

God's Church, God's Plan Acts 2:46-47 ZCC 9.22.13

46 Day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 praising God, and having favor with all the people. The Lord added to the assembly day by day those who were being saved. (WEB)

You know we love survivors. There must be a dozen or more reality shows on these days where the viewers get to watch people do dangerous things in dangerous places—from the safety of our own living room, of course. We see a guy dropped in the middle of the desert with only a knife and a parachute and some baling wire or in the middle of the Amazon Jungle or try to survive a week in Alaska in the middle of winter. Since there seem to be more and more of those shows on TV, then I can only suppose that a bunch of us are watching them. Watching those survivors and maybe imagining how we would do it.

I was looking over the history of Zion this week. Y'all have been here a long time—surviving the Civil War and the Great Depression, as well as many wars and conflicts around there world. I'm sure that it has survived many spiritual wars also along the way. Still, you've survived and I'm sure that God still has a plan for Zion just as he did back in 1846.

There are prayer-warriors in this church and friends outside this church who are praying that God's hand and his power will continue to hold this church up. As we continue to reach out to our community, I pray that the powerful things that happen will surprise us all.

I know we want to be a beacon of light in this community. How do we work with God to make that happen? Do we wait on God? Do we march forward in faith?

Often, when we ask questions, the answers are already there for us—in God's word. Usually, God's truth and God's plan are plain and simple and open and right there for us to find.

Psalms 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path.” So if that is true, what can we use it for? [To show us the way—so let's light that lamp and see where God's path leads us.]

I only read two verses earlier, but in the first 2 or 3 chapters of Acts we find a detailed look at the fastest growing and most “on fire” church in Christian history. As I looked over their path, I noticed seven steps that we can use to guide and shape what we do and how we do it here at Zion—steps that can help us continue to move forward toward God's ultimate plan for us as a church.

First I will just list the steps and come back and talk about them.

- 1. The church knew Christ.**
- 2. The church was of one mind.**
- 3. The church was constantly praying.**
- 4. The church was moving forward.**
- 5. The church gathered in Christ's name**
- 6. The church used the power God provided.**
- 7. The church (not just the preachers) preached the word.**

1. Know Christ. They knew him in the physical sense. Many of them had witnessed the miracles. They may have seen the Spirit descending on him at his baptism. They may have seen Lazarus' resurrection. Some of them may have literally tasted his power as they ate the loaves and fishes that fed thousands.

In the last verses of Matthew 14 we see that he was well known far and wide—and that people came from great distances to be healed by Jesus—and that even the hem of his robe could heal the sick. The church had witnessed the blind seeing and cripples leaping and the dead living again. They saw demons cast out and lives made whole.

Many of those in church had seen him alive and well AFTER he had been crucified and buried. Instead of a defeated mob of losers, they turned into the greatest and most powerful church in history.

Well, Christ isn't physically here is he? I guess I already hit a snag, huh? Not really. We CAN have a personal experience with Jesus that is just as real as theirs.

We can SEE him in the Gospels. We can HEAR his voice woven through Scripture. We can be TOUCHED by his presence in our hearts and souls.

When we study the word, pray, and seek his face—Christ will be real enough to change us and empower us to be his people and be HIS church on HIS mission in this time and place.

2. Be of one Mind. Acts 1:14 says that they were on one mind. So, how does that work? Did they agree on everything from the color of the carpet to the placement of the pulpit to the stripes on the parking lot? I don't believe they did any more than we do. What I DO believe is that they were willing to subordinate themselves individually to the cause of Christ. They might not have agreed 100% but I believe that once something was decided they all got behind it 100%.

They had no idea what was going to happen next, but Scripture says that they faced the future in one accord. Jesus said that he was going to send them power and they were standing as a group, waiting for that power to come! We will be doing the work of God, by the power of God, when we are marching forward as one body with one mind—not when we all agree on all the details—but when we all decide that God's work is more important than anything else.

3. Pray Constantly. Acts 1:14 says that they were continually praying. I'm certain that they prayed as individuals and in groups and as a church. They were seeking God's power and God's face and God's direction in the only way they knew how—and in reality, the only way they could get it.

Their whole world had been torn apart and their survival was in question. They prayed. They shed tears. They prayed. They cared for one another. They prayed. They fasted. They prayed. Notice a pattern there?

Were we to pray as they prayed, who knows what would happen here at Zion? I don't think we can even imagine. I suppose God only knows.

Not one of us or two of us can pray down such power—it will take us all. Individually and in groups and as a church.

4. Move forward in faith. They knew some things to do. They knew to pray—do they did. They knew to gather—and they did. They knew to observe the Lord's Supper—and they did.

As they waited for the hand of God—for God's power to fall on them, they did the things they knew to do. They were faithful with what they had and what they knew, moving forward for God.

5. Continually gather in his name. Acts 1:15 tells us that there were about 120 disciples gathered when Peter spoke to them. Acts 2:1 says that they were in one place and of one mind—as does Acts 2:46.

They developed a sense of love and trust and a sense of family as they gathered together and worshipped together and as they wept together and as they ate together.

I believe that one reason that they were of one mind—willing to put aside their own ideas for the sake of the body—was due to their shared experiences. They knew each other and loved each other as we are supposed to in the church. When one hurt, all hurt. If one had joy, all rejoiced.

This church should be our extended family and you know it is more difficult to stay angry with those we love most—our family. When we see each other as members of our family and when we see those in our community as being potential family members, we will fill the pews and fill the air with praise for what God has done.

I believe that our world is sick to death of loneliness and depression and despair and that, more than anything, the people around us just want to be loved and cared about. Strange as it seems, that is the reasons gangs flourish.

What better place to meet those needs than a loving and caring church—a family of God?

6. Use the power that God provides. After the sending of the Holy Spirit, the church preached in boldness. They witnessed constantly—telling others their stories and how Jesus had changed them forever. They used their personal spiritual gifts for the good of the kingdom.

When the Holy Spirit was given to them they literally took the world by storm. Within 70 years, all the known world had been evangelized. They USED that power!

That rushing wind was more powerful than an EF5 tornado and more powerful than hurricane Hugo—and WE have that same Holy Spirit available to us. ALL power really is available to us at Zion through the Spirit of God.

7. Preach the word. Matthew 28:19-20 says: *19.Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20. teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.*

Verse 19 is the Great Commission. Say it with me—you know it. You can quote whatever version you remember: *Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

Have you ever commissioned a missionary here? Have you seen a commissioning of missionaries? They all look different, but basically when they are commissioned—they are authorized and empowered to do God's work in the name of the church, to seek souls and to help those in need.

Their authority and their power and their direction comes from the church. Just as surely as those missionaries are commissioned to work on our behalf—we have been commissioned by Jesus to work on his behalf. Our command and our power and our authority—our commission comes from our Lord Jesus Christ.

So how about it—Zion—do we REALLY want to be right smack in the middle of God's will? Do we REALLY want to make a difference in our community and in our world? Do we REALLY want our own lives to change? Do we REALLY want this church to do things we never imagined and be what we never thought it could?

We can do it—by the numbers—by God's hand and God's plan:

1. Know Christ—develop and nurture a personal relationship with him—personally and corporately.

2. Be of one mind. We can't always agree on the details, but we can subordinate our personal wishes for the good of the church and of the kingdom of God.

3. Pray constantly. Individually and in groups and as a congregation.

4. Move forward in faith—do what we know to do.

5. Continually gather in his name.

6. Use the power that God makes available to us through the Spirit.

7. Preach the word. BE the Great Commission. I don't know exactly what that looks like for you individually, but I'll leave you with a quote often credited to St. Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words."