

The Local Church That God Blesses - Features of the Early Church

by Peter Brandon

The sermon highlights the importance of revival and restoration in the church, and how the early Christians overcame their problems through the Lord's program and the power of prayer.

Duration: 50:00

Topics: "Revival", "Empowerment of the Holy Spirit"

Description

Peter Brandon emphasizes the characteristics of the early church that God blesses, drawing from Acts 1 and 2. He highlights the importance of unity in prayer, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and the necessity of witnessing for Christ, even amidst the challenges faced by the early Christians. Brandon notes that despite their failures and theological misunderstandings, the early church thrived through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit, leading to significant growth and favor among the people. He calls for a return to these foundational principles to experience revival and restoration in today's local churches.

Transcript

I want to give a series on the New Testament church or assembly that God is really blessing. I want to share this with you from the word of God and from practical experience. And tonight I want to go right back to our objective and I want to look carefully at Acts 1 and Acts 2 and pick up some of the features that the Lord honoured in this early church.

Shall we turn to Acts chapter 1. Would you look at verse 8. But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you. And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Verse 13.

And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room where abode both Peter and James and John and Andrew and Philip and Thomas and Bartholomew and Matthew and James the son of Alphaeus and Simon Silotus and Judas the brother of James. They all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brethren. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples and said the number of names together were about a hundred and twenty.

Acts 2 verse 1. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as a fire and it sat upon each of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews devout men out of every nation under him. Now when this was noised abroad the multitude came together and were confounded because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

Verse 11. Cretes and Arabians we do hear them speak in our own tongues or languages the wonderful works of God. Then would you look at verse 16 or perhaps a little better verse 14.

But Peter standing up with the eleven lifted up his voice and said unto them ye men of Judea and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem be this known unto you and hearken to my words for these are not drunken as ye suppose seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel. And then if you'll come with me down to verse 38.

Then Peter said unto them repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost for the promise is unto you and to your children and to all that are far off even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort saying save yourselves from this untoward or perverse generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayer. And then the last verse they were praising God having favor with all the people and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. Now the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word.

Now I feel sure that everyone in this room this afternoon feels that there is a tremendous need for restoration. If you are going through the same experience like we're going in England and Scotland at this moment. We are beginning to see local assemblies dwindling in number.

And not only dwindling in number but dwindling in quality and many of us are very concerned. In fact if I gave you the number of assemblies that have been closed in Britain in the last 20 years every single one would be shot. And we do need revival.

And we do need restoration. But there are two or three kinds of revival. There are two manifestations that are totally false.

We do not just need an emotional revival. Nor do we need just an intellectual revival. But we need a revival that will bring us back to the scriptures and back to the power of the word of God.

And I believe just before the Lord comes he's going to stand at the door and knock and he will bring again hearts that the Lord has touched together. And we shall see God's supper time even in God's eventide. May it be that the Lord will not only save souls during this period but may he refresh and revive our hearts so that we might be really brought back to all the implications of first love.

Now the great objective is to trace back the church to the first century. And here in these two chapters we see the objective of all revival. First of all I want to share with you that these early Christians had problems.

We mustn't imagine that they were superhuman. They were supernatural when they received the Holy Spirit. But they were never, never superhuman.

What kind of problems did they have? First of all they had theological problems. For instance, they never cottoned on to the fact that the Lord Jesus was going to die. Nor did they understand his burial.

Nor did they understand his resurrection. And the sad thing is this, that the Pharisees, especially the Sadducees, knew more about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ than his own disciples. So that you can see, theologically they were a mess.

Secondly, they had deep social problems. Now I cannot go into all the details, but on three occasions, just the fortnight before the Lord died, they were arguing who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In fact, on two occasions, the Lord gave them a very dramatic object lesson.

One object lesson was to wash the disciples' feet, and the other was to take a child and put him in the mist. Now that was entirely new. Wherever we find Jehovah in the Old Testament, and wherever we find the Lord Jesus in the New Testament, and as you will know, the same person, you will find that the Lord and Jehovah is always in the mist.

Always. And there was only one occasion in scripture where the Lord Jesus stepped out of the mist. When the disciples were arguing about greatness, and there he put a little child to show to us how he loved humility and simplicity.

And then they had not only social problems, but they had devotional problems. As far as we can tell from the sacred scriptures, every one of them, probably with the exception of John, failed the Lord in the hour of crisis. And if I may use Hackney's expressions, even Peter let down the Lord with a few very nasty swear words in the hour of his rejection.

So you can see they failed devotionally. And then they had traditional problems. Now none of us here, apart from one or two, have been born in Judaism.

But these men were reared in Judaism. Now please do not misunderstand Judaism. It was the only God-ordained religion in the whole world.

Judaism. And there's nothing wrong with Judaism. It was the incomplete thing.

It was the flower. Christianity was the apple. But if you went back to Judaism, you became a transgressor.

Now these men were steeped in Judaism. They were facing Judaistic people. And therefore they had these Judaistic and traditional problems.

And it took them a long while to get completely free from Judaism into the freedom of Christianity. And you will realize what a difficulty the Lord had with Peter to go and preach to Cornelius in the Gentile world. And then they had geographical problems.

And I want you to note this. The fastest means of transport they had on road was the horse. The fastest means of transport on sea was the sailing boat.

Therefore they were moving no faster than Adam. And they were moving no faster than Noah. And yet we shall see in a few moments the Lord gave to them a worldwide program.

And they accomplished it. Now the question must be asked. How could men that were so full of failure accomplish such a mission? We shall see in a few moments.

And hallelujah, their power is our power. And we should all be praising God that the Restrainer, the Holy Spirit is still here in the church. Now having discussed the problems, I want you as it were to sit back and quietly say this.

If God can use those men, He can use us. If He could use those men in the 1st century, He can use us in the 20th century. Now first of all, I want you to note that the Lord gave them a program.

Now get the psychology of it, then apply. Supposing we had all let down the Lord and we were sitting here in a state of depression. Would you feel like receiving a program? I know how you feel.

You would say, Lord we failed you once, probably we'll fail you again. But He gave them this program. Now first of all, I want you to note the nature of this great program.

And He says this, ye shall be witnesses. Now whenever you read that word witness in scripture, stop and think. It comes from a jagged word, can I use another expression? It comes from a rugged word, which is martyrs.

Where we get our word martyr from. And it means simply, to witness unto blood. Therefore, when we understand the word witness, we must always remember it's associated with a living sacrifice.

Beloved, can I share this with you? We shall never bring in the kingdom of God with cricket bats, and tennis bats, and golf balls. Nothing wrong with those things. We shall bring in the kingdom of God with sweat, and toil, and blood.

You see, we must get back to the root meaning, witness, martyrs, martyr. And we must be prepared to lay down our lives and spend ourselves out for God. That's the meaning of the word.

Then secondly, I want you to note the object of the witness. Witnesses unto me. You see, the whole of the objective of our witness is to preach Christ.

And beloved, can I say this as before God? If I were to leave myself on this platform, I should fail. Do you remember when Philip preached Jesus to that Ethiopian eunuch? Something lovely took place. The spirit of the Lord caught him away, and the eunuch saw him no more.

But he didn't fizzle out. He went on his way rejoicing. You see, he was not magnetized by the preacher.

No, he was induced to the Lord Jesus. Now shall we pray every night that we shall so uplift the Lord Jesus that people will get a vision of the loveliness and the beauty of Christ. Witnesses unto me.

And then I want you to note the extent of the witness. They were to begin at Jerusalem. Jerusalem.

What a task. Think of it. The very heart of Judas.

The very place where the Lord Jesus said, Your house shall be left unto you desolate and wept over it. Dare I say it? The very place where they crucified him and said, We will not have this man to reign over us. Jerusalem.

The desolate. And that's where they had to begin. Ah, you might think Sydney is hard.

You might think Bexley is hard, but not half so hard as Jerusalem. And that's where they began. Then he moved out to Judea.

And Judea was the place where all the Orthodox Jews lived. Mainly the Pharisees. Hard bitten.

Steeped in their religion. Cruel in their behavior to anyone that brought another doctrine. And there at Judea they were to continue.

And then he said something that must have caused a shock. Samaria. And you can almost hear them saying, if I may use my English, Oh no.

The Jews hated the Samaritans. Sometimes they spat when the shadow of a Samaritan passed over them. And that's where they had to go.

And then after Samaria, Judea, the uttermost part of the earth. Now let me ask you a question. Supposing you were in the first century.

Supposing you had failed the law. And you were sore in heart. And someone came along and gave you that almost unimaginable progress.

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost part of the earth. You would feel like spiritually fainting. But he gave them a bonus.

He said ye shall receive power. After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you. Beloved, it doesn't matter how you have failed.

God knows the history of every local church. But if we are prepared to get back to that power, we can see the blessing of God. With that program, what happened next? They flew to the prayer room.

Notice verse 13, for there's a little touch there that I believe is tremendously precious. When they were come in, they went up into the upper room. Literally it means, when they came in, they went up.

Now what does that mean? When the disciples went into that room where they had to prepare the Passover, they did something that was amiss. They went in, but they didn't have their feet washed. Invariably a slave did it.

But they went in and up without their feet being washed. And it was the Lord Jesus that washed their feet. Therefore, Luke takes that up and he says, when they went in, obviously their feet were washed.

That's the secret of prayer. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart. You see, when we go in, we get our feet washed.

That's the washing of the water by the word. And then we can go out into the upper room and enjoy that heavenly Jerusalem. And then he tells us the names of the apostles, with the exception of one.

And these all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women. But there is an ugly omission. We know from 1 Corinthians 15, on one occasion 500 saw the Lord.

So that must have been a planned meeting. Here in the upper room, there were only 120. Now here's the omission, where were the 380, where were they? They missed a tremendous blessing.

Beloved, if there's a movement of the Spirit, make sure you're there. Don't be at a revival, be in it. When God moves among his people, don't be away, be in it.

That's absolutely vital. And even in the beginning, there were those who were like Thomas, should have been there, but they weren't there. Then I want you to note, they continued with one accord in prayer.

Now I'm not going to do this this afternoon, but if you go through the first 10 chapters of Acts, you will find prayer almost in every chapter. If you go through all the epistles, you will find reference to prayer. If you look at the Ephesian epistle very carefully, you will find that the two great chapters are prayer chapters.

And you will find this, whenever God sets his people of praying, there's always blessing. Do you know in my little sphere of ministry, beloved in the Lord, whenever I go among a group of people that know how to weep in prayer, and groan in prayer, and agonize in prayer, there's always blessing. If you go in that little back room, and you see the brethren on their knees, crying to God for souls, be sure of this, there'll be blessing in the public meeting.

I shall never forget, I was only 23 years of age, and I was invited to preach the gospel at South End. And I remember going into the back room before the gospel meeting, and there would be 40 brethren all on their knees. And some of those brethren, when they prayed, you could hear them 200 yards down the road.

Not that you always have to pray like that, but they were earnest. And there they were hitting the bench before them, crying that God might save souls. No wonder souls were saved night by night in that building.

They knew how to pray, and that's the secret. Therefore old Matthew Henry, admittedly he was a Puritan, but he knew a secret. And when he says, when God sets his people a-praying, the clouds are beginning to break with blessing, he knew a profound secret.

But then after the prayer, there was power. Come with me quickly to chapter 2, verse 1. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place, and suddenly there came a sound from or out of heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now that advent will never be repeated again. You will never have another Calvary, never. You will never have another resurrection of Christ, never.

You will never have another ascension, and you will never have another Pentecost. Pentecost was the birthday of the church. It was the beginning of the baptism of the Spirit, when all the believers were joined together in one body, and hallelujah, linked up with the head in heaven.

And the same thing happened in Acts chapter 10. But notice now the significance of the symbolism. A rushing mighty wind.

Now in Scripture you read of a mighty wind. In the Old Testament you read of a rushing wind. But only once, a rushing mighty wind.

And you will notice that was public. The wind filled the house. The cloven tongues of fire was individual, and it sat upon each of them.

Therefore, there are two manifestations of the Spirit. One fills the room that we would call the assembly of the saints. And the other, the cloven fire, fills the saints individually.

So there are two fillings. The filling of the local church, and the filling of the believers. A rushing mighty wind.

Beloved, they not only had pattern, note this, they had power. You see they were assembled together in a simple room. That's the first time you will ever find a statement like that in Scripture.

In the Old Testament, God's presence was located and isolated to one place, and that was Jerusalem. Now he moves completely outside of Jerusalem, and is found in a little room. Why? God no longer dwells in buildings made with hands.

He dwells with his gathered people. But that rushing mighty wind speaks of power. Now you can have Scriptural pattern, but have you got Biblical power? Have you ever been in a rushing mighty wind? I was in one rushing mighty wind, and I never want to be in it again.

We had a large tent in a place called Cheshire. And it came across the wireless, so I was informed that there was going to be a freak storm coming across Britain, and they were telling everyone to nail everything down, or to use my naval language, to secure everything and all hatches down. Well about 25 beefy brethren, and they were, all came on, and came round the tent in case of emergency.

Then the wind came, and what a wind. It was blowing massive tent pegs out of the ground like a lady pulls pins from the cushion. At last we couldn't knock them in to hold the tent, so the order was given, hold on to the ropes, and we were holding.

About 24 of us. Then my caravan that weighed two tons, with my wife and family in it, was beginning to be spun round. And my wife could see that one side of the tent was blown in, because we were all holding on to the side that was bellowing out.

And she shouted, unfortunately, above the howl of the wind, I heard her voice. So I said, brethren, let go, and we did. And up it went.

Poles, pegs, ropes, and then a pair of shoes. I thought one of the brethren lost his shoes. And then two legs were connected with the shoes.

It was our brother Alan Tremor. He went right up with it, about a hundred yards. The nearest thing I've seen to the partial rapture.

But he wasn't good enough, he came down. And it went about 150 yards over, and came right down in the next field. You see, a rushing, mighty wind.

Now that's the secret of the Book of the Acts. Peter preaches in Acts 2, and 3,000 are swept into the kingdom, the rushing mighty wind. Peter and John go up to the temple to pray, and there's a man that we

would call a spastic.

And he just says, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And the man leapt up, leapt up. If you want to see the miracle of that, if you're above 40, when you get home tonight, get down in a bending position, and then you try and leap up.

If you crawl up, you're quite good if you're over 40. This man leapt up. You see, it was a living miracle.

What was it? The rushing, mighty wind. The next chapter, when they had prayed, the place was shaken. Now forgive me if I get a little excited.

The assemblies are tailor-made for the 20th century. And if we got back to the mighty power of the Spirit, we would see God working in power. But you see, you can have patterns without power.

Rushing, mighty wind, and then cloven tongues of fire sat upon each of them. I cannot go into the details of this, but one thing I must say, they were not ecstatic tongues. They were practical tongues.

They were languages that everyone could hear and understand. And therefore, what God was basically saying was this. These are not the tongues that bring confusion like you saw in the day of Babel.

But these are the dark tongues that bring redemption and unity. And everyone heard them speaking in their own tongue. Isn't that wonderful? So the wind speaks of public power, and the cloven tongues of fire, individual power.

And don't we need that power back again? I used to be a young friend of Samuel Rogers, the father of E.W. Rogers. Who died when he was ninety-nine, and had all his faculties to the end. And he was an outstanding man of God.

He came into fellowship in the year 1864 at Thorson. And this is what he said. When I came into fellowship, the presence of God hit me like that, Peter.

And invariably when we broke bread, someone would say. Sometimes in our gospel meetings, three or four people would cry out to be saved. Brethren, what was it? They got back to the rushing mighty wind.

And the power of the Spirit. Wouldn't it be lovely if in this very building, night after night, we sensed the glorious presence and the power of God. So that we bowed our heads and said, oh this is the Lord's doing.

It's marvelous in our eyes. May God bring us back to the power. Then you will notice that they had praise.

Would you just look at verse 11. Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God. Now first of all, we must try to visualize what was taking place.

Most of these people were Galileans and the Galileans were not linguists. In fact, there are 13 nations mentioned here and nine different languages were spoken. And quite frankly, the Galileans had a very awkward grogue.

Edith Schein tells us, the Hebrew historian, that they were the Cockneys of the East. And when he said that, I didn't like that. Being one myself.

But I knew what he meant. They were not good public speakers. It was said of the Apostle Peter, his speech betrayeth him.

That's old English. And we might say, his speech betrayeth him. You could tell a Galilean a mile off.

And yet, these people, mainly Galileans, were speaking fluently the great message of praise in the people's languages that they could understand. Now what was happening? You would hear one Galilean man and he would be speaking out in praise the creatorial glories of God in another tongue. You would hear another brother and he would be speaking out the glories of God's Judaistic glory.

You would hear another person and he would be speaking of the glory of God's holiness. Another person would be speaking on the glory of the incarnation. Another person would be speaking of the glory of the redemption.

Another person, the glory of the resurrection and the ascension. You see, they were speaking out the wonderful works of God in praise. Beloved, you can't preach until you praise.

Now why? If your heart is not overflowing with the love of Christ, your gospel preaching will be legalistic. And mechanical. It will be correct.

Forgive me saying it, you know what I mean. But dead. Correct.

But dead. But when the heart has been touched by the Lord so that you can praise and worship him, then in your preaching there will be that overflowing heart. Beloved, we do need to leave now the mechanical and get back to the organic.

We do need to get back to the very life of the Spirit so people can come among us and see the joy of the Lord. In Bedford a few years ago after the breaking of bread, and I've mentioned this fact here before, I feel I must mention it again. A little girl nudged her mummy and she said this.

Only for, cheer up mummy, it's all over now. Isn't that sad? She got the idea that Sunday morning was a dirge. Now there are times when we should pray and cry and weep.

There are times when our heart should leap for joy. You see, they were praising God, speaking out the wonderful works of God. Immediately there's praise, then Peter stands up with the eleven.

Now this speaks of priestly participation. Now here is a masterly touch. Notice what the historian doesn't say.

The eleven standing up with Peter. Now, meeting Peter the figurehead. But you will notice what he says.

Peter standing up with the eleven. First of all, they were all there. All there.

You know there's one truth I do trust that the Lord will revive during this day and that is body life fellowship. When we learn to function together in body life. So that if one member suffers, we all suffer.

If one member rejoices, we all rejoice. And instead of moving together individualistically, we move together collectively as a body. And therefore we read here, Peter standing up with seven.

No, Peter standing up with the eleven. They were all there. Now can I share with you sometimes a problem over gospel meeting.

Sometimes you can come out of a prayer meeting and stand on the platform and you look for your eleven. And they're not there. There's only half of the assembly there.

Now, I know some of our very age brethren and sisters can't come. I know our married brethren and sisters cannot always come out. They have to take turns.

But beloved, please do not just be a breadbreaker. Make sure you move in body life. And it's lovely to see all God's people there.

Peter standing up with the eleven. But they were not only all there, they were all filled with the Spirit. All filled with the Spirit.

Now that's vital. You see, power should not just be in one man. Power should not just be in the elders, but the power should be resident within the church.

So that each member is filled with the Spirit. Just look back to verse four. They were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave the mantra.

Now one night, as we talk about the local church that God will bless, we shall have to discuss in detail what it practically means to be filled with the Spirit. And then thirdly, I want you to note, they were all there, they were all filled, and they were all with Him. I am quite sure of this.

When Peter stood up and said, we are not drunk with wine as ye suppose, they didn't say, Peter, you've got your dispensations wrong. They didn't say that. They were all with Him, and you can almost hear them saying quietly, Amen.

And when he got to that part where he said, Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you all, you can almost feel as they were preaching with Peter, they were quietly saying, Amen. And then when he came to that solemn part, him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain, you can almost imagine them bowing their heads, saying quietly, how true. You see, they were all with Him.

They were preaching with Him. You see, that's priestly participation. It's a divine art to preach with the preacher.

We have just come back from Melbourne, and there's an aged brother there, Mr Chapman. He's now 91, more than 20 minutes. He sat where he could be released without being noticed.

But I noticed this. All the time I was preaching, he was preaching with me. And unfortunately, he was turning to his friend, looking to see if he was getting saved.

And he just longed to see that neighbour brought to the Lord Jesus. Now, that's the secret. Although an old man, he didn't have spiritual drops, you know what I mean, drooping the head.

In Yorkshire, they're terrible. Before you start to preach, the rascals loosen their shoelaces and take their dentures out. Now, we mustn't be like that.

But this is the point. They were all with Him, standing up with the election. Now, can you see that priestly participation? And now, with this, I'll close.

His preaching, and I'm going to have one night on preaching this week, was scriptural. 50% of the scriptures here that give us an outline of his press were from the Word of God, as we know, from Joel 2 and 16, or Psalm 16, I'm sorry about that, and Psalm 110. And then 50% was an exposition of those scriptures.

So to put it quite simply, his address contained 50% of scripture, 50% of exposition. And he didn't have a Bible like that. It was all by memory.

So the Lord must have been a wonderful teacher. And the Holy Spirit was bringing everything to his mind. And then his preaching was successful.

They cried, men and brethren, what shall we do? Just imagine being in a gospel meeting, where instead of the preacher appealing to the congregation, the congregation appeals to the preacher. You say, do you think that's happening? It is. Beloved, to be in a gospel meeting, where the Holy Spirit is moving ungrieved and unhindered, is an experience you'll never forget.

Some nights we shall see, if we are cleansed and purged and filled with the Spirit, the presence of God here in such a way that no one will be able to leave. The awe of God will fill the place. And then we might hear someone crying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

And we shall know that the Lord is working. Let's pray that we shall not be just taken up with preaching. Let's pray that we shall be in Holy Ghost meetings, where the glory of the Lord is manifested.

And then very quickly they had principle. Immediately they cried out, Peter says, repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then who were the people that were baptized? They that gladly, not those that sadly received the word.

But those that gladly received the word were baptized. And then you will notice these principles. New convert.

They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine, and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayer. And then very quickly, look at the prosperity of the local church, the 47. They were praising God, having favour with all the people.

And the Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved. May the Lord repeat that in miniature, in our midst. So that God will do a wonderful thing, that will bring entire glory to Him.

So that when the mission is over, the blessing continues. And the Lord adds daily, such as should be saved. Amen.

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