**PRAISING GOD & HAVING FAVOR WITH ALL THE PEOPLE**

Most of you reading this have already become Christians. You are my family. Together we are “*of like precious faith*” (I Peter 1:7; 2 Peter 1:1). Together we are building each other up on “*the most holy faith*” (Jude 20). There is a tie that binds our hearts together in Christian love. We are a “band of brothers” that exceed that of any Corps of Marines (“the few, the proud…”), or Battalion of Army (“an army of one”). Together we are waging “*the good warfare*” (I Timothy 1:18), and fighting “*the good fight*” (I Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7). We are all in this together, soon to join that great cloud of witnesses who have fought their fight, finished their course, kept their faith (Hebrews 12:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:7).

But do you know where all this started? Yes, almost 2,000 years ago on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2 traces our spiritual bloodline of spiritual warriors back to the 12 apostles and those first 3,000 that were baptized on that spectacular day when the Spirit of God was poured out and souls responded to Peter’s “*Repent and be baptized”* command(Acts 2:38). Thousands “*gladly received the word and were baptized*” (2:41).

It’s at that point that it really gets interesting. What do 3,000 people now do together? Read on…

*44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47* ***praising God and having favor with all the people****. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved*.”

Jews from around the Roman Empire had gathered for this sacred day*. “ 5 And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.”*

What are they going to do now? How are they going to stay together and “*continue steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers*” (2:42)? They did two things:

1) They “*continued daily with one accord in the temple*”
2) They “*broke bread from house to house*”

Being together was absolutely crucial to creating this new bond of fellowship. They spent TIME together, both spiritually and socially. I’m guessing that within two to three months most of these new Christians knew each other by name and country. They were now “blood brothers” (they had all been bought by the blood of Jesus – Acts 20:28). I doubt you had to beg them to come to the temple to worship, or open their home to serve. It was fast becoming part of their DNA. They loved each other and it showed.

But there was something else that fascinates me about this text from Acts 2. It says their actions impressed two Beings – God, and the Unconverted.

1) **God**. “*Praising God*” revealed that they first looked UP. One of those people in that first church gathering was James, the Lord’s real blood brother. And He would later write these words:

“17 *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from* ***above****, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures*.” (James 1:17-18)

Upon hearing Peter preach that first sermon they realized with sudden terror that they had been guilty of crucifying the Son of God (Acts 2:36). They were “*cut to the heart*” and asked what they should do (2:37). With a great sense of relief they learned there was something they could do – *Repent and be baptized* (2:38). “*Gladly*” they did this (2:41). From that day forward they showed the Jewish world, and then the Gentile world, that “God is so good, God is so good, God is so good, He’s so good to me.” In other words - Praise, praise, praise, praise, praise! God had to love this.

2) **Unconverted**. “*and having favor with all the people*.” This reveals that they then looked OUT. They knew by their new life that they were responsible to share their faith with others. They were to now be “*salt*” and “*light*” (Matt. 5:13-16). They were to become “*peacemakers*” (Matt. 5:9). This demonstration of sincere brotherly love impacted first Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, then the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). The numbers in that first church soon swelled to 5,000 (Acts 4:4), then it simply said, *“And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women”* (Acts 5:14). People felt their contagious spirit of love and wanted to be a part of that sacred fellowship.

**Application:**

During these days when we are practicing social distancing and can’t publicly “*continue daily with one accord in the [church building]*” or “*break bread from house to house*,” there is something we can still all do together.

1) *Praise God*. We can all still pray! And sing. Or do both! Like this:
 “Ere you left your room this morning, did you think to pray?”
 In the name of Christ our Savior, did you sue for loving favor, as a shield today?

 When your heart was filled with anger, did you think to pray?
 Did you plead for grace my brother, that you might forgive another, who had crossed your way?

 When sore trials come upon you, did you think to pray?
 When your soul was bowed in sorrow, Balm of Gilead did you borrow, at the gates of day?

 CHORUS: O how praying rests the weary! Prayer will change the night to day.
 So when life seems dark and dreary, don’t forget to pray!

2) *Have Favor With All The People*. Maybe it’s just me, but I’m thinking behind all this pandemic madness is an answer to my prayer that I often say to God. It’s found in Colossians 4:2-6. Do you want to hear it? Here it is:

*“2 Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; 3 meanwhile praying also for us, that* ***God would open to us a door for the word****, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, 4 that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.
5* ***Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside****, redeeming the time. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”*

Today. This moment. Right now. God is answering prayers to “*open to us a door for the word*.” But it takes walking in wisdom toward those who are *outside*. Outside? Of what? “…*at that time you were without Christ … aliens … strangers … having no hope … without God in the world*” (Eph. 2:12). But just as those first Christians in 30 ad changed the status of those who were outside from “*lost*” to “*found*” (Luke 15), so God has set the table in 2020 for us to “*have favor with all the people*” so that they also might be “*added to the church by the Lord*” (Act 2:47).

This is our moment. This is our door of opportunity. Let us now praise God. Let us now have favor with all the people. What a great time to be alive!

Until tomorrow… Praise God. And get M-A-D. Make-A-Difference.

I love you.

Rick