Working Together to Fulfill
The Great Commission
Acts 2:42-47

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I'm speaking to you on the topic, *Working Together to Fulfill the Great Commission.* The operative word here is *together.* The power of teamwork far exceeds the power of working alone.

(Illustration) Did you know that farmers have known for many years about the multiplied power of teamwork? Studies have shown that one horse can pull 2500 pounds. But two horses working together can pull 12,500 pounds! Not twice as much, but five times as much.

Within the six verses of my text, there is a repetition of the mutual cooperation of the early believers. *"They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship . . . All the believers were together and had everything in common . . . Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts . . . They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."*

A spirit of unity captured the hearts of the early believers, and God rewarded them in a marvelous manner, especially evangelistically. When you study the book of Acts, it shows the phenomenal manner in which God used them to reach unbelievers. Conversions weren't sporadic; they were frequent, and often by the hundreds or thousands. Conversions occurred so frequently that they became a daily activity of the early Church, and when Luke calculates the number of souls converted, he uses incredible terminology.

> Acts 2:47 says, *"the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."*
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> Acts 4:4 notes, *"the number of the men came to be about five thousand."*

Chapter 5 says, *"multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number"* (5:14).

Acts 6:7 says, *"The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith."*

Acts 8:6 says that in Samaria, *"The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip."*

Luke says that in Joppa, *"many believed in the Lord" (9:32).*

Acts 11:21 says there was *"a large number who believed [and] turned to the Lord."*

Acts 12:24 says, *"the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied."*

Acts 14:1 says when Paul and Barnabas ministered in Iconium, *"a large number of people believed."*

As Paul and Silas traveled through Lystra and Iconium, Acts 16:5 says the churches *"were increasing in number daily."*

Acts 17:12 says, *"many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men."*
Acts 19:20 says that in Ephesus, *"the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing."*

Acts 21:20 talks about the *"many thousands there [were] among the Jews . . . [that] believed."*

I believe I speak for every Christian here when I say I would love for this to be the evangelistic pattern for the church in Huntsville and America!

But what was the secret to the early believers' success? They didn't necessarily possess an abundance of money, vast resources, or unusual intellect to reach the masses with the Gospel. Luke never mentions a high-level apostolic meeting that devised a skillful strategy for harvesting souls. What was their secret?

The New Testament reveals three principles that helped the First Century Church fulfill the Great Commission. **One, they accepted their commission; two, they understood their message; and three, they possessed a vital experience with the Holy Spirit.** These principles can unify us as we work together to fulfill the Great Commission.

(Transition) First, we must accept our Commission.

I. We Must Accept Our Commission

I am intrigued by the early believers' boldness to fulfill the Great Commission. They took the Gospel and advanced against persecution, ridicule, rejection, threats, and even death. And nothing could dissuade them from their commitment. Nothing! Jesus told us that we should be tough-skinned when it comes to sharing our faith.

Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Last week, I read the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, where Christ sent out his servant to invite others to attend this feast. You may remember that one excuse after another was offered when the servant invited others to the Celebration. One said he had just bought a tract of real estate and couldn't come. Another said he had just purchased cattle, and another said he had just gotten married. The servant's report of these excuses angered his Master, so the servant was sent again to invite whoever would accept the invitation—the poor, the blind, the lame. But even after the servant obeyed, there was still room. That's when the master said: *"Go out to the highways and country lanes and make them come in, so that My House will be full" (Luke 14:16-23).*

The Lord anticipated people rejecting our invitation. He anticipated doors being slammed in our face. He anticipated excuses, insults, and even persecution. But he also anticipated a willingness on our part to extend the invitation regardless of the opposition.

This is what made the New Testament Believers successful. They accepted their commission and extended the invitation regardless of how others responded. And God is depending on you and me to be just as persistent in making the invitation and sharing our faith.

(Transition) There is another principle that should unify us in fulfilling the Great Commission. That is, like the New Testament church, we should understand our message.

II. We Must Understand the Message

There's more than a command to *"go into all the world,"* there's something we deliver to the world. It's a message. And the message, like the mandate, is compelling. The message is about Jesus!

I want to tell you how the apostles presented Jesus. They preached what we call the Kerugma. The Kerugma is a proclamation of Christ. It's a proclamation of His life, death, resurrection, and His Return. And this message is deeply convicting.

> When you tell people about Christ's life, you aren't talking about an ordinary person; you're talking about the man of perfection. He was born a virgin. He walked on water. He raised the dead. He never misspoke or misstepped. And His unordinary life proved He was more than a man—He was God!
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> When you tell others of Christ's death on the Cross you are sharing the most awesome message ever! It's the only message of salvation by which the Holy Spirit will convict men of their sin.

> When you share the message of the resurrection, it reveals that Christ has conquered what no one else could conquer—death. He willingly let men crucify and kill Him so He could single-handedly arrest, arraign, and conquer the power of the grave.
>
> And when we share the message of Christ's Return, it too has power! It disturbs people to hear that Christ will return and hold men accountable for their actions. I've never met a sinner who looked forward to Judgment Day.

Sharing the Kerugma (the life, death, resurrection, and Return of Christ) is a message with power. There is something in it that creates tension within people. But it's an anointed message that forces people to face eternal truths.

(Transition) You know, there is a message within the Kerugma that needs emphasizing today. And if we silence this message, which was preached by the apostles, we will prevent many sinners from seeing their moral condition. Here's the message: **Men are hopeless without Christ!**

Men are Hopeless without Christ

We live in a generation that assumes there is a human solution to every problem facing us. If there is a dilemma, then man thinks he can engineer an answer. Unfortunately, the world assumes it can manufacture a resolution for mankind's moral crisis.

> Washington, D.C., sinks billions of dollars into programs designed to stop crime, help families, protect children, and curb domestic violence. And while I'm sure many Americans have benefited from these programs, they still fail to change the part of men that needs changing the most—the heart.
>
> The Psychologists counsel people to "feel good about themselves," and the Sociologists try to get people to cooperate. But while everything is designed to improve our self-image, the heart remains unchanged.

I'm not trying to criticize our country's efforts to improve itself. I'm grateful to live in a nation that cares for its citizens. My intention is to keep you and me —this church—focused on what is essential to making the ultimate improvement on man's moral crisis.

We have to focus on the power of the Cross to change hearts. The heart is the central issue, and nobody but Christ can transform it.

(Example) A surgeon does not correct heart disease by telling his patient to "feel good about himself" or by prescribing a social program. . . . He cracks open the chest, removes the heart, clears the arteries, replaces the heart, and tells the patient to live by new dietary and fitness rules.

God has called the church to tell men they are hopeless unless Jesus Christ transforms their hearts. Theology terms this "the total depravity of man." This doesn't mean that man is incapable of performing a good deed; it means that our moral corruption has rendered us incapable of saving ourselves.

Unfortunately, many mainline denominations no longer make moral depravity a theme of their preaching. They fear it will injure man's self-esteem or insult his dignity.

When are we going to get over the fear of injuring the "feelings" of sinners that are on a fast track to hell and simply do what God has told us to do? I'm not suggesting that we insult and denigrate the lost with our message, but we must show others they are hopeless without Christ.

Listen to Romans 3:10: *"There is none righteous, not even one; (11) there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for god; (12) all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one."*

I'd like to water down that Scripture or assume Paul overstated man's moral decadence, but He didn't. The Bible says we are born separated from God; we have minds that are hostile to God and thoughts that are constantly contrary to God; and Jeremiah said the heart is *"deceitful above all things and beyond cure"* (17:9). In other words, we can't possibly rescue ourselves!

We can split the atom, shuttle men back and forth to the moon, and even clone the species. But we cannot cleanse ourselves from sin.

Our human works can't save us.

Government or social programs can't save.

Our pledge to a new world order can't save us.

Only Jesus Christ can regenerate our depraved heart.

(Transition) And let me say something about the telling of this message. The simple act of communicating the message of Christ will fulfill our souls in a deeply satisfying way.

The Spiritual Satisfaction of Evangelism

When we share the Gospel with sinners, we experience a measure of spiritual satisfaction that cannot otherwise be enjoyed. We see this in John 4 when Jesus talked with the Samaritan woman. As their conversation ended, His disciples returned from the city with food.

Here Jesus was: thirsty, hungry, and exhausted from a journey through the desert. He may not have eaten since the previous evening. That's when the disciples began "urging" Him to eat.

He said to His disciples: *"I have food to eat that you know nothing about." (33) Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" (34) "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:32-34).*

Maybe you have never considered this, but Jesus revealed a significant truth in that statement. Just like a delicious meal nourishes and recharges our body, sharing our faith brings nourishment and revitalization of our soul like nothing else. A major source of our spiritual satisfaction and invigoration involves sharing the message of salvation with others.

There's a fulfillment that satisfies our souls after a time of thanksgiving or praise.

There's a spiritual satisfaction that results from spending an hour in prayer or from reading the Scripture, or even when we help our neighbor *"pull his ox out of the ditch."*

And then there is a unique satisfaction that feeds our souls when we participate in God's plan of sharing the Gospel with unbelievers.

No other grace from God tastes quite like the meat of evangelism!

Evangelism isn't dessert; it's the main course! I am grateful for every ministry of a local church, but certainly, the heart of God is always testifying of Jesus Christ. And when we make declaring a Christ-centered message the central issue, it will strengthen every part of the church.

(Transition) Then the third principle that unified the New Testament believers and that we must incorporate is: We must be vitally connected to the Holy Spirit.

III. We Must be Vitally Connected to the Holy Spirit

The early Church successfully reached the lost because the Holy Spirit's presence and power were significant in their lives. He wasn't relegated to a peripheral place; He was preeminent in their every activity.

And when the Holy Spirit is preeminent in your life, He will bring an unsurpassed power to accomplish God's purposes.

As I have prayed, listened to God, and tried to discern the great need in my life and in the lives of today's believers, I believe it's this: There is an urgent need for a demonstrable presence of the Holy Spirit upon our lives! In most Christians and in most Churches, there is plenty of room for more of the Holy Spirit.

Every accomplishment of the flourishing New Testament church included a pronounced presence of the Holy Spirit. And He was especially present in their evangelistic thrust.

> When the people of Jerusalem heard Peter's preaching, they were *"cut to their heart" (Acts 2:37).*
>
> When the people of Samaria heard Philip's preaching, they experienced *"great joy" (Acts 8:7-8).*
>
> When Peter preached at Caesarea, the Holy Spirit fell on the listeners, and they were filled with power (Acts 10).

The Holy Spirit brings conviction, joy, deliverance, and healing to our evangelistic efforts. He supplies the *"signs and wonders"* and gifts of the Spirit to persuade sinners of Christ's Lordship.

Here is what I have found: the Holy Spirit will do for those who invite Him into their lives. The Holy Spirit will always cover for our inadequacies. He will furnish us with all the power necessary for reaching and winning the lost! That's why we need to heed Paul's admonition to the Ephesians when he said: *"Be filled with the Holy Spirit!"*

(Transition) The Holy Spirit not only provides power but also favor.

The Holy Spirit Provides Favor/Grace

Acts 4:33 says: *"With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and **abundant grace** [favor] was upon them all."*

One version reads this way: *"and divine help was given to them all abundantly" (TCNT).* And the Williams translation reads: *"God's favor rested richly on them all."* How do we see this *"great grace"* manifesting in the NT church?

"Great grace" was prison doors opening for the apostles.

"Great grace" included angelic visitations that directed the apostles into cities that needed evangelizing.

"Great grace" meant divinely inspired visions and dreams that furnished guidance to Peter and Paul.

"Great grace" was the power to overcome stoning, beatings, shipwrecks, and persecution.

Grace/favor prevails when all else fails. God's favor upon us means nothing is impossible. It means no door can remain shut when God tells us to walk through it.

Sometime back, I discovered an amazing Old Testament Scripture that speaks of God's favor. When Moses pronounced his final blessings upon the Tribe of Joseph, he blessed them this way. He said,"May you enjoy the *favor of Him who dwelt in the bush"* (DEU 33:16).

That's an incredible passage. Here's what's significant about obtaining *"the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush."* After Moses encountered God at the burning bush:

He never lacked for spiritual power.

He never lacked God's supernatural guidance.

He never lacked bodily refreshment or nourishment.

For forty years, God's favor directed and sustained Israel even through the wilderness.

If we want God to cover for our inadequacies and furnish us with door-opening, Holy Spirit power and grace to win the lost, then we need to do whatever is necessary to obtain God's favor.

Conclusion

Could it be that the Apostles took to heart a mandate from Christ that we haven't? Could it be that the early believers preached a message that we are overlooking or aren't preaching with their passion? And could it be that the early believers possessed something far beyond what we possess today?

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