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Acts 2020 Bible Study (Moving Forward with Jesus) DNA: The Core of the Local Church

Acts 2:42-47, Devoted To The Word

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In our series we are looking at Acts 2:42-47 as we consider the core and heart of the church. In Acts 2:41 we are told that the 3000 people received the message I proclaimed and they were baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). What will these people do next? Now that they have accepted the message about Jesus responded in faith as seen in their repentance and baptism, what will these disciples do now?

Devoted

The first thing we need to see is that these 3000 disciples devote themselves to spiritual things. Acts 2:42 says that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, breaking bread, to fellowship, and to prayers. These people now have a new devotion in their lives. They are not devoting themselves to hobbies, material interests, sports, or some other interest. They are devoting themselves to spiritual things. But even in the spiritual things, it is important to consider what they did devote themselves to in their lives. As the people of God they did not devote themselves to music, entertainment, social programs, or social justice. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to break bread, to fellowship, and to prayers. The church must always have a spiritual focus. Here is something important for us to think about. If the people spend their time and resources involved in worldly concerns, then who is going to fill our spiritual concerns and needs? What is going to fill the spiritual void if the church spends about its time in cultural events, world affairs, and material concerns? The church must fill the role of handling spiritual concerns and spiritual needs. This is one of the reasons why you will not see here a physical focus. We are not going to have barbecues here, hand out coffees, blast rock bands, or other such things. We can get that elsewhere. What we need is the spiritual when we come together. We immediately see a spiritual focus that these Christians have in Acts 2:42 and this must be our focus also.

Before we move on, I want for us to consider the four areas these Christians devoted themselves to: the apostles' teaching, breaking bread, fellowship, and prayer. This is so simple. There is nothing extraordinary here. There is nothing radical in what they devote themselves to. But extraordinary things will happen if we devote ourselves to this focused walk with God. What we are going to see is that this is a simple formula for devoting ourselves to God and growing our faith.

The Apostles' Teaching

We are told that these disciples devoted their time to the apostles' teaching. This immediately tells us that the teaching of the apostles was authoritative. They did not only read the red letters (the words of Jesus), but considered what the apostles taught and wrote as equally authoritative. By devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, these disciples are devoting to hearing the word of God.

What a picture we are given in this listing! The disciples devoted themselves to knowing the word of God. They wanted to know God's will. They wanted to know God's word as given through the apostles. This is a key characteristic of God's people: they desire God's word. This is what Jesus said about the people of God.

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31-32 NRSV)

Think about what Jesus says. If you are living in his word and staying in it, then you are truly his disciples. You will know the truth and be made free. This is an important picture for our consideration. God's people continue in God's word. This is what we see the disciples in Acts 2:42 immediately doing. They are devoting themselves to the word. Peter says the same thing.

Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation, if you have tasted that the Lord is good. (1 Peter 2:2-3)

Peter says that God's people desire the word. They want the word so that they can grow into their salvation. They desire it like a baby desires milk. This is a power because you cannot distract an infant from milk when they want it. They will continue to cry until they receive the milk they desire. Peter uses this image as a picture of the desire of God's word.

In essence, we are not the people of God without having a commitment to God's word. We are to have a hunger for hearing the word of God. We devote ourselves to teaching and want to hear the proclamation of the scriptures. Does devoting ourselves to the word of the Lord sound like wanting to hear a short devotional or a sermon talk? There is a growing call for less teaching or no teaching at all. There is a growing desire to keep the teaching light and simple. But as the people of God we must hear what the word says. We should desire to hear all of what God says. We want to know what he says in the Prophets just as much as we want to hear what God says in the Gospels. We do not look at the teaching as a minimum requirement but desiring to hear God's word as often as possible.

We must take a step back and see if this is an accurate description about our lives. Are we devoted to the word like we see these Christians in Acts 2 and like Jesus described? Do we long to get into the scriptures every day? Do we want more time in God's word, not less? Do we want to hear all of God's word, not just certain parts? Do we want to hear the complex teachings just as much as we want to hear the simple teachings from God's word? What we desire says a lot about where we are in our relationship with God. Do we avoid reading God's word during the week? Do we avoid opportunities to listen to God's word taught? Do we want less teaching? Do we want easy teaching? Do we only want certain books or certain topics? These are warning flags that must concern us if we said yes to any of them.

Why Devotion To The Word?

So why is this so important as the people of God? First, devoting ourselves to the word is the only way we will rid ourselves of wrong ideas about life and renew our image of God. If we think about how much influence the world has on our thinking due to what we watch, read, and listen to, it is so easy for us to become more like the world. The only way to counteract the world's impression on our hearts and minds is a constant diet of God's word. Now sometimes we will excuse ourselves from devoting ourselves to the word of God because of our schedules. We say that we are too busy and there is so much going on. We are tired and there is too much to do. But please remember that we all do what we want to do. Did we have time to get on the internet? Did we have time to watch tv? Did we have time to be on social media? Do we have time for our other hobbies and relaxation activities? I am sure that we did, no matter how short it was. You see that we like to use the excuse of being busy but that we did not want to do. If we did not read the word today, it is because we did not want to read it today. There is no other option. We need to let that idea hit in our hearts. The people of God devote themselves to the word which means that the word of God receives priority over our other interests and desires. Devotion to the word is the only way that we can be transformed by God and remove all the wrong thinking that is in our minds.

Second, devotion to the word of God is the only way we will grow in our faith toward salvation. Peter said this in 1 Peter 2:2 as we looked at earlier in the lesson. Our growth in God is only going to happen by being devoted to the word of God. Knowing God's word is going to help us make better decisions in this life and prepare us for eternity with the Lord. The less we know about God from his word, the greater the disaster that is ahead of us. Israel was destroyed because they lost their desire for God and to love him.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the commandments of the Lord, I also will forget your children. (Hosea 4:6 ESV)

We must be a learning church. So there is a responsibility in the leaders to teach God's word and a desire for all people to desire to hear God's word. It is the only way we can grow. If we are weak in the faith and struggling with God, we need to really closely consider if we can say that we are devoted to the word.

Devoting Ourselves

1. Never read just a Bible verse.

This might sound really strange but we need to never read a Bible verse. It is so easy to take a verse of the Bible out of its context when we only read one verse. Read the whole paragraph and get the whole context. God gave us books that stand alone. Think about in ancient times that none of these books were collected into one volume but remain separate scrolls for hundreds of years. They are letters to people and churches. The books are songs and poetry books. The books are prophecies. The books are theological narratives. The Bible is not a book of random sayings from God. Each book has literary structure and order.

2. Look for why the text was written.

Do not read only looking for what I am supposed to do or not do. Looking for these purpose statements and thesis statement will help you enjoy a book of the Bible more. Let me give you one example: The book of 1 John is considered a fairly complicated book. But turn to 1 John 5:13 and notice what it says.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13 ESV)

Now we have a lens for reading this book. What John is teaching is to help us know that we have eternal life. So I can read each paragraph asking myself, "How do I know that I have eternal life?" Finding and knowing these purpose statements will help us be excited to read each book in God's word.

3. Think about what the text just said.

We blow over words and sentences so quickly without thinking about the implications of what was read. I believe this is exactly what Jesus is telling the Pharisees and Sadducees when he asks them, "Have you not read?" Of course they had read it but they had not thought about it in a way to understand what it said. They knew it but did not think about the conclusions that should be drawn from it. I think this is why there are so many misunderstandings and disagreements over scriptures and teachings. We often do not carefully read what the scriptures say.

One of the best ways to slow down and think about what the scripture said is to have a wide margin Bible, a journaling Bible, or notebook that you can highlight and make observations. This helps us stop reading to get done and allows us to start reading with our minds, so that we can contemplate what the text said. One thing that is recently popular is that every translation now has a journaling Bible or a wide margin Bible. I would advise getting yourself a large print journaling Bible unless you are you the print can be very small in those editions. But now you can read with colored pencils, highlighters, and pens so that you can really think about what the text said and your thoughts devotionally toward God.

4. Apply the text.

Get a notebook or journaling Bible and write down what you are thinking and seeing. What does this passage teach you about God? How does this passage change you? Do these words hit your heart? But remember something very important: application to ourselves cannot be done properly unless we understand how the text was intended for the original audience. What did they hear? What did they learn? Now I can grasp what we are to learn.

5. Jump start your reading.

A great way to jumpstart your reading is to buy yourself a new Bible and try a new translation. Buying something new always generates an initial excitement to go to look at your new purchase. Get yourself a new Bible to start reading today. Also, try a new translation. You will see all new things because things can be worded differently that will give you a better understanding. I am not saying that you need to leave your favorite translation forever. But try reading a new translation and you will enjoy new things. If you have always used a NKJV, try the ESV, CSB, NET, or NIV. If you have always used a NIV, try using a NASB, NET, ESV, or CSB. If you always used a NASB, try using a CSB, NIV, NET, or ESV. The CSB, ESV, NASB, NET, NIV, NKJV, and NRSV are reliable, accurate translations that are written in currently English so that we can understand what we are reading.

6. Read to see the glory and beauty of God.

Finally, read to see God. This is the most important instruction for enjoying reading God's word. We have been called to know God. We are beholding the glory of God as we look into God's word. Read in that way. Read to see Jesus. Read to see the glory of the Lord. Read to understand the Lord. Do not read to read. Do not read with a self-centered lens: what am I going to learn about God? When Jesus spoke to the men on the road to Emmaus, he opened the scriptures and beginning with Moses and the Prophets showed them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (cf. Luke 24:27). Read in the light of the gospel and read to see the glory and the beauty of God. Experience him. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

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7 pm