

LESSON 4

SEPTEMBER 26, 2021

UNIT I. GOD'S PEOPLE OFFER PRAISE CELEBRATING IN UNITY

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 134

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 2:32-33, 37-47

PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 2:32-33, 37-47

KEY VERSE

They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:42, KJV)

.....

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42, NIV)

LESSON AIMS

As a result of experiencing this lesson, the participants should be able to do these things:

- Understand Jesus' forgiveness of sins and the role of the Holy Spirit in your lives and in the life of the church.
- Discern how the love of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit inspire believers of different backgrounds to share a life of worship, care, and witness.
- Plan opportunities for persons to encounter the Holy Spirit and begin a relationship with Jesus Christ through the ministries of your church.

KEY TERMS

Forgiveness (verse 38)—Greek: *aphesis* (af'-es-is): dismissal; release; pardon; "remission" (KJV).

Praising (verse 47)—Greek: *aineó* (ahee-neh'-o): to praise, extol.

Raised up (verse 32)—Greek: *anistémi* (an-is'-tay-mee): raised (from the dead); "raised . . . to life" (NIV).

Repent (verse 38)—Greek: *metanoéó* (met-an-o-eh'-o): to change one's mind or purpose.

Witnesses (verse 32)—Greek: *martus* (mar'-toos): eyewitnesses or ear-witnesses.

Wonders (verse 43)—Greek: *teras* (ter'-as): portents; marvels; miraculous events.

PREPARING THE LESSON

- Refer to the *Townsend Press SS Commentary Teacher's Edition* for an additional lesson plan—with word studies, insights on teaching adults, learner matrices, etc.
- Review last week's student assignments ("Your Life" and Your World!").
- Thoroughly review your student book for your adult or young adult class.

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

Celebrations bring about unity and a new way of seeing and being in the world. How can our celebrations unify a divided community and world? The first Christian community heard the Gospel, was inspired by the Holy Spirit to see the world differently, and united to live, worship, and evangelize together.

THE LESSON IN FOCUS

People often experience joy and other feelings of euphoria when they participate in a festive celebration. Many appreciate the joys and privileges of belonging to a group, large or small, united

by a common passion or belief. For example, families, churches, and friendship circles grow closer and stronger when they look beyond individual differences and celebrate the bond that unites them. Over time, people typically grow closer to those with whom they share time, space, or history, but they are especially drawn to those with whom they share common values and goals. God has called the body of Christ to a shared experience of love and unity with persons of various ethnic, social, and cultural boundaries. Without the Spirit of the Lord, such unity would be not just elusive but also nearly impossible. In Christ, there are no divisions—we are one in faith and love because of Him.

THE LESSON IN CONTEXT

The Greek words for “breath,” “wind,” “blowing,” and “spirit” are from the same root word, *pneuma*. Jesus connected wind and spirit in His conversation with Nicodemus (see John 3:5-8) and illustrated the giving of the Holy Spirit by breathing on the apostles (see John 20:22). On Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit was accompanied by a rushing wind—the animating power of the church. The “breaking of bread” could refer both to the ceremonial practice of the Lord’s Supper (see 1 Corinthians 11:23-39) and the simple sharing of a common meal (see Acts 27:33-38). The text seems to speak of both spiritual and material sharing of all things in common, including food (verses 44-46). Because Passover and Pentecost were only about seven weeks apart, many Jewish pilgrims would remain in Jerusalem from one feast day to the next. The communal arrangements described in Acts 2:44-45 suggest that the common sharing in the Jerusalem church accommodated those with limited means as well as displaced pilgrims. The unifying practices of the early church described in Acts 2:43-47 continued even after early persecution in the church (see 4:32-35). The empowering presence of the Holy Spirit is credited with giving boldness to early Christians in the face of the open persecution they suffered because of their faith (verse 31). The John the Baptist prophecy that Jesus would baptize believers with the Spirit (see John 1:32-34) was first fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:38). Peter calls those who would be saved to both repentance and baptism with the promise of the Spirit, as linked in Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; Acts 13:24; 19:4. In the manner of the apostles, the church should continue to recognize the symbols of the new birth—water baptism *and* the Holy Spirit baptism.

OPENING INQUIRY (Choose from the questions below.)

1. What emotions do you feel when you are able to meet someone’s need?
2. Share a time when someone met a significant need of yours at just the right time.
3. What are some important keys to building unity within groups of individuals?

INSIGHTS

Christians acknowledge that the work of building the Lord’s kingdom requires a committed response. Sitting idle is not an option—God has called every believer to be engaged in the worship and “work-ship” of the Lord. Those who engage in this labor for the Lord willingly accept fellow Christians as spiritual brothers and sisters.

EXPLORATION

Wonderful things happen when Christians come together to demonstrate their valuing of people over possessions. Bonds of unity grow stronger and new believers are drawn to Christ when Christians extend themselves to touch the needs of those within and outside their circle. The church community grows closer as Christians gather regularly for worship, prayer, the Lord’s Supper, Bible teaching, and serving the needs of others. Jesus declared that others would recognize Christians by their love—a love that transcends ethnic, national, and socioeconomic barriers to become one in Him.

ADDITIONAL EXPOSITORY INSIGHTS FOR THE TEACHER

Commentary on Acts 2:32-33, 37-38

KJV

32 This Jesus hath God *raised up*, whereof we all are *witnesses*.

33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

.....

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the

rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

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.

NIV

32 God has *raised* this Jesus to *life*, and we are all *witnesses* of it.

33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

.....

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

38 Peter replied, “*Repent* and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the *forgiveness* of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

In Acts 2:25-28, Peter quoted Psalm 16:8-11. Jesus had not only been raised from the dead, but He had also been exalted at the right hand of the Father and had, from this exalted position, poured out His Spirit in the form and presence of the Holy Spirit, as foretold by the prophet Joel (see 2:28-29). Peter’s hearers were both convinced and convicted (thus, pricked at their very souls) as they were cut by the realization that they had crucified God’s Messiah. In response, many asked what they could do to be delivered from the awful guilt that was pricking their souls. Peter replied that God’s mercy was available to forgive sin. God’s forgiveness is conditional—it requires repentance and baptism. Repentance for salvation requires making a complete turn from the life of sin and confession of Jesus as Lord and Savior. Baptism was the public evidence or affirmation of a repentant spirit. The experience of salvation is not to be understood as a one-time duty, like checking off a box. Being saved is a lifestyle, a daily commitment to living a repentant, holy life. This is the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s power at work within the believer’s heart.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book’s related biblical exposition section.)

Adult Question:

Is it possible to come to Jesus without repentance—that is, if one’s heart is not pricked of sin?

Young Adult Question:

Jesus used the adjective comforter to reassure the disciples that He would not leave them alone. When circumstances cause you concern, which adjectives remind you of the Holy Spirit’s presence?

COMMENTARY ON ACTS 2:39-42

KJV

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.

40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

NIV

39 “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Peter was pleased to report the good news that God's Spirit was now available to anyone who believed in God—not just leaders such as prophets, priest, and kings. Whereas being a Jew had been an exclusive designation that separated persons by ancestral history, the power of the Holy Spirit is given by God to anyone—anyone who would simply repent, believe, and obey God, “even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (verse 39). It should also be emphasized that the gift is the presence of the Holy Spirit Himself rather than a material gift to be acquired. Peter exhorted those who heard him to save themselves from the current “untoward generation” (verse 40). In a single day, three thousand persons responded to the Word by being baptized and accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord. The promise of God was given upon the profession of faith through repentance and reliance on Jesus Christ for salvation. The new converts formed a community that came together to receive and study God's Word, and to unite in fellowship, eating, and praying together.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book's related biblical exposition section.)

• Adult Question:

As we seek to commune with the Holy Spirit, in what ways can we truly fellowship with one another?

• Young Adult Question:

Do you think Peter was surprised by the overwhelming response to his preaching? Share a time when the Holy Spirit has given you a successful outcome that blew your mind.

COMMENTARY ON ACTS 2:43-47

KJV

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many *wonders* and signs were done by the apostles.

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,
47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

NIV

43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many *wonders* and signs performed by the apostles.
44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.
45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.
46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,
47 *praising* God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The character of these converts, this new Christian community, apparently aroused a sense of awe in the people who witnessed their behavior. This respectful fear was reinforced by the signs and wonders performed by the apostles (verse 43) and the communal behavior of the Christians (verses 44-47). The early Christians were so devoted to one another that wealthy Christians sold their possessions to help care for the necessities of less-fortunate Christians. Christian love manifested itself in a social system or program of support for one another. It is quite possible that this level of Christian sharing was so surprising because the Jews of the time had strayed so far from the early Jewish church and traditions of caring for one another. The new believers in Christ were still Jews and continued daily worship in the Temple, following Jewish rituals and customs of the time. They saw no reason to separate from their roots and simply added a level of love and joy that was defiantly noteworthy throughout the community in such a way that even those who had not witnessed, heard of, or even believed in Jesus as the Messiah still had respect for the actions of Christian fellowship—leading to the gaining of favor throughout the community. This visible demonstration of Christian love resulted in God’s adding members to the church daily as they openly and joyfully praised their Lord and Savior. As the people prayed and pursued God’s Word, new converts received the witness of the saints and the saints received the fellowship of the new converts.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

(Please review the appropriate student book’s related biblical exposition section.)

- **Adult Questions:**

Are the Christian practices noted in today’s lessons practical and useful today? Why or why not?

- **Young Adult Question:**

What does the generosity in the early church tell you about the disciples’ priorities? Reflect on the unity of the people in the early church. What factors hinder or prohibit that kind of unity among believers in today’s church?

LIFE APPLICATION

Refer to Adult Book

(See student lesson’s “Your Life” section.)

—This week, consider your praise and worship experiences. Do your acts of Christian love reach beyond the church building? Think about it and consider starting a log or journal to capture your expressions of commitment to Christ beyond the sanctuary.

(See student lesson’s “Your World!” section.)

—This week, be intentional about living out your faith. Christianity is not just an inward

contemplation of the heart. To touch the world, our faith must impact our words and actions.
What will you do to demonstrate your faith this week?

Refer to Young Adult Book

(See student lesson's "Your Life" section.)

—The believers in the early church were blessed as they devoted much of their time to the ministry of the church and fellowship with other believers. They gathered together throughout the week and joined together in a wonderful spirit of love and Christian fellowship. Consider some ways you can strengthen your commitment to God and grow closer to the members of your church community.

(See student lesson's "Your World!" section.)

—The early church was filled with people from various ethnic and social backgrounds. It is important that the church remain open and welcoming to people, no matter what their differences may be. Consider some practical ways that you or your church can create a more welcoming atmosphere so that anyone would feel comfortable in fellowship there.

NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

The lesson topic for Sunday, October 3, 2021, is “Only You.” The Devotional Reading text is Psalm 66:1-7, the Background Scripture text is Psalm 100, and the Printed Text is Psalm 100:1-5.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Lord, help us to become bolder in our open display of our love for You. Give us greater unity in our worship of and service for You. Help us to share and celebrate in love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE

(September 27–October 3, 2021)

MONDAY, September 27: “Praise the Rock of Our Salvation” (Psalm 95)

TUESDAY, September 28: “Stones Shout Out!” (Luke 19:28, 36-40)

WEDNESDAY, September 29: “Indescribable and Glorious Joy” (1 Peter 1:3-9)

THURSDAY, September 30: “Sing to God a New Song” (Psalm 98)

FRIDAY, October 1: “A Continuous Sacrifice of Praise” (Hebrews 13:12-16)

SATURDAY, October 2: “Rejoice in God's Mighty Rule” (Psalm 66:1-7)

SUNDAY, October 3: “Enter God's Courts with Praise” (Psalm 100)