

Following Jesus Christ – The Example of the First Generation Christian Church

Matthew 4:19 [NIV] *“Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men.”*

Matthew 4:20 [NIV] *“At once they left their nets and followed Him.”*

Follow me – we are to look at what Christ did and follow His example, in the way the gospel message is given to this world.

Acts 1:8 [NIV] *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”*

What for?

“And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

These were the final words of Christ on earth.

How did the New Testament Church follow the final command of Jesus Christ?

Acts 2:4 [NIV] *“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”*

The promised gift of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Peter used this newly acquired power in a very dynamic way.

Acts 2:41 [NIV] *“Those who accepted his message [the tongue that was enabled by the Holy Spirit] were baptised, and about 3,000 were added to their number that day.”*

How did the newly formed church continue this commanded work of witness?

Acts 2:46-47 [NIV] *“Everyday they [the newly called church] continued to meet together in the temple courts [where the public would gather]. They broke bread in their homes and ate together, with glad and sincere hearts. [Took communion and had fellowship meals]. Praising God [singing psalms of praise] and enjoying the favour of all the people [what people? Those they had met within the temple courts] and the Lord [Christ’s representative on earth, the Holy Spirit] added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*

This was an environment in which Holy Spirit worked.

Luke 19:10 [NIV] *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”*

People do not seek God, God seeks them !

1 Corinthians 3:11 [NIV] *“For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*

We are to build on that foundation, that is build the house of God on earth, His Church.

How do we do this?

1 Corinthians 6:19 [NIV] *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, Whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price, therefore honour God with your body.”*

The word for body is “*soma*”, complete body, mind, human spirit, [**Job 32:8; Proverbs 20:27; 1 Corinthians 2:11**].

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you brothers, in the view of God’s Mercy, to offer your bodies [“*soma*”] as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship.”*

As the early Church gathered together to remind themselves of Christ’s sacrifice [broke bread] sang psalms of praise, and had fellowship meals together after meeting with and talking with the general public, the Holy Spirit added to their number.

But remember it was a **total** sacrifice of body, mind and human spirit on a daily basis that caused the Holy Spirit to add to their number.

Let us now look at an example of Jesus Christ being a witness of His own gospel message.

John 4:1-42 [NIV] *“The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptising more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptised, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?” Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.” “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.” The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.” Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no-one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” They came out of the town and made their way towards him. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.” Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?” “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour.” Many of the Samaritans from that*

town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world."

Christ used a simple everyday event to preach the gospel.

Now let us look again at the early Church's response to the gospel message in more detail.

Acts 2:42 [NIV] *"They [the newly called church] devoted [continued steadfast] themselves to the apostle's training [God's Word] and to fellowship the breaking of bread [worship – Christ centred] and to prayer.*

Prayer

This is an environment in which the Holy Spirit will work powerfully.

Prayer needs to be a major part of the culture of the church.

Personal prayer and corporate prayer, and intercessory prayer should be far more than for those physically sick in the church. The really sick people in the world are those who do not know Jesus as the Saviour.

Prayer linked with study of God's Word is a major part of our relationship with our Creator God.

Just as through conversation with other human beings we get to know them so we get to know God through the conversation of prayer and study.

An example of intercessory prayer worked dramatically.

Acts 12:1-19 [NIV] *"It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists. Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating." When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognised Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel." But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place. In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had*

become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed. Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there a while.”

We need to pray in faith expecting God to intervene.

What a powerful witness of the Holy Spirit at work in the Church as a response to fervent prayer.

The Word

Romans 10:1-15 [NIV] *“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them.” But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? **“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,”** that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.** As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

It is our job to preach the Word of God in any way we can.

The aim of this preaching should be transformation, not just information.

Our preaching must model that of Jesus Christ. He started where the people were to lead them to Himself.

Worship

The adoration of Jesus Christ – a real encounter with Jesus Christ through the active presence of the Holy Spirit, **not** just a show but real substance.

The worship service should encourage and empower all the people.

Taking up of offerings should be part of the worship service, surround the offering with prayer and the Word of God.

Giving an offering has always been part of the worship life of the Church in Old Testament and New Testament Church.

The New Testament Church offering is the parallel of the Old Testament offering of an animal sacrifice to God.

Fellowship

An atmosphere of love.

A commitment to contact.

Fellowship meals accompanying the communion.

Acts 2:47 [NIV] *“praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*

A joy-filled time that was free from judgementalism or divisions.

Fellowship and prayer groups in each others' homes during the week.

A fellowship that is easily accessible to new people and an atmosphere that reflects love for all humanity.

Personal testimonies of how Christ called us and what He has done for us in our lives.

Christ was a friend of sinners.

Are we a place where sinners can find love, rest and peace of mind through fellowship with us?