**Renewed Vision for 2020 Series**

**“Renewed Vision for Gathering for Worship”**

**Introduction**

Last week I began a new preaching series for the New Year focusing on a renewed vision for the elements of worship and ministry the Lord has ordained for His Church. These elements of worship and ministry aren’t flashy or trendy but they are the things the Lord has appointed for His church to walk in. Last Sunday I challenged you to have a renewed vision for devotion to Christ as we considered the overarching characteristic of the first Christians recorded in the book of Acts was that they “*continually devoting themselves*” to Christ. (Acts 2.42)

**Renewed Vision for Gathering for Worship**

This morning I want to return to the early Church to see their vision for gathered worship. As I mentioned a few weeks ago what my grandparents called the Sabbath, my parents called Sunday, we now call the weekend. We’ve lost the importance of the Lord’s Day. And in South Florida with such nice weather and countless things to do we find ourselves neglecting worship altogether. I used to tell people that on any given Sunday 25% of the congregation will not be in attendance but today I tell people that on any given Sunday 35-50% of the congregation will not be in worship.

The writer of Hebrews admonishes us to *not forsake our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.* (Heb.10.25) And this word “forsake” doesn’t mean, “being absent.” Everyone occasionally misses a worship service. I’m not going to be legalistic. The word “forsake” means “to desert or to abandon.” Its when one Sunday becomes two and two become a month and a month becomes three months. “Houston, I think we have a problem.” I’ve always admired the Apostle John who was exiled on the island of Patmos and he wrote, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.” He was alone – isolated from humanity but he still worshipped on the Lord’s Day.

I started to wonder why so many people who claim to be Christians don’t regularly participate in public worship. There is ample scriptural proof pointing to the fact that God has called us to gather together on the Lord’s Day. The book of Acts records the church gathering together on the first day of the week. (Acts 20.7) In the book of First Corinthians the Apostle Paul mentions that the church assembled together, came together, and gave offerings on the first day of the week. (ICor.14.23; 11.18; 16.2) The idea is that the church coming together not coming to church. But all of this didn’t give me an answer to why so many people who claim to be Christians don’t regularly participate public worship. And I am going to suggest that the reason why so many people who claim to be Christians don’t regularly participate in public worship is because they lack a sense of expectation.

Just follow me here. You go to football game because you expect to enjoy yourself tailgating and watching your football team win. You anticipate the traffic, the crowd, and even having to put up with ignoring people but none of those things block you from going because you have a high expectation. But what is your expectation for gathering for worship? Do you expect God is going to show up and perform wonders? Do you expect God is going to call your name? Or have you settled into the norm, the common, and the every Sunday routine.

I’ve always enjoyed the TV game show “The Price is Right.” During the holidays I was able to watch an episode of this great show. As I watched it came to me that what makes this show so great was the expectation of the audience. Every person who gets a seat in the audience expects to get their name called to “Come on Down!” That’s why everyone is so excited. You never see someone in the audience of the “Price is Right” dozing off or inattentive. Everyone is crazy with excitement about what is about to happen. But that’s not the way it is with many people who are in the audience at church. What I’m suggesting is that we as believers lack a sense of expectation of what God is going to do at a worship service. We settle for the regular. We settle for the ordinary. We settle for the normal. We lack a sense of expectation that God is going to work wonders in our lives and in our church. We lack the sense of expectation that God is going to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we may ask or think! (Eph.3.20)

So this morning I want to revisit the early church to capture a renewed vision for gathering for worship. We are going to take a journey through the first four chapters of the book of Acts and consider five episodes to discover what the early church expected to happen when they gathered for worship and I’m asking God to give us those same expectations for our church. This morning I want you to see that the early church expected to be empowered by the Holy Spirit when they gathered for worship. They expected their hearts to be pierced by the Word of God when the gathered for worship. They expected souls to be saved when they gathered for worship. They expected to be healed when they gathered for worship. And they expected God to intervene in their lives when they gathered for worship. O’ Lord give us a sense of expectation!

**Expected to be Empowered by the Holy Spirit**

First the early church expected to be empowered by the Holy Spirit when they gathered for worship. After Jesus’ resurrection and before His ascension back to the Father Jesus told His faithful followers, *“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised. For you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.* (Acts 1.4-8) So these faithful followers gathered together in aN upper room for ten days. *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.**And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.* (Acts 2.1-4)

Now, we know that this outpouring of the Spirit in the upper room in Acts chapter two was a special occurrence but that fact should not stop us from expecting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our lives today as we gather in this room. In Acts thirteen we are told that the disciples were continually filled with the Holy Spirit and the Apostle Paul tells us in the book of Ephesians to *be filled with the Spirit.* (Eph.5.18)

Listen, the Father gave us the gift of His Son our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. Jesus gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit for THIS life. *For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.* (Rom.8.14) Brothers and Sisters, *the Spirit of God dwells in you.* (Rom.8.9) And what I am suggesting is that when we gather for worship we should expect a renewing of the Holy Spirit to be poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 3.6)

**Expected their Hearts to be Pierced by the Word of God**

The early church not only expected to be empowered by the Holy Spirit when they gathered for worship but they also expected their hearts to be pierced by the Word of God. I’m not talking about just listening to a sermon. I’m talking about your heart being pierced as you hear the Word of God. The Bible tells us that those who listened to Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost where pierced to the heart and they continually devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching. (Acts 2.37; 42) When we gather for worship we should have an expectation that the Word of God is going to pierce our hearts as far as the soul and the spirit, cutting through our thoughts and intentions. (Heb.4.12) We should have a high expectation that the Word of God will not return void but will accomplish all that the Lord pleases. (Is.55.11)

**Expected Souls to be Saved**

As we gather for worship we should expect souls to be saved. As the crowd heard Peter preach on the Day of Pentecost *they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”**Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”* (Acts 2.37-39) *That day there were added about three thousand souls.*(Acts 2.41) And as the early church continually gathered for worship *the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.* (Acts 2.47)

Brothers and sisters, *I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.* (Rom.1.16) But I fear that we have lost the expectation that God will use *the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.* (ICor.1.21) I fear that we have resorted to clever presentations and the use of props instead of believing that the preaching of the Gospel of the cross has the power to save lives. I believe we should follow the example of the early church and expect souls to be saved as we gather for worship.

**Expected to be Healed**

One day after the birth of church *Peter and John were going up to the temple where**a man who had been lame from his mother’s womb was at the called Beautiful begging alms from those who were entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, “Look at us!” And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!” And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.*(Acts 3.1-8)

Notice this lame man gave Peter and John his attention *expecting to receive something from them.* But what was he really expecting? I suggest that he was expecting to receive the same thing he had received every other time – a few coins in his basket. But what the Lord had for him was much more than he was expecting. Maybe we, like the lame man, have lowered our expectation where we are content with just the same old thing when we gather for worship instead of expecting something great from God. As Peter explained to the crowd that it wasn’t by their power or their piety that they man was healed but faith in the name of Jesus that gave this man perfect health. (Acts 3.12, 16)

Brothers and sisters, every Lord’s Day after the service the elders are down front to pray for anyone who has a need. We do this because God’s Word tells us that if there are any suffering, any cheerful, and any sick among you that the elders of the church are to pray over them in faith and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (Js.5.13-16) But do we really believe that? Jesus said, *All things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”* (Mt.21.22) No one knows the providence of God but we should have faith that believes that God is both able and willing to answer prayer.

**Expected God to Intervene**

Well the healing of the lame man got Peter and John thrown in prison. After they were released the church gathered together with an expectation that God was going to intervene against the threats that the authorities had been making against the church. Listen to the last part of their prayer. *And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”* (Acts 4.29-30) These believers expected God to show up!

Listen to their prayer. *Lord, take note of their threats.* They believed that the Lord was intimately aware of their circumstances. *Grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence.* They knew their need for the Lord to give them holy boldness. *While You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.* They believed that the Lord was going to extend His hand into their world and perform signs and wonders through the name of Jesus. These believers expected God to show up! And guess what? He did! *And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.* (Acts 4.31) Brother and sisters, when we gather together for worship we should expect God to show up and intervene in our world. We should expect God to shake things up.

**Closing Thoughts**

I might be getting a little too excited for some here today. Someone told me on Christmas Eve, “You’re the most Baptist PCA preacher I have ever heard.” And you might be saying, “You’re the most Pentecostal PCA preacher I’ve ever heard. Well, I’m first and foremost a Bible preacher and I believe that the Bible tells us that we should have a high expectation that God is going to show up when we gather for worship. Jesus said, “*Where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”* Well, there are more than two or three here today so we should have confidence that the Lord is in our midst.

But I just want to say that I tried of the normal. I’m tried of the regular. I’m tried of the ordinary. I think that God is calling our names saying, “Come on Down.” Come on down and experience what the Lord doing and expect that He will do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we may ask or think! (Eph.3.20)

As we enter this thirtieth year of ministry lets have a renewed vision for gathering for worship. Let’s join the early church and expect to be empowered by the Holy Spirit as we gather for worship. Lets expect our hearts to be pierced by the Word of God as gather for worship. Lets expect souls to be saved when we gather for worship. Lets expected healing as gather for worship. And lets expect God to intervene in their lives as we gather for worship. O’ Lord give us a sense of expectation as we gather for worship!