

What is Church – Acts 2:37-47

INTRODUCTION:

1. The last time I spoke, we started examining Acts 2:37-42, and we started with the acronym *J.E.S.U.S.*, which was as follows: *J- Jesus Christ; E- Emotive Worship; S – Saved Church members; U Under Godly leadership; S – Sin repenting*

2. And today, we will continue to the second part, which is C.H.U.R.C.H.

C – COMMUNION: *“They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”*

1. At Jesus’ last supper as He ate with His disciples, He said, *“This is my body given for you,” and he took the wine and said, “This is My blood shed for you.”*

2. When we partake of Communion, we’re reminding ourselves of the sacrifice of our Savior.

3. As I have studied the Passover and taken it to Jesus’ last supper, and then to the New Testament Lord’s Table, or Communion feast, I realized that historically, up until the Reformation, God’s people had pretty much celebrated Communion every week.

4. Communion is an opportunity for you to do business with the Lord and to remember His broken body and His shed blood, given out of love for you, so that your sins could be forgiven.

5. With preaching, we hear the gospel, but in Communion, we show the gospel.

6. *Revelations 19:7 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”*

QUESTION: *So, my question to you is this: do you partake of Communion on Sundays*

It’s a great honor to do so, and we would invite you to join us.

H -HUGE GENEROSITY: *Acts 2:44-45, “And all who believed were together, had all things in common”—that’s their possessions. “And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”*

1. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.

2. Jesus lives without sin, gives us His life, and dies. Then He ascends into heaven.

3. Once you meet Jesus and you receive the Holy Spirit, unless you really fight or resist the promptings of the Holy Spirit, He awakens in you a desire to be generous.

4. As you know, there was only one of Jesus’ disciples who wasn’t a giver.

5. In the verses we are looking at, we see God’s people, filled with the Holy Spirit, who are hugely generous and give their possessions to other people.

6. Now, let me say this—I’ve got to clarify this: there will always be at least one person who, when they hear this, says, *“Yay, Communism!”*

7. They’re like, *“Well, look, they didn’t even own their stuff. It was all in a big pot, and you could just take what you wanted.”*

8. No, that’s not the way it works, because Communism denies private property ownership.

9. Does the Bible teach private property ownership, yes or no?

10. So, *“Thou shalt not steal.”* It means it’s not yours.

12. Your house, your car, your income, your wealth, your possessions—those are yours.

13. But when we get saved, we have stewardship responsibility

14. The church doesn’t have any right to your resources, but you’re invited to give.

15. If you are filled with the Holy Spirit and love the church and love people, you will give.

16. The church has no right to take, but we have the privilege to invite others to give in obedience to the scriptures.

17. Immediately, some of you will be like, *“Here we go, the church talking about money again.”*

18. No, we're talking about your god. (small g)
19. Jesus says some have Mammon (money) as their god.
20. Who's your god? What's your priority? Where's your investment?
21. There are people in this church who are hugely generous.
22. And that happens over and over and over in unaccounted ways, humble ways, quiet ways, and unseen ways among loving relationships with people in the church.
23. It is never about the amount, but the heart. Remember the story of the widow's mite

QUESTION: *So, how is your generosity going? How are you doing? Are you a generous person?*

U – UNDER WATER BAPTISM: *Acts 2:41, "So those who received his word were baptized."*

1. Jesus was baptized in a river, and John the Baptizer baptized people in a river.
3. How many of you were baptized as infants? The answer is nobody
4. You were made wet, probably by a priest, and believing parents who had good intentions, but you were not baptized - you were sprinkled.
5. Baptism means "*dunk underwater*." This word is used for a ship that sank.
6. So, baptism is for adults.
7. My mom and dad were Episcopalians, and so I was sprinkled as an infant.
8. But once I got saved, coming to my own faith, I got baptized as a believer in Jesus Christ to show his **death, burial, resurrection for me, newness of life.**

QUESTION:

1. Have you been baptized - that's the question?
2. Baptisms are evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work, and we rejoice in that.

R – REGULAR GATHERINGS: *Acts 2:46, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes."*

1. We meet on Sunday because it's the day we gather to remember the resurrection of Jesus.
2. The early church had bigger meetings and small meetings.
3. We have bigger meetings. They tend to be on Sunday and small meetings; we call them Community Groups.
4. Some are new to church, new to Christianity, and you say, "***Why do we do these things?***"
 - They are in the bible
 - Now, there is a myth that I need to correct, and that is sometimes people come along and say, "*Oh, the early church only had small meetings, not big ones. They only met in homes. They didn't have large get-togethers. We should only meet in homes,*" "*We don't need all that leadership,*" and "*We don't need all that preaching,*" and "*Not everybody needs to get together. It should just be a little group.*" Or "*That's the pure church,*" or "*That's the best church,*" or "*That's the real church.*"
5. Any time you hear the word "temple" and "court," think big, OK?
6. We read about other places in the Bible with large meetings
7. In the city of Ephesus, from which Paul wrote, he rented the hall of Tyrannus, and he lectured there.
8. Jesus had big crowds—5,000 men, plus the women, and children, some 20,000 people.
9. And there are smaller gatherings in the homes
10. In the hill country of Judea, where Jesus grew up, the people were peasants, and their homes were very small, the size of a parking stall

11. But if you go to a city like Laodicea, one of the cities mentioned in the Bible, these people lived on a plateau.
12. We were in Italy earlier this year, and we visited the ancient city of Pompei, and there were great rooms for entertaining in the homes of the more affluent people that could easily house hundreds of people.
13. I want you to blow out the myth that Christianity was forever this small movement of a couple of people meeting in a home and nothing more.
14. They have large meetings and small meetings, and even some of the meetings in the homes were not necessarily small meetings.

QUESTION: Are you attending our large meetings? Do you join us regularly on Sunday?

1. Are you participating in our small meetings, our Community Groups that meet in homes?
2. We don't believe that if you just go to a Community Group that you're fully participating in what is a biblical church.
3. Somebody who's only in a Community Group or only listens to a sermon online is getting an aspect of the church, but they're not participating in the fullness of what it means to be the New Testament church.
4. So, my encouragement is for you to get involved with God's people.
5. Regular gatherings—this shows us Jesus' reconciliation, that he reconciles us to God, and he reconciles us to one another.

C - COMMUNITY: Acts 2:42, "They devoted themselves to the fellowship."

1. Hospitality is where we welcome strangers; fellowship is where we welcome believers **"to the breaking of bread and prayers."**
2. So, community is getting together, they know each other, they love each other, they serve one another, they do life together.
3. **Acts 2:44, "All who believed were together." Acts 2:46, "Breaking bread in their homes."**
4. So, the language here is the language of community.
5. This is community, friendship, life, love, joy, and unity.
6. But don't get this idealized picture of a Community group - sometimes in community, you're going to find a person who is going to drive you nuts.
7. So, when you show up to a Community Group, don't think, *"Oh, this will be amazing. These people will be perfect. It's going to be like heaven."*
8. No, it might not be - you're going to drive them crazy, and they're going to drive you crazy.
9. Welcome to the family of God, and we will work things through together.
10. *God will afflict you with a person according to your need."*

QUESTION: Are you in a Community group?

H - HARVESTING THROUGH EVANGELISM:

1. Our mission must always be to make disciples.
2. We want people to meet Jesus and to become more like Jesus.
3. **Acts 2:41, "There were added that day about three thousand souls."**
4. How big was the church before that – a hundred twenty to three thousand?
5. It's a good thing when a family grows.
6. You know I'd rather have a big family than one where things never change.
7. We may have a smaller family now, but it is my earnest prayer that we become a big family, and that would be a good thing.

8. But we are not going to hype or engineer something.
9. If the Holy Spirit is not in it, I am not interested.
10. It is about souls – people being saved, disciplined, and on their way to heaven as they, in turn, lead others to the Lord, disciple them, and have the assurance that they too are on their way to heaven.
11. Folks, that is the multiplication principle
12. **Acts 2:47, “The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”**
13. You know what’s amazing - years ago, I prayed, *“Lord Jesus, I know it’s not soon, but someday, please, let us see people get saved day by day. Every day, every day, let us get to the point where we see people saved.”*
14. And I have not yet seen the fulfillment of that at Bellevue Church.
15. But over the many years, we have seen many, many people around the world come to a saving knowledge of Christ.
16. You are part of that – being the witness for your circle of influence
17. Some of you may say, *“Oh, it’s all about the numbers.”* No it is not
18. We believe that people have an encounter with Christ, and you are the catalyst for that
19. This is what Jesus started. This is what Jesus died for. This is what Jesus loves.

A CHANCE TO OBEY:

1. I don’t know if you know this: I really do love each one of you
2. And I really do love our church.
3. And Jesus really does love our church, and my prayer is that the Holy Spirit shows up – nothing forced, engineered, or hyped, but just a sweet move of Him in our midst
4. If you’re not a Christian, this is where you give your sins to Jesus and become a Christian.
5. We’re going to sing so you can obey.
6. We also want you to sign up to serve and get into a Community Group so you can obey.
7. We invite you to love and serve one another so that you can obey.
8. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves.
9. We need to be doers of the Word
- 10 And in this church, no one is more important than the next.
11. To tell you the truth, numbers are not my focus; it is about you – we want to shepherd and care for you individually
12. Remember last week, I spoke about the perverse model for the church, which is the CEO model – that is, managing a church like a business.
13. Scripture informs us over and over that Jesus is the great shepherd
14. ***“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, He makes me lie down in green pastures, He restores my soul”***
15. In the Bible, there are two main types of shepherds mentioned.
16. The first type refers to actual shepherds who tended to sheep, such as Abel and David. The second type refers to spiritual leaders or “shepherds” who guide and care for God’s people, like Moses, Ezekiel, and Jesus.
17. These shepherds are often seen as figures of leadership, protection, and guidance in both the Old and New Testaments.
18. I want our church to be strong, to have loving, committed, stable leaders and pastors who are going to love and care for our family.

19. I want the Community Groups to not settle for anything less than working through the hard issues of life together and doing what the church families are supposed to do together on mission in their community, reaching out to the lapsed, the collapsed, the disillusioned, and the unbelievers.
20. It's about people meeting Jesus.
21. It's about people being loved by Jesus. It's about people loving Jesus and loving each other.
22. It's about people then doing life together as a family; walking through the hard times; being there to celebrate the good times; when there are problems or sin, it's about helping people get unstuck and corrected; when people are growing in wisdom, having them become leaders and help look after the younger believers in the family.
23. Those are the things that, in my heart right now, are super important.
24. We have so many people to reach.
25. And so, as you're thinking about Bellevue Church, be praying for us as we relaunch after a long hiatus, with Community Groups being at the center of what we do
26. Here's the truth, as I said, I love our church, and by God's grace, I want to continue to pastor this church for as long as the Lord allows.
27. I love our diversity - everybody's different and everybody needs investment, love, care, concern, and correction differently.
28. As a side note, we have some of the most amazing leaders right in our midst – many of them are so low profile that you would not even know them, but without them, the cogs of this church will not turn effectively.
29. So, love the people in your family and in your spiritual family, and even when there's conflict, trouble, or trial, we love one another, and we work through that so that we can be the family of God and continue to mature together.
30. Whatever Jesus has for us, I know that if we're loving one another, whatever he has for us, we're going to be ready for it.
31. If we're not loving one another, we're not going to be ready for any opportunity that he would give us.

FINALLY:

CT Studd, who gave up a personal fortune, said this: "I am more than ever determined that no ring or limit shall be placed around us, other than that of our Lord Himself, To the uttermost parts, To every creature. I belong and will ever belong to The Great God party. I will have nought to do with The Little God party..."

General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, once said that if he had his way, he wished part of the final training for Christians going into the work of evangelism would be for them to dangle over Hell for twenty-four hours. It wasn't so they would fear it for themselves, because they had the hope of Heaven. Rather, it was so they could see the reality of what awaits those who do not know Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:23 "Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives."

John 13:15: "I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you."

So, my question for each one of you – are you willing to join me in this great adventure