

What's Right with the Church

TEXT: Acts 9:31, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

THESIS: Begin seeing what is right with the church so that you are focused more on the mission of God than on the problems people bring to the church.

INTRODUCTION:

1. In Latonia, Ky., an automobile was trying to beat a train to a crossing. It failed. The engine hit the automobile, caved in the body and turned the car around by the roadside.
 - a. A crowd gathered thinking there was a fatality. But, as they looked on, the driver climbed out, looked his car over and climbed in again.
 - i. The people's amazement burst into applause as he stepped on the gas and sped away. Not a fundamental part of the machine was injured.
 - b. When we look at the church, it too has been hit, but not wrecked.
 - i. All the fundamentals of our faith are here.
 - ii. The Bible is here, Christ is here, our hope is here and the church goes on triumphantly!
2. And this is where we come to our text in Acts 9:31, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."
 - a. This is an interesting verse.
 - b. I mean, when we think of the church, how many times do we hear news of scandals, crimes, divisions, false teachings, etc . . .
 - i. And then, there are people who we hear complain or give poor excuses for not attending church.
 - ii. In any case, a tremendous focus is placed upon problems in the church.
3. Well, this morning I want to look at a different picture.
 - a. I want to look at a picture of a church that was doing it right.
 - b. I want to look at a church, after a storm had come and gone.
4. Throughout history, Christians have looked to the church in the Book of Acts as a model of what Christ wants his body to look like.
 - a. And, Acts 9:31 certainly sets forth some evidences of a healthy church.

DISCUSSION:

I. MOOD OF PEACE

- A. Notice in Acts 9:31, that the verse begins with the word "then."
 1. The context of this verse is shortly after the conversion of Saul and the resulting decrease of external persecutions on the church.
 - a. I mean, this peace was not in reference to spiritual rest in Christ; this they had before, even in tribulation.
 - b. But, now they had rest from persecution.

- (1) No doubt, when God converted Saul, the great persecutor (Acts 9:1-9), people felt more at rest.
 2. But also, since God overruled the evil of men and worked it out for good, God used a world event to distract the Jewish rulers from the church.
 - a. At this time, the Roman emperor Caligula was attempting to set up a statue or an image of himself in the temple at Jerusalem.
 - b. He was set on forcing the Jews to worship his image.
 - (1) This, of course, was anathema, accursed to the Jews.
 - (2) In their minds, it was a much greater threat than the small movement of Christianity.
 - c. Therefore, they turned from persecuting the church to dealing with the threat of the Roman emperor.
- B. Now, Luke uses the word rest, which is actually, the word peace, which is an active noun indicating a continuous state of peace or rest.
 1. The church had been going through some turbulent times, but now they were becoming calm and settled.
 2. They were rejoicing in the peace and deliverance God had given from their great trials.
 - a. And truly, the church should joy in God who works things out for good and brings such a state of peace to the church.
 - b. I mean, we know that the believer will suffer persecution (Phil. 1:28).
- C. But, it is wonderful when peace and joy reigns.
 1. Peter said in 1 Pet. 4:12-13, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”
 2. Peter shows that peace involves much more than the absence of persecution.
 3. And, we ought to know that a church can have peace outwardly and not inwardly.
 - a. You see, peace involves absence of conflict, both outwardly and inwardly, and the presence of harmony.
 - b. Because, a church filled with division will not see multiplication.
 - (1) In fact, without inward peace, the Gospel will be hindered.
 - (2) It will be opposed.
 - (a) Therefore, opportunity for proclaiming the gospel freely should be grasped to the fullest.
 - (b) And, here in Acts 9, the churches knew that.

II. CONSISTENT SPIRITUAL GROWTH

- A. Notice the verse says, “and were edified.”
 1. Edified here means “to build a house,” referring to us, the household of

God!

2. It is in reference to spiritual growth, to strengthen, to establish, to confirm in the faith.
 3. The believers were continuing to grow spiritually:
 - a. Becoming stronger in their faith in the Lord Jesus.
 - b. Learning more of the Word of God, of Jesus' teachings and doctrines.
 - c. Gaining a greater knowledge of the Holy Spirit's presence and power.
 - d. Learning how and becoming more effective workers for the Lord.
 - e. Gaining more and more boldness both for living and working in the Lord.
- B. You know, a healthy church is one blossoming with spiritual growth in its members.
1. And, we grow spiritually through spiritual food and spiritual exercise.
 2. Our spiritual food is the regular intake of God's Word, and our spiritual exercise is our ministry and service to His will.
 3. Now, if you are going to grow spiritually, it will cost you time and effort.
 - a. It will require you to follow after the things which make for peace (Rom. 14:19).
 - b. It will involve pleasing your neighbor for his good (Rom. 15:2).
 - c. It will take nothing corrupt coming out of your mouth (Eph. 4:29).
 - d. It will call for helping to fully furnish the saints for the work of the ministry and the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).
- C. Thus, as Paul said in Col. 2:6-7, "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."

III. COMPELLING SPIRITUAL LIFE FORCE

- A. In vs. 31, Luke continues to write that the church was walking.
1. They were walking in the Lord (1 Pet. 2:21).
 2. They were alive!
 - a. And, a clear spiritual dynamic was at work!
 - b. They had distinctive characteristics that identified them as the church so that no one would be mistaken as to whom they belonged to.
- B. And, they were walking in two particular ways:
1. First, they walked in the "fear of the Lord" or very simply, they were living in "fear of the Lord," to live before Him in trust, reverence, awe, worship, and obedience.
 - a. To walk in all the ways of God (Deut. 10:12) working to the glory of His love, grace, holiness and righteousness.
 - b. They knew that if they worked righteousness, that they would be

accepted with God (Acts 10:35).

- (1) And, how great is his goodness to those who fear him (Psa. 31:19).
 - (2) You know, the fear of the Lord portrays an idea of being afraid to offend God in any way.
 - (a) A healthy church seeks God's will above all else.
 - (b) A church that pleases God is a church where the people honor Christ in their daily conduct, in their daily thoughts (Phil. 4:8), daily deeds (2 Cor. 7:1), and in their daily words (Eph. 4:29).
2. Second, they walked in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
- a. This word comfort means "to call near or called to one's side" and suggest giving aid, such as a counsel would for the defense.
 - b. Now, we know that the apostles, now including Paul received, proclaimed, defended and recorded the revelation of the New Testament and the church was brought comfort through these inspired teachings.
 - c. But also, the church was comforted knowing that the Holy Spirit dwelt within them which was a stamp of God's approval and his down payment on our eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14).
- C. Thus, the church was living by faith because without it, they could not please God (Heb. 11:6).
1. They walked by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).
 2. And just like today:
 - a. The church must commit to holiness (Eph. 4:30).
 - b. The church must depend on prayer (Eph. 6:18).
 - (1) And without these components, the church would be dead!
 - (2) Now, we must have compelling ambition, a driving force, to making progress in these areas.

IV. CONSISTENT NUMERICAL GROWTH

- A. God blessed them because the New Testament church was multiplied.
1. In Acts 1:8, the apostles earlier were told by Christ that they would be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.
 2. And, we can see that the church did spread so far to the regions of Judaea and Samaria.
 - a. In Acts 8:4 it tells us that the church was scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the word.
 - b. But now, a breathing spell was given to the churches in Palestine, to continue to grow without persecution and were given more opportunities to minister to the world.
- B. You know, a healthy church will experience consistent growth.

1. Not numbers for numbers' sake, but because numbers represent people and people matter to God!
 2. And, we need to reach people for Christ!
 - a. Because, a healthy church is a church where lives are changed by the gospel.
- C. However, notice why the church in Acts 9:31 grew.
1. The believers:
 - a. They were at rest and peace.
 - b. They were edifying and building each other up.
 - c. They were walking in the fear of the Lord.
 - d. They were walking under the comfort of the Spirit.
 2. Now, you take one these things away, and the church will not grow.
 - a. These are the essentials for church growth, for reaching people with the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

CONCLUSION

1. You know, I am saddened to say, that there are some who see the church as drab and dull.
 - a. But,
 - i. The church was right in the way she started back in Acts 2.
 - ii. The church was right in the materials she used as men and women started life afresh with a new power, a new purpose, a new prospect.
 - iii. The church was right in the way she grew like a contagious disease infecting people with their courageous convictions.
 - iv. The church was right in what they believed as the truth knowing that God worked with them.
 - b. The church is a divine institution.
 - i. No wonder that the Church of God increased, when such lights as these shone among men.
 - ii. This is a short, but full and forcible description of their righteousness, purity, and their happiness for being in the Church!
2. You know, in the face of all the problems in the church, we can become part of the solution.
 - a. We need to follow the model of the New Testament church, cultivating the lifestyle of peace, spiritual growth and vitality, numerical growth, and godliness.
 - b. We need to be the church that:
 - i. Has the right sense of her mission by seeing the purpose of the church.
 - (1) We have local as well as world wide responsibilities.
 - ii. We need to be the church that has the right sense of her persistent demand on love, motivating our hearts in the way of righteousness.
 - (1) Since God is love, and it was love that is the motivating force of the church, we need to realize that love is the driving power of every task we undertake.

- (2) Our discipleship, our worship, our work for the Lord should be covered in love.
 - iii. We need to be the church that has the right sense of her idea of greatness in being more dedicated disciples.
 - (1) We can never measure the church's greatness by the standards of the world.
 - (2) What I mean by this is that we cannot measure things by the greatness of our numbers.
 - (a) This was the problem that the Jews constantly had in the old testament.
 - (b) If you have a church that has 40 members and all of them are devoted and dedicated, committed by their love and have faith and belief in the greatness of the Lord, you would really be surprised at what she could do.
 - iv. We need to be the church that has the right sense of her desire to help others.
 - (1) The people around us are frustrated, disappointed and beaten.
 - (2) They are desperately in need of aid if they are going to face life triumphantly.
 - (a) And, that is where we come in, bringing the "Good News" about faith, forgiveness, freedom and the future.
 - (b) It is the only message that can help man to resolve his difficulties and to find a deep, personal and satisfying reconciliation with God.
3. But, will you commit yourself to help build that type of church here?
- a. You know, it has been said there are three kinds of people:
 - i. Those who make it happen.
 - ii. Those who watch it happen
 - iii. And, those who wonder what happened.
 - b. Let's not focus on the negative.
4. And, let's look at what's right with the church.
- a. Let's remember that, "the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."
 - b. Will you commit to be a part of that group who will make it happen?
 - i. Rest in the promises of God, be Christlike in spirit, reveal your faith to yourself and to others.
 - ii. Because, we have a great Gospel for a great age!