

To be a CHURCH...
The Vision of Grace Hill, Pt. 1
Acts 2:37-47

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I. PRAYER

- i. Would you, through your Word, give us a vision for what it looks like to be a biblical church that has favor with the people of our town.

II. INTRODUCTION

a. **Did you know that our culture has a new rule...and it is very possible that you violated this rule this past week.**

- i. And in doing so, you have run the risk of being captured violating this rule while being discreetly filmed on someone's phone.
 - That being posted on Social Media and you being shamed and ostracized by the whole Nation.
 - If caught, your career could be ruined.
 - People could not afford to be associated with you!
- ii. Do you know what rule I am referring to?
 - It is no longer acceptable to drink out of plastic straws.
 1. They are harmful to the environment, they do not decompose, and there is an island of plastic garbage in the Pacific Ocean.
 2. So, plastic straws are no longer allowed.
 - You must now use paper straws or no straw at all.



1. This is why Starbucks has moved to plastic sippy cups for their iced beverages....I guess plastic sippy cups are better for the environment than plastic straws.
- iii. Now, I am pro caring for the environment, so if straws really pose a risk, fine let's get rid of them.
- But it is so interesting to me how when these new socio-political rules emerge and gain some traction, they sweep across the culture like an avalanche.
 - It's like all of the sudden, everyone is afraid of being the last one on the bus and so everyone becomes anti-plastic straw.
 1. Businesses race to be the first to ban them from their establishments.
 2. Books are written.
 3. Even when I was in Nags Head last week, at this little mom and pop restaurant that we have been going to for over a decade all of the sudden had posters hanging talking about the danger of plastic straws!
- iv. And if this is the first you are hearing about this...it's time to get with the program...no more plastic straws!

b. It's interesting how trends have accelerated in our social media culture.

- i. How many of you make fun of teens and young adults who pay extra for jeans with holes already ripped in them?
 - Now, how many of you have intentionally distressed furniture in your homes?



1. That's me. I make fun of people who pay extra for holes in their jeans and I have been instructed by my wife to intentionally distress (beat up) a piece of our furniture.
 2. And believe me, that trend is going to pass if it hasn't already. Soon, we're all going to ask why we have beat up furniture in our homes?
- ii. **But in our social media culture, trends are accelerated, and it can intensify our felt need to keep up and fit in.**
- It can intensify the feeling that I don't measure up, people look down on me, and I need to be better.
 - So, for you, maybe it's not environmental or interior design trends.
 1. But maybe it's the fear of what people think about your parenting.
 2. Or the cleanliness of your house.
 3. Or the kind of food you buy.
 4. Or the shape of your body.
 5. Or how spiritual your prayers sound or how much bible knowledge you have.
 - We live in a culture where we are trained to be consumed by what people think about us!
 1. And when everyone is consumed by what people think of them...then everyone is consumed with themselves.
 2. When I am consumed by what people think about me...then I am consumed with me.
 - And our culture lives in a perpetual state low-grade stress and anxiety because we all fear what others think of us.



III. SERIES PLUG

a. **And I sincerely believe, that one of the most strategic ways that our church can engage and reach the culture around us...is by reclaiming and committing ourselves to be the kind of church that is modeled to us in the New Testament.**

- i. Because the kind of church that is modeled to us in the New Testament contains a culture within that is completely antithetical to the culture out there.
- ii. And I believe that this is strategic because the culture out there is exhausting and life-sucking...
 - ...and I believe the kind of culture the church is called to live out is refreshing and life-giving.

b. This morning, we are going to begin a three-part series on the vision of Grace Hill Church.

i. We want to be abundantly clear about the kind of church that we want to be, the kind of church that we envision, and how that will impact ministry here over the next year.

ii. **Our vision at Grace Hill is to be a church where all people can find joy in Jesus.**

- Repeat
- And we are going to take the next three Sundays to explain what we mean by that and how that will practically impact ministry here at Grace Hill Church.



- iii. And so, this morning, we want to talk about the first part of that vision statement.
- **Our vision is to be a CHURCH!**
 1. What do we mean when we say we want to be a church?
 2. Why is that so significant to devote an entire week to talk about it?
 3. Doesn't everyone, even non-Christians, know what a church is?
 - Well, we have taught on this significantly before and we will continue to teach on this regularly because I don't think it is given.
 1. I think the kind of church that we see in the New Testament was way more radical than what we're used to seeing today.
 2. And that's exactly why I think modeling our church after the New Testament example is strategic to reach our town.
 3. Because so much of the church today has assimilated into the culture in the name of relevance and I think what will make the church relevant is not assimilation, but rather is offering a life-giving alternative to the culture.
- c. So, this morning, we are going to look to the Scriptures to see what it actually looks like to be a faithful, genuine church.**
- i. I am praying that God, through His Word, gives all of us a fresh vision for what it means to be a part of a church.



IV. ACTS 2:37-47

a. Let me setup the context for you.

- i. Jesus had just accomplished redemption through his death and resurrection and ascended to be with the Father.
 - Jesus' disciples were left with the mission of starting the church with the help of the Holy Spirit, who shows up a little in earlier in chapter two.
 - At this point, the church is extremely small and is located in Jerusalem.
- ii. And through Acts 2, we get the first sermon of the church preached by the Apostle Peter.
 - And our passage begins right when Peter is done preaching his first sermon and we see the response.

b. Read Acts 2:37-41.

- i. Peter preaches the Gospel.
 - The people ask how to respond!
 - Peter says repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.
 - That this Gospel is now available to every single person on earth...young and old, men and women, rich and poor, dark or light.
- ii. And at the preaching of the Gospel in Jerusalem...3000 people get saved.
 - 3000 people say: "I am surrendering my life to Jesus and trusting him for my salvation."
 - And so now, the church in Jerusalem is a little over 3000 people strong.
 - That's a great first day!



- iii. But in v.42-47, we're going to get a snapshot of what this church was like on a day to day basis.
 - This is the church in its purest form and I want Grace Hill to learn from their example!

c. Read Acts 2:42-47.

- i. Immediately in this passage, we get a summarizing statement about what this first church was like.
 - Look at v.42 with me again.
 1. And they devoted themselves...then it gives us four things that this church devoted themselves to.
 - And when you see that word devoted...the sense that the Greek is trying to convey is the idea of persevering in something.
 1. It has the sense of a continued perseverance and devotion.
 2. So, this immediately makes me think about my devotion to the Washington Redskins.
 3. I've always been a fan of the Redskins.
 4. And it's not fun to be a Redskins fan.
 5. Every year I have good reason to drop my devotion to the team.
 6. But I am a devoted fan. I have persevered.
 7. So, you can be devoted today but as soon as they inevitably lose games or make personnel decisions with the intelligence of a preschooler - drop your devotion.
 8. That's not the kind of devotion that we read of here in Acts 2.
 9. This is the kind of devotion that perseveres even though you may have reason to drop your devotion.



- So, we read in v.42 that this church continually persevered in sitting under the Apostles' teaching, in fellowship, in breaking bread, and prayer.
 - ii. So, let's break each of these down...
- d. What does it mean to continually persevere in sitting under the teaching of the Apostles?**
- i. **Read v.43.**
 - One of the roles that the Apostles played in the early church was communicating the Word of God to the church...because they did not have complete Bibles like we have today.
 1. Either through writing it down in the Scriptures...which we have today.
 2. Or by preaching a Word from God...and one of the things God would do to confirm to the people that what the Apostles were teaching was true and of God...is God would allow them to perform signs and wonders...to authenticate that what they were preaching was in fact the Word of God.
 3. But the key component here is not that the church was devoted to the Apostles...no, the church was devoted to the Apostles teaching...which was the Word of God.
 - And so today, for any church to be a faithful church, they must continually persevere, even when it gets hard, in sitting under the teaching of the Word of God.
 1. What this means is that when I or any other preaches from this pulpit...this book is open.



2. What this means is that a faithful sermon is reading the text, explaining the text, applying the text, and praying the text.
 3. That's a faithful sermon and this church most persevere in tolerating nothing less.
 4. God does not need to perform a miraculous sign to authenticate what I am preaching because what I preach must be in this book.
- And we must preach the whole counsel of God's Word.
 1. Even the hard parts. Even the parts the culture gets up in arms about.
 2. We must not be a church that is consumed with what they out there think about us.
 3. Because the minute we are consumed about what they think about us...we become consumed with ourselves...we make people pleasing our foundation..we compromise our teaching...and now all we are is a service based non-profit that has assimilated into the culture.
 4. What a lot of formally faithful churches have become nowadays.
 5. And look at v.43 again...we give up the very thing that will bring awe and joy to every soul.
 - ii. **If we do not continually persevere in sitting under the whole counsel of the Word of God, it's not that we cease being a faithful church, it's that we cease being a church.**



e. Secondly in v.42, we see that this church continually persevered in fellowship.

- i. Now, when we think of fellowship, we tend to think of relationships centered around faith...and that's a good definition.
 - But, the word here for fellowship comes from the Greek word KOINOS which essentially means common.
 1. And we see this word used again in v.44.
 2. **Read v.44-45.**
 - And so, what we see here is that the fellowship of this church was fueled by their commonality...they had all things in common.
 1. But at first glance it probably didn't seem that way.
 2. This is a church of over 3000 people and I promise you, before they all got saved, they didn't have all things in common.
 3. And we also see from earlier in Acts 2 that this group of people was from all over the world.
 4. **Read Acts 2:9-11a**
 5. Talk about racial reconciliation.
 6. You got people from around the globe who speak different languages gathered together...the gospel comes to bear on their life...and immediately they are persevering in having all things in common.
 7. What exactly do they have in common?
 8. They are brothers and sisters in Christ.



- ii. And the practical application of this kind of fellowship we see in v.45.
 - Jamie read Acts 4:32 for us earlier with the same implication of this fellowship.
 1. Read Acts 4:32.
- iii. See, I think today we judge a church if they have good fellowship or not based on what we receive.
 - Is this a church that meets my needs?
 - Is this a church where people reach out to me?
 - Is this a church where I have friends?
 - Is this a church with people who appreciate my personality?
 - Is this a church that will fit into my busy schedule?
- iv. See, the vision of fellowship that we get in Acts is a vision where everyone sees what they have...their money, their homes, their property, their time, their gifts and talents, their dinner table, their presence...
 - As something that they have to give to others.
 - It's not a mindset that says, do these people meet my needs.
 - It's a mindset that says, how can I meet the needs of these people.
 - It's a mindset that is Christ-like.
 1. I am here to serve and not be served.
 2. I'm here to give my life to these people.
 3. And I will persevere in this kind of fellowship.
 4. I am committed to it.



- v. What is a community like, when everyone has the mindset of what they can receive and everyone is consumed with what everyone think of themselves.
 - Well, it's like the world.
 - There's a lot of loneliness. A lot of judgement. A lot of gossip. A lot of polarization. Conflict averse. Can't handle any sort of disagreement. Massive emotional immaturity.
 - vi. But, what would a community be like where everyone is committed to giving of themselves and everything they have so that others may flourish in their faith...so that others may have friends...so that others can have their needs met...
 - A community where no one is consumed with themselves...but love their neighbor as themselves.
 - That is true, life-giving, biblical fellowship.
 1. And it takes every one of us being devoted to this...persevering in this.
 - vii. And do you know how a community perseveres and maintains this kind of fellowship?
- f. It's through continually persevering in their devotion to Jesus.**
- i. Look back at Acts 2:42...they were devoted to breaking bread and prayer.
 - When it says breaking bread, the text is referring to the Lord's Supper.



1. Where Jesus instructed His disciples to break bread and drink wine whenever the church met together as a way of remembering what Christ has done for us.
 - So, when the church makes it a habit to break bread and pray when they come together, they are reinforcing the very thing that they have in common.
 1. Jesus!
 2. Jesus is what brings us together.
 3. We all used to be dead in our sins but now we are brothers and sisters because Christ has taken our sins to the cross, he has defeated the grave, and welcomed us into His family forever.
 - Breaking bread and prayer centers our worship, our fellowship, and our teaching on the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 1. It reminds us that we do have all things in common.
 2. It reminds us that we do have a basis for our love for one another.
 3. It reminds us that our joy is not found in being served but in serving and giving our lives as Jesus did.
 - **Read v.46.**
 1. Regular feasting on the gospel of Jesus Christ produces glad and generous hearts.
- ii. **This church persevered in sitting under the Word of God. They persevered in giving of themselves in fellowship. They persevered in being centered on Jesus Christ.**



g. And what was the fruit of this perseverance?

i. Read v.47.

- It says that this church had favor with all the people.
 1. This is referring to all the people of the city of Jerusalem.
 2. The people who are not Christians and a part of this church.
 3. They had favor with them...and people were consistently getting saved.

ii. The word for favor here is CARIS - which is the word for grace.

- These were gracious, gentle, kind, caring, selfless, charitable, generous people.
 1. That's how they treated each other in the church.
 2. That's how they treated those outside the church.

iii. What was it about this church's unwavering commitment to the Word of God, to giving of themselves in fellowship, and to Jesus Christ that gave them favor with all the people?

- You know, you can snuff out narcissism, whether it is personal or organizational, from a mile away.
 1. But a congregation that perseveres in what it believes.
 2. A congregation that perseveres in their love for one another.
 3. And a congregation that perseveres in their love for Jesus.
- This is a congregation made of people who truly are not consumed with themselves, they are free of the bondage of what others think, and they truly have found joy in life.



1. And our culture craves this.
 2. They look to anything and everything for this.
- And this is why I believe modeling our church after this is not only faithful but strategic...because this is what our culture longs for.
 1. Not everyone will agree that what they are looking for is found in Christ.
 2. But I love what **Acts 5:13** says.
 3. The culture was saying...I don't believe what they believe...but man I like those people.
 4. They're so kind, gracious, unassuming, and genuine.
 - They didn't have favor because they catered their beliefs to what the world wanted.
 1. They had favor because they were selfless, genuine people.

V. APPLICATION

- i. And I believe that our commitment to persevere in these things here at Grace Hill Church will produce that character within us personally and this kind of witness and favor in the community.
- b. This is why we do church membership here at Grace Hill.**
- i. Some people find church membership as exclusive and not welcoming.
 - And maybe there is a better word for it.



ii. **But we do church membership because we want the people who call Grace Hill their church home to be committed together to persevere in these things!**

- So, when you become a member of Grace Hill Church...you are making a promise...a covenant.
- You are saying...
 1. I promise to persevere along with all of you in sitting under the Word of God and not wavering from that.
 2. I promise to persevere along with all of you in giving of all I have to love and care for you knowing that you are doing the same for me.
 3. I promise to persevere along with all of you in making Jesus the center of my life and the life of this church.
- No matter how much persecution comes from the culture...I promise to persevere.
 1. When our church goes through great times and hard times, I promise to persevere.
 2. When I have a conflict with someone in the church, I promise to persevere.
 3. When I am struggling with doubt and wrestling with major questions about God, I promise to persevere.
 4. Because this isn't about me...this is about Jesus and our witness of him in this world.

iii. **That's what church membership is all about.**

- The church is not an organization that provides a good or service for us to consume on our terms.



- The church is a community of Christians who have committed themselves to one another for the purpose of God’s mission in this world.

c. And so, when we say that our vision is to be a CHURCH where all people can find joy in Jesus.

- i. That word church is a loaded word.
- ii. And if you call Grace Hill your church home and have not become a member, I want to invite you to become one.
 - We have a class that we will enroll you in that is mostly online that walks through our doctrine and our belief of what it means to be a church.
 - You’ll find this in your bulletin, but you can request to be enrolled into that class by going to gracehillchurch.com/membership.
 - We want to link arms with you and persevere in these things together.
- iii. And if you’re new to Grace Hill and still checking us out and not sure yet if you want to become a member, that’s completely fine.
 - We are glad that you’re here and we hope one day you’ll move towards membership when you are ready.

d. But Grace Hill, let’s be the kind of church that the Scriptures call us to be.

- i. Let’s be a church that is antithetical to the self-consumed culture around us.
 - Let us lay down our rights in humble submission under the Scriptures and out of love for our God and one another.



- ii. We will not be a place where all people can find joy in Jesus if we are not a true, faithful church.

- Can y'all say amen to that?

e. Then let's break bread together.

- i. On the table up front, we have bread and juice.

- The bread represents the broken body of Christ who came to serve you and not be served and to give his life as a ransom so that we would not have to face the judgement for our sins.
- The juice represents his blood. Which has cleansed us from our sin and made us righteous in the sight of God.

- ii. **This table represents what we have in common...our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

- This is what unites us.
- So, if you are a follower of Jesus, I invite you to come forward, take of the bread and juice, remember what Christ has done for you, and celebrate the gospel with your brothers and sisters,
- If you are not a follower of Jesus, I ask you to not come forward because this is something really sacred to us who believe in Jesus.
 1. But let me say to you what Peter said in his first sermon where 3000 people were saved...
 2. "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins"



3. There is forgiveness freely available to you and there is joy freely available to you and a family of brothers and sisters in Christ who are ready to welcome you in.
4. And if you want to surrender your life to Jesus today, just come forward as everyone is coming to the table and grab me. I'd love to pray with you right now.

VI. PRAY

