have one without the other. We are great with the idea of being with God forever (or at least not going to hell), but to daily grow our desires to want more of Him doesn't do much for us. We've come to think that forgiveness makes holiness optional rather than understanding that only through forgiveness is holiness even possible. One author said, "The only sin you can fight is forgiven sin." The

only chance we have at victory is that sin has been stripped of its condemning power. It's not enough to have the option to fight sin and pursue holiness. Saving faith fights sin and pursues holiness. Counterfeit faith doesn't. And like we said last week, holiness isn't near as much about the rules you keep, but all about desiring, pursuing, and obeying Jesus. If we are in Christ, there should be some desire for holiness. We pursue the things that we believe (trust, or have faith) will bring us most pleasure. Saving faith brings with it a desire to love and long for God and a desire to love and serve people because we believe that is where ultimate satisfaction is found. I long for a greater desire for God and the things of God. It's not always that I desire Him ultimately, but just to "want to" desire Him. I've started praying more directly for God to "help my unbelief". Not that I don't believe in God or Jesus, but that I sometimes fail to live like I believe that He is better and in Him is greater pleasure than any good, bad, or other thing found in creation. Father, help me want to know You and love You and desire You. Just You, not how You can help my situation or do this thing or fix this mess. Just You. That verses like Psalm 16:11 which says, "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." and Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." would be the honest and growing attitude of my heart. That that desire would then drive me to be devoted to the things that increase that desire all the more.

- **The Holy Spirit Empowers New Devotions** – In Colossians 1:11 Paul prays for this church and says *"May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, (sounds like they're about to be called to do something wildly amazing to need all power and God's glorious might, but listen to what he says) for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."*

We need the power of the Holy Spirit and His glorious might to endure with patience and joy and thanksgiving to the Father. If we need that much power to do that, then Jesus' words ring so true from John 15, *"without me you can do nothing."* The things that the early church devoted themselves to are nothing extraordinary, but the power of God through the Holy Spirit empowered them into the

miraculous. When I ask the question of my own life, “what is happening right now in my heart and life that is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit?”, I don’t like the answer. But here’s what I am doing. I’m persistently asking the Lord to empower me with His Spirit and trusting Luke 11:9-13 that says,

“9 And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 11 What father among you, if his son asks for[a] a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; 12 or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

As we look at Acts 2:42-47, we would all agree that this sounds wonderful and seems to be a church that loved God and loved people and were doing what they should be doing. We’d say that sure would be nice to see today. For us, it’s not about trying to replicate the results of the early church as it is examining our hearts to see if the desire for Christ and His Kingdom are there at all, and growing. If there has never been a change in desires, if you are not convinced that in God alone is pleasure found, then understand that is not a faith that will get you to heaven. Today, trust Jesus to change your eternity and change your desires. For many of us, it’s about starting to directly ask God to “help our unbelief” and grow our desire for Him. It’s asking the Father for the power of the Holy Spirit to be devoted to the habits needed to grow a greater desire to know and love Him.