

Priorities of a Productive Church

by Harley Porter

The sermon outlines the essential priorities of a productive church, emphasizing unity, the preaching of the Word, and spirit-filled leadership.

Duration: 45:12

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 1:12-14, Acts 2:1, Acts 6:1-3

Topics: "Productivity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses two main sections: dealing with a potential crisis in the church and the transformation of a waiter into a powerful witness for Christ. The first section emphasizes the importance of congregational unity, which the Apostle Paul also emphasized. The crisis is addressed by summoning all the believers and proposing that seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom, be chosen to serve tables. The second section highlights the waiter's continued witness in Acts chapter seven, which provides a summary of Old Testament history.

Transcript

If we have Jesus, we have everything we need. And in him is found all of the wisdom, all of the hope, in him is found eternal life. The last line of that song, the Pearl of Greatest Price, it refers to one of the parables, and there's more than one interpretation of that parable.

This particular song says that Jesus is the Pearl of Greatest Price, and of course the man who sells everything he owns to buy the pearl is pursuing, knowing Jesus. Well, another interpretation is that we, the church, are the Pearl of Greatest Price, and that Jesus is the one who gave everything he had to go and buy that pearl. And I think both of those are things that, I mean, we need not argue about interpretation, but Jesus is by far the thing of value that we ought to pursue in this life, and we are, as his church, by far the apple of his eye, the love that brought him all the way to the cross.

We're going to continue our study this morning in Acts chapter 6. We're making our way through the book of Acts, and really in many ways it is like reading our family history. These are our great-great-great, and add a few greats, grandparents in the faith. They're ordinary people just like us.

They're Christians like us. They have the same spirit living in them, God's unchanging spirit that lives within every believer today. They didn't have the whole canon of the Scripture.

They didn't have the whole New Testament. They had the Old Testament. They had the letters that were being circulated from some of the apostles.

They probably didn't even have the written accounts of the gospel yet, but they had the spirit of God, and they had living among them 12 men who had been with Jesus for three and a half or three years and had been taught directly by him, and these men were entrusted with basically establishing the foundation of the church through the doctrine, through the teaching that Jesus gave them. Now, as we've been looking through the book of Acts, we've seen kind of that idyllic picture of Pentecost where the Holy Spirit comes down, and the apostles speak in other tongues, and 3,000 people hear the message in their own language, or more than 3,000 heard, but 3,000 became followers of Christ and were baptized on that very same day, and if we kind of keep track, we do the little add-ins for women and children, right now in the book of Acts, we're at well over 10,000 people that have probably received the Lord Jesus Christ and are new disciples. The whole equilibrium of Jerusalem has been completely discombobulated and messed up by this new entity, this new spirit-filled body called the church, and there's been all kinds of protests.

The apostles have been put in prison simply because they would not cease from preaching in the name of Jesus, and we've seen that that name, the name of Jesus, is a very common phrase throughout the book of Acts. There is great power in the name of Jesus, and the Sadducees, and the Sanhedrin, and the temple police, I guess as it were, they are absolutely intimidated by this name. The disciples could go and say anything else they wanted, but they forbade them from preaching in the name of Jesus, and they refused to be silent because God's authority in the name of Jesus has a higher authority than any human authority.

Well, then we saw in Acts chapter 5, the first real crisis in the church, and we are well aware that Christians in the early church were sinners just like us, and they made mistakes all the time. Read the book of Corinthians if you don't believe me. You find some very, very serious sins being committed, and of course the apostles intervened to deal with these things.

The first crisis that the church had was in Acts chapter 5 when Ananias and Sapphira gave what they said was the entire purchase price of land sold, and they came and laid it at the apostles' feet, and they were imitating a great leader. He was later, I guess, called an apostle, but Barnabas, who kind of set the tone by selling a parcel of land and bringing the money so that they could distribute it among all of the saints gathered in Jerusalem because many of them were far from home. They just couldn't tear themselves away.

The Spirit of God was there. He was saving people. There were miracles happening all over the place, and God was giving them this supernatural unity, and they were just compelled that everything that they had, they were willing to share it with the rest of the church.

It was a unity that I doubt we've seen since except in very small circles. This unity, it comes on the scene in times of revival or spiritual awakening when suddenly brothers and sisters realize that we really are the body of Christ, and we're really dependent upon each other, and we really do love each other with the love of Christ. So there was that profound unity, and they were sharing everything, and yet human nature is still there, and Ananias has a desire to take the instant track towards spiritual acclaim, that he would take the shortcut and be perceived and be seen by others as a spiritual giant, and of course he's lying.

He's putting forth an image saying, I'm giving all of this to God, but he's got to hold back. He's holding back something for himself. So we were challenged about being honest before God.

The penalty in that first public case of dishonesty was immediate physical death, and just because God doesn't strike us dead when we are dishonest in our heart, and we have a different portrayal of who we are than who we know we are in our heart, doesn't mean that God's attitude or that God's judgment of that sin is any less severe. We need to continually search our hearts. God desires a heart that is honest without guile, like the heart of Nathanael.

So God dealt with that sin, which was really the first crisis that was within the church, and he made this profound object lesson, and in spite of that, in spite of the fact that people were scared to death, the church continued to multiply, and there were people being added and added, and also the Bible says multiplied, and the church continued to grow, and the consternation of the ruling elite continued to mount. Well, now in Acts chapter 6, we have a crisis of a different sort. Some scholars would say that it was actually the seed of a deep division.

Oh, yes. Thank you, Kevin. In the pew, in the little slot in front of you is a brand new ESV Bible.

These are our new pew Bibles, and if you've been having trouble following along, and if you're one of those people who can't follow along in a different translation, please feel free to do that, and I can even give you a page number this morning. We're on page 914 in the Black Bible. We're going to be looking at Acts chapter 6. I'd just like to pause and ask the Lord to bless the reading of his word, and also give me humility to proclaim it as it needs to be proclaimed.

Father in heaven, I thank you, Lord, for your word. Lord, this isn't a doctrinal passage that we're studying. It doesn't have a whole lot of doctrinal truth compressed in it, but Lord, we see the moving of your Holy Spirit in your church, and we see the power that comes when hearts are submitted and obedient to you, and Lord, we see the priority that the apostles gave to maintaining the unity of the church.

I pray, Lord, that you would bring these words right into our hearts, that you would make them current and fresh, that we would be very much aware that the same Spirit working here in the book of Acts is at work within us and among us today, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. All right.

Well, I just want to start by reading this passage, and then we'll just talk our way through it and just see what God was doing here. Chapter 6 of Acts, verse 1. Now, in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, it is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, the apostolate of Antioch.

These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.

Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the freedmen, as it was called, and of the Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.

And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes. And they came upon him, and seized him, and brought him before the council. And they set up false witnesses who said, this man never ceases to speak words against the holy place and the law.

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us. And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel. And Lord bless the reading of his word.

All right, this is an amazing chapter, and it kind of has two sections. One has to do with dealing with this potential crisis in the church. The other has to do with this waiter who becomes kind of a warrior.

He becomes a super witness for Christ. He wasn't called to be a preacher. He was called to be a waiter, literally a deacon or a servant who waited on tables.

That was his commission. But the Holy Spirit is not bound by any kind of title. So I just want to go through this.

I put down some points again for convenience, but I just want to let the message of the text come through here. And the first thing that I want us to notice here is that there is a continuing commitment to congregational unity. It was a very, very important topic that the Apostle Paul brought up again and again.

He hated, well, God hates factions. He hates divisions. He hates it when Christians can't get along.

The Holy Spirit is grieved when Christians speak ill of one another. You can read about that in Ephesians chapter 4. So there is this, what I would like to observe here, is a commitment by the disciples, by the apostles to maintaining this unity. And the crisis here in these first few verses is that the Hellenists, who are basically Jews who are Greek in culture and language because they've been sent out during the diaspora to different parts of the world, and they've adopted the predominant culture.

And so they have, there's a cultural division and a linguistic division between them and the Hebraic Jews, who would speak Aramaic as their main language and Hebrew in the synagogue. So there was probably no malicious intent to snub anybody. There was just a communication breakdown.

And even if there was malicious intent, you can see that it is a great priority that the disciples resolve this issue. Anything that is a threat to the unity of the body of Christ should be dealt with very quickly and very effectively. We've seen this unity, evidences of it, through our study of the verses 12 through 14.

I'm just going to read these passages to set the stage and to show you this priority that's there. Chapter 1, verses 12 through 14. I don't think I even have the right verse there.

Anyway, they were all together in one place. Okay. Chapter 2, verse 1. When they were in Pentecost, when the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place as they had been commanded by the Lord.

And then, of course, I've already shared about how they were sharing all things in common. Chapter 2, verse 44. It says, and all who believe were together and had all things in common, they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as they had need.

And so there's just instance after instance. There's a couple of more in chapter 4, instances of this unity. Now, in Acts chapter 2, verse 42, there is kind of an overview of the priorities of the church, of the early church.

And this continues to be...these things that they emphasized continue. And this message here is kind of just a recap of that same thing. But if you look back in chapter 2, verse 42, you'll see that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, that's one priority, and the fellowship, that's another, to the breaking of bread, which would be the common meal and also the Lord's Supper, and the prayers.

Four instinctive activities that the early church did as the Holy Spirit was doing all these great things. Today's message isn't a whole lot different from that because these things, they're all there and we're just simply expanding upon that. But so they deal with this crisis which has to do with the unity of the church.

And the way that they do it is, first of all, that they summon the full number of the people. Now think about this. It's not like 30 or 40 people, it's not even 120, it's not 500.

Everyone who has believed in Jesus Christ and been baptized is now a disciple. This is a big meeting. That square in front of the temple, in front of Solomon's porch, it must have been just just brimming with people.

And they make this proposal. They say, it's not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables. Therefore, pick out from yourselves seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

So the congregation gets together and they are to choose seven men. And they're supposed to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. These are the criteria that are given.

It's not that you go and you collect resumes and you find out who's the most skilled. They're full of the Spirit and wisdom. You don't even need someone with skill waiting tables.

The qualification were full of the Spirit and full of wisdom. So they leave it up to the congregation to select these men. And they're selected by recognition.

When we select any kind of church officials, we shouldn't be selecting them based on our checklist, but on recognition of spiritual qualities that are in these men. And I would say that in the case of deacons and servants in the church, in this particular case, it's men. But we can also recognize these abilities and qualities in women within the biblical parameters of not holding authority or not teaching and holding that authority over men because God has given that to the men in the church.

And the people, they really like this suggestion and they chose these seven men. All right. Now, that is one priority.

And you can just, it's not, it's just there in the text. Second priority here is the preaching of the Word and prayer. The disciples have this one great concern.

If we're busy feeding people and keeping track of logistics and making sure that Helen over here is not neglected and just making sure that these two ethnic groups are not feeling alienated by one another, that would take up all of their time, 24-7. They'd be serving tables, as it were. But they recognize that this is a very important task.

And so they recommend that these men be appointed. These seven men that were appointed, they are the first deacons. Deacons function in the church leadership to provide and to take care of the physical logistical needs of the church so that the ministry of the Word and the ministry of the gospel can go forth unhindered.

And so the disciples' priority here was preaching the Word of God and prayer. It's not right for those who are entrusted with ministering the Word to be giving all of their time and effort to other things that are all important, but they're taking away from that message. Now, if you think about our churches today, there really seems to be a trend toward living the gospel by meeting all of these physical needs.

But the priority of the Word and the priority of prayer, they diminish. And almost always you can see as a church becomes more focused on social action and on social justice, you very much see the pendulum swing way over and the preaching of the Word and prayer is neglected. And it's really important that we see that all of these priorities, we can't begin to pull back from one because the whole ministry of the gospel will suffer.

Without the Word of God, without the preaching of the name of Jesus, there's no power. Without the name of Jesus, there is no intimidation to the Sadducees and Pharisees. They would just let you go because you're no real threat.

Remember last week Gamaliel said, if these men, if it's of God or if what they're saying is not of God, it'll fade away and you won't hear anything more of them. But if it is of God, you better be careful because you might not just be opposing men, you might be opposing God. You see, you leave out the name of Jesus, you leave out the gospel, there's no more power and even Satan himself is not intimidated by a church without the gospel.

So that is a huge priority, preaching the Word of God and prayer. We can preach the Word of God also and neglect the prayer part, but as we read through the book of Acts, there is great surges of evangelistic power that come after corporate prayer meetings. It happens again and again.

People become charged up and in one case, it's not only the disciples that are the apostles that begin to preach. In Acts chapter 4, you see that the whole everybody who's gathered there becomes filled with boldness and begins to preach boldly. So prayer and preaching, they go together.

Now the third thing that the third priority that is important here, and it is actually all the way in the previous chapters, but it's just not stated directly, is spirit-filled leadership. The one qualification of the deacons was that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit and with wisdom. They need to be born again.

That's given because if you're not born again, you do not have the Holy Spirit. But they also need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And for a Christian, being filled with the Holy Spirit means not being filled with yourself.

That throne that's inside your heart, it means you're not sitting on it and you're not fighting with the Holy Spirit because you want your agenda or you want your fame or you want your glory. That means the Holy

Spirit is at work ruling your life. You're willingly submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ and you're not full of yourself.

And my criticism of a lot of so-called spirit-filled ministries that I see in television is you watch for a little while and it kind of looks like that guy is full of himself. It kind of looks like he's enjoying the attention, the adulation. So I would say that humility and just a brokenness before God would be one of the marks that you would look for in finding a man who's filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

Well, we see that this spirit-filled leadership, it is marked by the progress of the gospel. If you look at verse 7 here, That's a strange phrase, isn't it? How can the word of God increase? Does that mean there were more bibles being circulated? Does it mean that maybe people were getting more revelations and adding it to the word of God? Well, I'm going to say a safe thing. The word of God didn't decrease.

Have you noticed in church growth movements that are designed to bring people into the church, what's the first thing that happens? You chisel off some of those sharp rough edges off the word of God. You take away the offense. There's even many churches they don't like to talk about the blood of Christ.

And the word of God decreases. Maybe numbers increase, but disciples don't increase. You've got full pews.

That's not a church. That's just kind of a gathering of the heathen, really. And if the gospel is not even presented, they're going to stay that way.

They're going to come. They're going to come back for the entertainment or whatever it is, or to have their consciences soothed, or their itching ears scratched. And they're going to leave and they're going to come back and want more of the same.

Then by the time you do present the gospel, they're so offended by it because you've been leading them in a different direction. If you suddenly dump the gospel, oh, what's this? It's not the sales pitch that we receive. So there is a real progression here.

The word of God increased. How do you know that there's spiritual leadership? The word of God increases. You know, the rustling of leaves of Bible pages in a church service, that would be one indication that the word of God is increasing.

People in everyday conversations going to the word of God for counsel and for wisdom. Lack of shame in proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ. Whether or not the sanctuaries are full of people, the word of God should increase.

And there are times when the word of God seems to be coming back empty. But the promise is that the word of God will not return empty. And the promise in Isaiah is to keep casting your bread upon the water.

I think it's in Isaiah. And it will come back to you in many days. You know, don't be discouraged if you have to wait a while to see the work.

All right. So, and also the number of disciples multiplied. It doesn't say the number of people attending synagogue or who are kind of hanging with the people on Solomon's porch.

It was disciples. The root of disciple is discipline. Their first act of discipleship was obedience, or was, pardon me, was baptism.

It was identifying completely with the Lord in his death, burial, and resurrection. That's what going under that water means. It means I have died with Christ.

I have been buried with Christ. I have been raised with Christ. I have a new life in Christ.

I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, not yet I, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

And it says here that, so that's, those are disciples, not Klingons, not what the Old Testament called, well, what did it call the guys that came along from Egypt? There's some, Mr. Schaaf, you remember what the riffraff, or it was some kind of word like that. But yeah, basically Klingons. Most churches are full of Klingons, and I don't mean that in the Star Trek sense.

Did you know, by the way, that you can get the Bible in the Klingon language? Never mind. It's true. All right, moving on.

Many priests became obedient to the faith. Now, that's significant, isn't it? The priests were the ones who carried out the sacrifices in the temple, did all that dirty work of slaughtering and mopping up blood and, but they saw, they saw these sacrifices day in and day out, and they administered. And they were also responsible for, at least the high priest, for interceding for the people.

So, if you think about these priests, they've got the Levitical sacrifices before them, they've got this shadow of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, they see it every day. And suddenly the Holy Spirit is opening things up, and they're seeing the whole testament fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and his death for their sin. And he is the one Passover lamb that really does turn away the wrath of God.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And they're seeing that he is the great high priest who entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for them. They're saying, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered once into that holy place, and having obtained eternal redemption for them.

It's, I just, I just rejoice, and it's just exciting to even imagine all these light bulbs turning on, and that this man, Jesus, he was a sacrifice who came back from the dead. You know, the Old, the New Testament tells in Hebrews that when, when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, he was willing to go through with actually killing his son, because he had the hope that God would raise him from the dead. It's the hope of the resurrection.

So all of these things are clicking, and these, even these, the priests of Judaism are coming to see Messiah, as Jesus is the true Messiah, true Savior. Religious people who have all the external formalities of worship, there's plenty of them, maybe even here this morning. And you can hear about the blood, you can sing about the blood, but has that blood ever been applied to your own heart? Have you ever received, by faith, the payment that Jesus made on the cross for your sin? Many priests, many religious people became obedient to the faith.

We see also here, in addition to being marked by the progress of the gospel, the spirit-filled leadership. Oh, I sort of jumped ahead. Spirit-filled leadership.

The apostles, of course, received the Holy Spirit and were filled with the Holy Spirit, and there was also evidence of this. The apostles identified with the deacons that had been chosen, they didn't give them the

Holy Spirit. When they put their hands on them and prayed with them, they didn't give them any kind of special power.

What they did was they recognized, in the context of the church body, they gave them authority to act in the roles that they acted. But the Holy Spirit was already in them. It wasn't some sort of transference of power.

We've got to get that straight, because there's a lot of false teaching about laying on hands and then transferring this anointing by laying hands on others. That's not what was happening there. Okay, now we see also that there's a real example of this spirit-led leadership in Stephen.

Now remember, he is not intended to be an authoritative preacher or teacher. That was not what the purpose of his calling was. And yet, we see that he is full of faith in the Holy Spirit.

In verse 5, and when they said they pleased the whole gathering and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith in the Holy Spirit, and all these other men as well, and they sat before the apostles and they prayed for them. Then you go down to verse 8 and you begin to see what Stephen's ministry looks like. And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.

So we have two descriptions of Stephen here. He is full of the Holy Spirit. That's what they see in him when they're choosing.

And then later on, Luke says that he is full of grace and power. Again, I suggest to you that he's not full of himself. None of this comes from him, and he knows it.

Do I believe that signs and wonders could take place in our day? It's a big question, big question at the local ministerial prayer meeting. Can signs and wonders take place? Are there people who can walk around and their shadow will fall on someone and they'll be healed? Well, I'm not going to answer that question. I don't want to presume anything.

But I wonder when people are full of the Holy Spirit, full of faith, full of power, full of wisdom, whether these things might happen. Matter of fact, without drawing attention to any person's unique charm or charisma or anything like that, I'm just saying God is big enough to do things like these. I'm not suggesting anyone go out and start trying to do miracles.

But if God wants to do a miracle through you, this is not being full of yourself and being full of the Holy Spirit. That's the kind of person he's going to use to do that. And we see also here that it is manifest through, in Stephen's life, through wonders, wonders, signs and wonders.

I don't know exactly what they were. The Bible doesn't say. And he was filled with wisdom.

Look at verse 10. Oh, we already looked at verse 10, but a little bit further on. Oh, yeah, verse 10 is the verse I wanted.

It says here, but they could not withstand these people who rose up to accuse him, people of the synagogue of the freemen. They could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking. I don't think this was Stephen's natural wisdom.

I don't know whether he did very well in school or whether he excelled in oratory class. In fact, none of the disciples had, were real big speakers. They were fishermen.

Peter was, I've mentioned it lots of times before, but he was chicken of a little girl who said that he'd been with Jesus, and God gave them wisdom and power and boldness. So Stephen had this wisdom, and the fact that he was filled with the spirit was manifest through this wisdom. They could not contend with his wisdom or with the spirit that was giving him that wisdom.

If you worry about being put on the hot seat to defend your faith, and you think, I would never know what to say if someone were to ask me those hard questions, I would say give all of your attention to being filled with the Holy Spirit, to seeking his word and confessing your sin to him, living, walking in humility, and trusting Christ, the one who saved you and the one who is able to give you everything that is necessary for life and godliness. And don't worry. When you're in the word of God, and when you're yielded to him, he will give you the words.

Our brother Greg here, I think you streak preach from time to time, don't you? And I want to ask you, does God provide for those situations? Absolutely. Well, the last characteristic here, or the way that this spiritual, spirit-filled leadership comes through Stephen is through witness. And I've looked at the end here.

I didn't know what else to call this, besides it was a W. So, but verse 15. They give all these false accusations, and basically he's in court, okay? They're accusing him, and they're trying to bring him down. Gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Remember earlier, they took note of these men that they had been with Jesus? Remember earlier when Peter said, look at me? That paralyzed, or that lame man, look at us? What do you think that lame man saw? Do you think he saw a grizzled old fisherman, or did he see the presence of Jesus? Did he see that this man had been with Jesus? Our witness begins with our very countenance. If we are at peace with God, and if we are lovers of souls, this ought to be visible even in our faces. And I'm not saying put on some sort of sickly smile.

You can kind of tell when people do that on purpose, and it's not real. But it's just another mark. Now, his witness actually continues in the next chapter.

If you want a real good summary of Old Testament history, you can read Acts chapter 7. We'll look at it next week. But what Stephen does in that summary is he disproves all of their accusations. He shows them that he is not blaspheming God's name, that he is not against any of the traditions, and that Jesus Christ is the epitome of what the temple worship is all about.

And we'll get to that later. But the thing is that God, through Stephen, witnesses to himself, and just lays out the foundation of the law. And it basically, at the end of all of that, his accusers are they're held in conviction, and they're so angry they pick up stones and kill him.

All right, that wouldn't be a very good way to end, except that suffering is certainly something to be expected when anyone is bold in proclaiming the gospel. And Stephen was very happy to pay that price of martyrdom. Well, that brings us to the end of the chapter, and we're a little bit past our normal ending time.

But as you can see here, these are priorities of a productive church. Let's take a look at what God is doing here. Is the word of God increasing? Is the number of disciples multiplying? We're doing pretty good in the biological department, but how about the other department? And are many priests, many religious people, coming to a true saving knowledge of Jesus Christ? Let's think about these things and pray about them,

and live the gospel and preach the gospel.

Father in heaven, thank you for your word again. It is like water to our soul. Thank you, Lord, that the same spirit that was working here in the book of Acts drawing sinners to yourself is at work in us.

I pray, Lord, that you would take these words and that you would keep them in our minds and our memories and in our hearts. And Lord, that we would see a radical upheaval, first of all, in this church body, and then even in our community. Lord, that what you begin to do here would have great effect all around the world, and that you would continue to build your church as you have promised.

And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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