

Acts #3

by Stephen Kaung

Stephen Kaung's sermon explores the birth and life of the early church, emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit and the importance of unity and fellowship among believers.

Duration: 1:04:32

Scripture: Acts 2:37-38, Acts 2:41-42, Acts 2:47, Acts 4:32, Acts 4:35

Topics: "Church Unity", "Communal Living"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Acts 4:32, which describes the unity and generosity of the early church. The believers in the church were united in heart and soul, and they considered everything they owned to be common among them. The apostles testified to the resurrection of Jesus with great power, and the church experienced great grace. The believers in the church took care of each other's needs by selling their possessions and giving the proceeds to the apostles, who distributed it according to each person's need. The preacher emphasizes that this practice of communal living was not just a ritual or formality, but a genuine expression of their devotion to Christ.

Transcript

This is Monday evening, October the 2nd, 1972, in Richmond, Virginia. Minister given to Brother Stephen Cohn. And we have a word of prayer.

Our Heavenly Father, how we praise and thank thee for gathering us together here unto the name of thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no name that is nobler, higher than this name. And to this name, Lord, we gladly bow our knees and we gladly confess that Jesus is Lord.

O Lord, we do desire that as we gather together unto thyself, that thou wilt reveal thyself to us. As thou hast promised to thy disciples, thou wilt manifest thyself to those who love thee. We praise and we thank thee because thou hast put a love in our hearts.

We do love thee and we do desire that thou wilt manifest thyself tonight to us in a new way, in a living way. Lord, all that we need is thyself. We want thee, Lord, more than anything else.

We commit ourselves to thee for this evening, trusting thy Holy Spirit to open thy word to us and lead us into thy truth, that we may be unto the praise of thy blessed name. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Will you please turn to the book of Acts, chapter 2. We'll read from verse 37.

Acts, chapter 2, verse 37. And to your children. And to all who are a part of as many as the Lord our God may call.

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, Be saved from this perverse generation. Those then who had accepted his word were baptized, and there were added in that day about three thousand souls. And they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayer.

And fear was upon every soul, and many wonders and signs took place through the apostles' means. And all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and substance, and distributed them to all, according as any one might have need. And every day being constantly in the temple with one accord, and breaking bread in house, they received their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to the church daily those that were to be saved. Chapter 4, verse 32. Chapter 4, verse 32.

And the heart and soul of the multitude of those that had believed were one. And not one said that anything of what he possessed was his own, but all things were common to them. And with great power did the apostles give witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

And great grace was upon them all, for neither was there anyone in want among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses, selling them brought the price of what was sold and laid it at the feet of the apostles. And distribution was made to each, according as any one might have need. That's all we'll read.

We mentioned in the very beginning that the book of Acts is the continuation of the gospel according to Luke. Because it is the same man who is used of God to give us these two books in the New Testament. In the gospel according to Luke, it is the Lord Jesus began to do and to speak.

But in the book of Acts, it is the same Lord Jesus who continues to do. We say the only difference is, in the gospel according to Luke, it is the doing and the speaking of our Lord Jesus in his own person. In that body that he has put upon himself when he came to this world.

While in the book of Acts, he is speaking and doing in a mystic, corporate body of his. It is very important, therefore, for us to know this body. That our Lord Jesus has been and is using to continue his speaking and his doing.

And this body we all know. The body of Christ. The church of the living God.

In chapter one of the book of Acts, we see the travail. During those sixty days, between the resurrection of our Lord Jesus and the Pentecost, you will find there were sixty days. And these sixty days can be roughly divided into two parts.

Forty days and ten days. During the forty days, the Lord Jesus appeared to his disciples living. And he taught them the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Then, during the next ten days, a hundred and twenty people, they gave themselves to continual prayer, waiting upon the Lord for the promise of the Father. So we say that those sixty days were very significant

days. We would like to call these days the days of travail.

The Lord Jesus was traveling. And his own people traveled with him. For the bringing forth of something which is most essential to his continued speaking and doing.

And we know that is the church, the body. And this morning we mentioned about the birth. Again, we will emphasize that a congregation can be organized.

But a church must be born. So here you'll find on the day of Pentecost, a tremendous thing happens. We often are attracted to the spectacular, the visible.

But we often overlook the essential, the unseen. And very often you'll find the seen is actually that which accompanies the unseen. And it is the unseen that is the reality.

So on the day of Pentecost, there was the sound. There was the sight of popping tongues as a fire. But what people have seen and heard actually points to one thing.

And that is the exaltation of our Lord Jesus. Peter says that which you have seen and heard proves one thing. That God has made him the leader, Christ and Lord over all.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit. Give us two things. One is the exaltation of the Lord, the head.

The other is the forming of the body. In one spirit we will baptize into one body. So dear brothers and sisters, on the day of Pentecost, with the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Lord baptized his people into one body, under one head.

And that is these hundred and twenty people. When you look at them individually, may we say they were all spiritual giants. Every one of them was a spiritual giant.

There was no drop there. And these hundred and twenty people were together as a congregation. Tremendous.

And yes, something more. Every one of them had the indwelling Holy Spirit. Without the indwelling Holy Spirit, they were not able to be together for ten days and give themselves to continual prayer.

And yet there was something more that had to be done. Not only in each one of them, but among them. In between them.

And it is by the baptism in the Holy Spirit, these hundred and twenty people were baptized into one body of hundred. This is the meaning of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We are made one body.

Members one of another under the headship. A living head with a living body. And because the body is living, the head is able to speak and to do through that body.

And this is in order that we may be living, functioning members. Gifts are distributed. Because we leave gifts, we may minister one to another for the building up of the body.

Now this evening we would like to go a step further. We have seen the cadet that brings in the birth. We have seen the birth of the body and what it is.

The next thing naturally will be the life or the life. You know one thing we have to thank the Lord. And that is when you read the Bible you find that God often shows us life before we are given to Him.

God often demonstrates first before He instructs. I think there is a definite advantage there. Why? Because if we are taught first, we will try to manufacture it.

We are taught of something so let's go and make it. So God does not teach us first. He demonstrates it first.

In other words, life before teaching. That's the reason why you have the four Gospels before the Book of Acts. And you have the Book of Acts before the Epistles.

In the Book of Acts you do not have much teaching. But you have demonstration of life. In the Epistles you have the teaching which explains.

So when you read the history of the early church, what you see in the beginning is a demonstration. Here a body is born. A church is born by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Now how does that body live? How does that church function? You don't see, but you do see lots of demonstration. A hundred, as we say these hundred people had very good background. They had a long history with the Lord.

Now for these hundred hundred people who have such background and long history with the Lord, after they were merged into one body, we could expect a wonderful body life. But you know, just as these hundred hundred people were starting to live as one body because they are one, three thousand were added. That's a problem.

And these three thousand were not as matured as we think. Like the hundred hundred people. Well, they were pious beings.

They knew the Old Testament, yes. They might have some little contact with the Lord while the Lord was on earth. That's possible.

But if you compare the three thousand with the hundred twenty, there was a great gap in between. Humanly speaking, the hundred twenty will say, now wait a minute, you are not fit to come in. Let hundred twenty people, let us live that body life because we were ready for it.

If you come in right away, you dilute everything. It will become very difficult. You know how we all like to have all those spiritual people being together and say now you who are new, you are beginners, wait, wait a while until you're more mature.

This is a college, this is not kindergarten. But you know the wonderful thing is, in the body there are big members, there are small members. In the family of God, there are fathers, there are young people, and there are little children.

So in the very beginning of the church life, you find there were fathers, young people, and lots of babies. But the wonderful thing was that these babies were very soundly born. Even though they might hear the gospel for the first time, what shall we do? What shall we do? They were tripping hard.

They didn't know what to do. Peter and the eleven apostles said, now this is what you should do, repent. And give patience in the name of the Lord.

And receive the gift. And Peter used many words to exhort them to be saved from the perverse generation and those who receive his word. The word receive I accept there means receive in fullness.

Their accepting the Lord is a complete acceptance. Receive. They repented.

They were baptized. They received the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were saved from this world.

You'll find these three thousand became living members of that list. Very often we think those who are matured, they could function. But those who are newly saved, wait three years before you open your mouth.

But here you'll find right away, here is the body of Christ. Immediately you'll find the old and the young, the matured and the vague. They merge together in the spirit in one body.

Every member is living. And every member is functioning. They function but they all function.

So the Bible says they persevered in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles. In breaking of bread. The day here refers not just to the hundred and twenty people.

The day here refers to a hundred and twenty plus the three thousand. In other words, the day here refers to every. They all persevered.

They all continued. Step by step. They all abode in the teaching and the fellowship.

That's how they lived. What is the teaching of the apostles? It's none other than the teach. Because you remember our Lord Jesus, before he ascended, in Matthew chapter twenty-eight, he said, Go ye into all the world and make disciples of the nation.

And baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And whatever I have, I join you. Teach.

The apostles teach the teaching. And Paul says to the Corinthians, What I have delivered to you is what I have received. It doesn't mean that the apostles can teach what they like.

The apostles have their special teaching. The apostles teach nothing but the teaching of Christ. In other words, the Lord Jesus teaches his people through their apostles.

It is not the teaching of man. It is the teaching of our Lord Jesus. How did the apostles teach? Their teaching does not come from man.

Their teaching does not come from the wisdom of man. Their teaching, that is the way of Paul. When the apostles teach, they teach what they receive from the Lord by love.

What they teach is what they themselves have seen. What they themselves have experienced. Their teaching is not just their doctrines.

Their teaching is not just theories. Their teachings are living words. And because their teaching is, those who receive their teaching do not receive as man's words, but as the word of heaven.

Not just as some theories in their mind, but they abide in the teaching. In other words, they practice. They experience.

The teaching of the apostles is the teaching of Christ. It is found in the Bible. But it is breathed, quickened by the Holy Spirit.

The ministry of the apostles is a living ministry. It's a ministration of Christ. And because of that, their teaching is power.

And those who receive them, receive them in the Spirit. So it's working in their lives. It is not something that comes from one mind to another mind.

It is something from one spirit to another spirit. It is the impartation of Christ. And the receiving.

And by that they bless. That is the teaching. And all these people persevere.

In other words, they continue. They're fastly in their teaching. But together with that, the fellowship.

Now what is the fellowship of apostles? Do the apostles form an exclusive club called the Apostles Fellowship? The apostles join an exclusive club. They join the exclusive club of the Father and of the Son in the Holy Spirit. You know, if you read the first epistle of John, what did Apostle John say? He said, what we have seen and heard and touched and contemplated, we have reported to you that you may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son.

And you remember in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 9, Paul said, we are called into the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ. In other words, the fellowship of the apostles is not a man-made fellowship. The fellowship of the apostles is the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

And the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ, is the fellowship between the Father and the Son in the Spirit. Oh, that is the most exclusive club in the whole universe. The membership is very, very exclusive.

Just the Father and the Son in the Spirit. And what fellowship the Father and the Son had in the Spirit. That is real fellowship.

They share everything because they are one. They are one in heart, they are one in love, they are one in purpose, they are one in everything. No reservation, no drawback.

Open and free. Committed one to another. Perfectly, harmoniously, gloriously.

There is the fellowship. No shadow, no darkness, no jealousy, no prejudice, no fear. Oh, the fellowship of the Son with the Father in the Spirit.

But then the Father and the Son agree. Let's enlarge our exclusivity. Let's include man into our fellowship.

Let them share with us what He did. That's why the Lord Jesus came to this world. He came to this world to seek marriage to them.

He came to this world to open the door of His fellowship with the Father. And through His death and resurrection, He told the disciples, the women, to tell the youth, the disciples, now I go to my Father and your Father, my God and your God. The apostles were called into.

So here you'll find apostles joined that fellowship. How did they join that fellowship? Not by official means and ways. They joined the fellowship through the Spirit.

God has put them in Christ. And being Christ, they are in that fellowship. There's the fellowship of the apostles.

Oh, their fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Their fellowship with the Son. Their fellowship with the Father in the Spirit.

And what a fellowship they had. But then you remember our Lord Jesus in John chapter 17. I pray not only for them, but I pray for those who believe me through their words.

That they may be one as I and the Father. So you'll find that the apostles extend their fellowship to us. By preaching the gospel to us, we too are being drawn into that fellowship of the Father and the Son in the Spirit.

Now that is the fellowship of the apostles. And the teaching of the apostles is not another teaching, but the teaching of Christ. The whole teaching of Christ in the Spirit.

So you'll find the fellowship of the apostles is not a different fellowship, but it is the fellowship of God. Teaching refers to truth. Fellowship refers to God.

On the one hand, we persevere in the teaching of the apostles. We receive all the truth that is in Christ. As Paul says in Ephesians, you have not just learned the Christ.

If you have heard him and have learned of him, you know the truth that is in Jesus. God's truth is in Christ. Because only in Christ is there an amen.

That's the teaching of the apostles which we have received. But at the same time, there is a fellowship. A sharing.

A common participation. A partnership. A togetherness.

That is the fellowship. The teaching that we persevere cannot be greater or smaller than the teaching of the apostles. The fellowship that we maintain should not be bigger or smaller than the fellowship.

If we persevere in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles, we are living. If we exceed it, or if we limit it, we are not living in the body. That is how the body lives in the beginning.

The body lives in the teaching and the fellowship. We receive all the truth that is in Christ. Not just one or two.

Not just a few. Not as many, many, many things in Christ. But as delivered by the apostles.

And they have fellowship with one another in the body. The scoop of the fellowship is the scoop of the body. That is church life.

That is how it is. And the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles is especially demonstrated in the breaking of bread. And what is the breaking of bread? On the night of his betrayal.

The Lord Jesus gathered his own around him. And towards the end of the Passover feast he took a loaf. He blessed it.

He broke it. He delivered it to his disciples and said, All of you, this is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

And afterwards he took the cup. And he blessed it. He passed it to the disciples and said, This is the cup of the new covenant.

Share it. Fill it with my blood. For the remission of sin.

Do this in remembrance. Sing that day. The apostles.

Remember that. Therefore you will find in the early church they break bread. Not just once a week.

Because in the breaking of bread it is the fruit of their remembrance. In other words, the breaking of bread in the early church becomes a very symbol of their life. Their life is centered.

Their life is based completely on His blood cleanses them. His life. They live because of Him.

And they express their love towards the Lord. This is the teaching. I remember.

Somebody will help us. Some people ask me, What version of the Bible do I use? And sometimes I hesitate to mention it. Because this is not a popular version.

It happens that I use a version called New Translation by Darwin. Now if you know anything about Darwin, you know he lived in the 19th century in England. And he translated the Bible with some helpers from Greek and Hebrew into German, into French, and into English.

And when he was translating the Bible with his helpers, do you know what they did? They broke the bread every day. The reason was when they were working, occupied with the translation, it was lots of mental work, you know. And they were afraid by being so occupied with mental work their heart might be drawn away.

So they broke the bread every day in order that their heart may be brought away. I think that's it. You know today sometimes we take this method of communion as a formality.

Either you do that four times a year, or you do that once a month, or you even do that once a week. But we usually take it more as a ritual, a ceremony, a Christian ceremony, ritual or sacrament. But dear brothers and sisters, to the early church, this is the way to express how they persevere in the teaching and the fellowship.

This is the way they express their lives were centered upon Christ. This is the way to keep their hearts in love. This is the way to keep them always in gratitude, in love.

So the early church, they persevere in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles in the grace of Christ. This is the way. Christ is the center of all the teachings.

Christ is the center of all their fellowship. You know, if any teaching or doctrine is not centered upon Christ, soon it will become something opposed. Whatever the teaching or doctrine is, however correct it may be, if a fellowship is not centered, it is a sharing of Christ.

Fellowship is not just talking nonsense. It's not just talking something. It's not criticizing this one and that one.

Talking behind that one and this one's back. Oh, this brother, that sister. Well, we had a good fellowship because we all agree that is a very bad system.

This is no fellowship. This is not agonizing. Fellowship is centered upon Christ.

It is the sharing of Christ. So in the breaking of bread you'll find there is a seed of their being. As Zingendorf once said, he said, I have only one passion in this world, and that passion, not only the breaking of bread, no two things that Christians neglect very much today.

One is the breaking of bread. The other is prayer. However you'll find in Christianity, somehow I don't know.

Some people say, well, the breaking of bread, once a week, that's too much. So reduce it to once a month. That's too much.

Reduce it to once in a season. That's too much. Reduce it to Easter and Christmas.

As if it is a minor thing. And look at the prayer. When a preacher is preaching, the place is filled.

But when it comes to prayer meetings, like the pharaohs at your door, just like this, and some have no prayer meeting at all, isn't that the truth? They come together. They do not come together in order to be one. But they are one, therefore they come together.

This togetherness is more than a physical, this togetherness is a togetherness. They know they are one. They know they are related to one another.

They know they cannot live without the other. They have. Our dear brother Watchman, he once visited an elderly brother.

The one who wrote Safety, Certainty and Enjoyment, George Cutty. You know, that is a wonderful booklet, Safety, Certainty and Enjoyment. Many, many people were helped by that little booklet.

And when Jeremy went to England, he purposely went to visit that elderly brother. He was at that time in his nineties. And his mind was not too clear at that time.

He would wake up and very clear for a few minutes and then he would again, you know, go into a kind of semi-tumor state. So our brother went to visit him. And when he came back he told us one thing.

He said, when he visited that elderly brother, he sat there and this brother woke up and talked to Jeremy. He said, he cannot do without me. I cannot do.

I cannot do without him. He cannot do without me. Of course he is referring to the Lord.

We often say, well, we cannot do without him. But do we know he cannot do it? This brother knows it. So our brother said, it is true.

We cannot do without him. He cannot do without me. But neither can you do without me.

And I can do it. How much are we conscious of the body? How much do we really know? As we cannot do without him, we have to be together. They have all things in common.

No one says, this is mine. Everything is at the disposal of the God. Are they forced to do that? Is there any teaching that they should do that? They are so delivered from the spirit of consciousness, of self-possessiveness, of self-interest.

They are so full of the love of Christ. They cannot say, you know, there is a very strong urge in our flesh. And that is self.

We want to possess something. We want to say, now this is mine. You see that even in a little child.

Oh, this toy is mine. You cannot touch it. This is mine.

Self-possessiveness is a fallen instinct, it is there. Whether it is expressed in a big way or in a small way, it is there. It is the expression of individuality.

But when the grace of God has come in such a way, when the love of Christ has fulfilled them, they are completely delivered from individualism, not from the individualistic. They are still individuals in one sense. They haven't lost their individuality.

That is what I mean. They haven't lost their individuality. Yet, they are delivered from individualism.

It is the body, the spirit of self-possessiveness of God. They are one. They share everything.

Strictly speaking, you know, this is not communal life. People today in this country, there seems to be a kind of mood among God's people. Those whose hearts are touched by the Lord.

They are longing to live a communal life or a community life. Therefore you find in this country there are lots of communal communes organized. Lots of communal groups are organized.

Lots of so-called community, Christian community are being organized. Now brothers and sisters, do not misunderstand me. Let me try to explain how, what is in my heart.

On the one hand you'll find if the love of Christ constrains us, we are a community. The church is a community. We share everything one with another.

Selfishness is gone. Everything is in common. But remember, this is the whole church.

Not just a few special people organized into a community or a commune. I believe that the desire there is right. For trying to organize into an exclusive commune or an exclusive community life, this is what the church ought to do, not just for us.

I don't know if you understand me. The desire is right. But we must remember, it is not something that you go out and organize.

It is not a teaching that you try to copy. It is the love of Christ within you that gives you such a sense of body consciousness that you learn. With the brothers and sisters, as every sister does, no one says, this is mine, as a matter of fact.

Because there were so many poor people at that time, many sold their property and lay at the feet of apostles, let them speak to each according to their needs. But it all is voluntary. It is not something that everyone has to sell his property and business.

Even those who haven't sold, they open their house. Otherwise, if they all sell, sold their property, the church has no place to meet. So brothers and sisters, what I'm trying to say is simply this.

It is not something organized. It is not something manufactured. It is spontaneous.

It is the expression of the love of Christ in that, the consciousness. And when you see that, you know that's it. You know, humanly speaking, there is always such an aspiration.

Several years ago, I went to Israel. I visited a few kibbutz, kibbutzes. I was deeply impressed.

You know, all these kibbutzes were coming. They came together, they lived together, they eat together, they work together, you know. They did not possess anything.

It all belonged to that kibbutz. Naturally, seeing the division, the selfishness that was, that is in mankind, the good self naturally aspires to such things. I mean, I was deeply impressed.

It is not a copy, an involuntary thing, or even voluntary, but organized. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. As you go along, you will find how true this is.

The apostles never, never said no. Every one of you must sell your property and give to the church. Never.

Even Sapphira and Ananias, they sold their property, hold back some and give the others to the apostles. The apostles said, when the property is in your hand, it's yours. Nobody forced you.

Even after you sold it, the money is still yours. But why do you deceive the Holy Spirit? In other words, it is purely a matter of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who comes.

Brothers and sisters, that's the way they live. That is the life of the church. That is body life.

And then finally, they meet every day in the temple, and they break bread in houses, feeding their food with joy and thankfulness, praising the Lord, getting favor with all the people, and the Lord adds to the church. That's it. The church life is an assembling life.

They assemble together. Now probably you'll say, now that's impossible without... Yes. But the principle is still there.

Do not forsake the assembling of. Especially when we know his return. How we need to come together to anchor one another, even though we may not be able to meet every day, but we should meet as often, because the very life of the church is an assembling life, to worship the Lord, to exhort one another, to build one another.

They praise God and found favor. They do not offend the people. Found favor with all the people.

They had a good testimony. So brothers and sisters, when you read the early chapters of the book of Acts, it gives us some demonstration of the life in the early days. It is true.

The Spirit of God is living. He does not try to uniform everything. Because the early church is that way, therefore let us copy it.

His ways are different everywhere. But the principle... So we are not talking about here is effect, form. Now, do it.

We are talking about the Holy Spirit has shown us a path full of divine peace. Let us be led by the Spirit into trust. You will find every place and yet at the bottom side of hope that the Lord will recover such life to us today.

Our Heavenly Father, we do praise and thank you for the demonstration of thy life in the church. Lord, thy life gives me. May it be unhindered.

And by the quickening of the Holy Spirit there may be expression coming forth spontaneously to the praise and the glory. Lord, we have shared these things. Now it is up to you to work it out.

We do not dare to stretch our arms and try to organize anything. But we just commit ourselves to thee for what thy Spirit desires. In the name of our Lord Jesus.

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