# SERMON SERIES:

# CARRYING ON THE MISSION OF JESUS

# “The Two Imperatives Of The Early Church”

## *Acts 2:32-33, 36-47*

Last Sunday we launched a new sermon series called “Carrying On The Mission of Jesus” that focuses on the book of Acts. The purpose of this series is to help us see the way in which the biblical church is supposed to function, and to aid us in understanding the mission, heritage, and purpose of the church.

Last week I shared with you the “ever-widening circle” from Acts 1:8, which forms the anchor for this series: “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* The last words of Jesus to his church were for them to carry on his own mission in the world. Beginning right here at home and stretching across the world, we’re still called to that great task.

I also mentioned what’s been known as the ***“Basic Law of Congregational Life.” This rule states that churches grow when they intentionally reach out to others, and churches die when all they do is take care of themselves.*** If we’re to become the full ideal of what God wants us to be as his church, our focus cannot be turned inward, but must be turned outward.

This morning I want to emphasize two imperatives of the early church―two things we consistently find in the actions of the earliest Christians: **devotion to Jesus** and **obedience to Jesus**. It’s devotion and obedience that help us understand the implications of God’s claim on our lives, and the church’s role in transforming its community.

Let’s turn to Acts 2. We’re going to begin with verses 32-33, then jump down to 36-47.

In chapter 2 of Acts, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the waiting disciples and they began speaking in a variety of different languages “…*describing God’s mighty wonders!”* (2:11). The arrival of the Holy Spirit was so powerful that Peter had to convince people that the disciples weren’t drunk because it was only nine o’clock in the morning!

Look at verses 32-33: *This Jesus, God raised up. And every one of us here is a witness to it. Then, raised to the heights at the right hand of God and receiving the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, he poured out the Spirit he had just received. That is what you see and hear*.” In his message to the people, Peter drew upon the writings of the prophets and the psalms to declare that Jesus is Lord and Christ over all. Only a few chapters later, in Acts 4:12, Peter will boldly proclaim, *“There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”*

***Just like our own culture today, the world of Jesus’ day was pagan. We live in a time when many gods vie for the devotion and obedience of people. In such a world, to ask someone if he or she “believes in god” is a meaningless question. The public doesn’t have a clue which god you ‘re talking about: the god of Israel? The god of Hinduism (and there are thousands!)? The god of Oprah Winfrey? The god of the Yankees? The god of Donald Trump?***

Because the “cult of celebrity” permeates every aspect of our culture today, people have little to no clue what‘s meant when they hear the word *god*. Therefore, it’s vital that the church distinguish which god we‘re talking about. Like the people of the Old Testament who spoke of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we must talk about Jesus Christ, plainly and purposefully.

For the early church, Jesus was central to all they said, thought, and did. Jewish belief taught that there was only one true God. Yet the first Christians understood that Jesus was the fullness of God in human form. He was the very equal and the complete revelation of the living God. This was the first significant break between Christianity and its Jewish origins.

The early church’s devotion to Jesus resulted in the phrase ***“Jesus is Lord,”*** ***which is our oldest known creedal statement of faith.*** Keep in mind that for the early church to make such a claim was extremely dangerous—even lethal. During the first century, the phrase “Jesus is Lord” was used in contrast to the popular greeting among Roman citizens, “Caesar is Lord.” Because the early church refused to swear allegiance to the Roman emperor, the empire saw this refusal as a social, religious, and political threat. For Christians to say “Jesus is Lord” meant that Jesus deserved more honor than Caesar did. It also showed that the early church believed the Emperor was not divine. Rather, they asserted that Jesus was the supreme ruler of all creation. For this belief, countless numbers of Christ-followers were martyred.

To say Jesus sits on God’s throne, and to call him Lord and Christ, is to separate Jesus from all other beings and to equate him with God. As such, he commands our devotion and obedience. Jump down to Acts 2:36. Peter said, *“All Israel, then, know this: There’s no longer room for doubt—God made him Master and Messiah, this Jesus whom you killed on a cross.”*  We must be firmly convinced that Jesus is fully and completely Lord of our lives—of every single aspect. This is not a one-time-and-it’s-done exercise, but something we must continually work toward. We should desire to fall more and more in love with Jesus as we mature in our spiritual walk. And if we’re devoted, then there should be obedience.

Ahhh, obedience...

A word which strikes fear and guilt in our hearts in equal measure! Obedience is incredibly difficult for us since we exist in a very self-centered, self-absorbed culture. We don’t like bowing to anyone. Our pride continually gets in the way.

But what does obedience to Jesus look like?

Sitting in a pew? Going to committee meetings? Jesus didn’t die for such things. If we follow the example of Jesus, we know that real Christianity begins when we exit this building. Christ didn’t die so we could sit and marinate in comfortable seats. He died so we could transform the world and make disciples who will go out to transform the world and make more disciples.

Obedience to Jesus is just another way of saying that the early church saw its reason for existence to be *missional*. To be obedient to Jesus was to do what Jesus did: to leave the religious center called the temple or sanctuary, and relate to and reach the non-believer. To be obedient to the Lord is to walk with him on the road to mission, to constantly be moving away from Jerusalem and toward Emmaus, to set aside our wants and wishes in order to offer Christ to others. The focus of authentic ministry is always more outward than inward. We’re maturing as Christians when our primary concern is the salvation of the world rather than the entitlements that come with church membership.

But here’s the kicker: before devotion and obedience to Jesus can happen, repentance must take place. Look at Acts 2:37-38: *Cut to the quick, those who were there listening asked Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers! Brothers! So now what do we do?” Peter said, “Change your life. Turn to God and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so your sins are forgiven. Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

Like devotion or obedience, repentance is another word we’re all very familiar with; yet I wonder how many Christ-followers practice real repentance? Repentance isn’t just “I’m sorry for what I did.” It’s a change in heart, mind, and action toward God and his Word. ***It literally means to “turn around,” to do a 180º (not a 360º!)***

Since we’re so familiar with the term *repentance*, we often forget what’s really involved in it. For authentic biblical repentance to occur, three things have to happen: First, we have to see ourselves as we really are—lost, ruined, broken, guilty—and acknowledge our sin. Every single one of us is a sinner for one reason or another. We’re all guilty of sin, and we have no part in Jesus or his mission until we confess our sins, ask for forgiveness, and let him turn our lives around.

Second, we need to be horrified by our sinful condition and desire God’s help. Simply feeling sorry isn’t enough. We must hate what we’ve done or what we’ve become. Repentance comes through the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and causes a change in our attitude, actions, and our love for Jesus. To encounter the living God in Jesus Christ is to change. ***Erwin McManus, a Los Angeles pastor says, “You cannot meet the Creator of the universe and remain the same. If the God who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present comes to dwell within your soul, you would expect at least some minor disruption. I think there’s a problem when people talk about meeting God or knowing God and yet remain unchanged by God.”*** To fully repent, we must abhor what we’ve done and seek out God’s grace.

And third, we must abandon our sin and throw ourselves onto God’s mercy. Repentance involves turning away and forsaking sin, not just getting a free “Forgiveness Pass” so we can go out and do it all over again. Repentance is not only a heart that is broken *for* sin, but also a heart that is broken *from* sin. We must flee what we would ask God to forgive.

To be part of God’s kingdom—to be on the road to mission with Jesus—to be authentically filled with the Holy Spirit―we must be devoted to the person of Jesus Christ. We cannot shy away from speaking his name or telling about what he’s done. We must also learn to tell about what he’s doing within our church. ***People are drawn to churches where members are enthusiastic, where they love telling about the things God is doing among them.***

Once again, refer to our Scripture reading and look what happened in Acts 2:41-42: *That day about three thousand took him at his word, were baptized and were signed up. They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers.* And verses 44-47: *…And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home… Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.*

We must also renew our obedience to the call of discipleship in Jesus. Obedience is a tangible expression of our devotion. If we love Jesus, we’ll do what he commands. If we refuse to be obedient—whether in reaching the lost, discipling the saved, in repentance, in worship, in community—then our devotion can rightfully be called into question.

Every growing, thriving church can be identified by its devotion and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. If we want to achieve God’s grandest dreams for our church—if we want to believe God for the impossible—then we must evaluate our devotion and obedience.

So we’re going to take a few minutes this morning for prayer and repentance at the altar. Maybe you know that your devotion to Jesus has waned. Maybe you know you haven’t been as obedient as you should’ve been. Perhaps there is something for which you need to repent. To authentically and biblically repent, we need time and space to do so. God is present in this place. The Spirit of Jesus is moving among us. It’s time to lay down and turn from whatever we’re carrying. It’s time to recommit ourselves to devotion and obedience.

I invite you to come as you will and know that when you arise from your altar of repentance, you do so as a new creation―no longer bound by sin or guilt. The altar is open. Come as you are and leave as Jesus intends you to be.

Amen.