

Acts 2:42-47 “The New Testament Church” Jerry Arnold May 20, 2006

Do all of you have a sheet of paper or something to write with? You maybe are wondering what that sheet is about? Here is what we are going to do today: we are going to study the Bible, we are going to look at the New Testament Church. We are going to see that the New Testament church had 4 primary aspects to it, and we are going to note what was happening back then. We are going to then try to take that church, and make it our church in 2006.

How in our culture, in our rushed and hectic lives, how can we be a fellowshiping church, how do we do that? Now, some of you are extremely creative, and maybe we need to have a chat room? A community chat room, that helps to create some community. I don't know, but I do know this. God speaks through his church body, He speaks through his members, and the staff is intently interested in hearing what you have to say. So we are going to have 2 step approach here: We are going to study from the Bible what the New Testament Church was like, and then we are going to give you time to see how we can become that in our day.

We have had a tremendous response from our other two services, in fact, I've been told it is going to take me a long time to read all that has been written, but I am so grateful for that. We, and I am talking about our church staff, we earnestly believe that God is going to talk to us through you today, and that we are going to find direction for our church into the future. Let's begin with prayer!

A number of years ago, the Arnold family had a family reunion. My father and mother have passed away, but my father's sister and brother are still live. I was going to be in Michigan taking some classes, and my brothers and sisters heard about it and they contacted everybody, and quickly a family reunion got together. We met in Big Rapids, Michigan where my father grew up. We had our family reunion at the County jail. A reason for that was, it's not the new county jail, it's the old county jail. It's a historical site in Michigan, it's a building that they have mostly completed in redoing, and the reason we met there is that my grandfather, my father's dad was sheriff of Mecosta County for about 12 years. When my father was about ten years old his family moved into the jail. It was a jail house, and then the back sections of it were the jail cells. And what ever the Arnold family ate, the jail inmates ate, and it was kind of a family joke, my grandmother wasn't a great cook, and so that was kind of a crime prevention of Mecosta County, you don't want to get in there... And it was fascinating to see the kitchen where my father from the age of 10 -12 years old, when ever it was they moved in there, until he graduated from High School, this is where their family prepared their meals, where they ate, and where his bedroom was, and things like that. Well, what really fascinated me was in conversing with my aunt, my father's oldest and only sister; she talked about the Methodist church that the family attended when they lived there. The property of the jail joined with the property of the church, just one corner, and she still attends there. I am very curious of churches and curious about my family and I asked if I could go over there? She was more than happy to take me over there and take me on a tour of the

church that my Dad attended when he was a young boy. She told me where the family sat in the sanctuary, so I could just picture it. Grandpa and Grandma, the five boys, and one girl, all squirming, are doing what kids do. I see it every week; I could picture my Grandpa and Grandma being there. It was very touching to me to be able to think in terms of my father being in church, and hearing messages about God. Messages that would help form his character, his personality, and make him who he was. My father unfortunately turned away from some of those teachings, although he was always a man of good character. He did not serve God all his life, up until, we figured, the last seven years of his life. He came back to the God of his youth, and he died a Christian. And some day, my father and I will worship together, and we will worship our Father, and we will worship throughout eternity. I am looking forward to that.

It was exciting to go back to my father's church. Today, I want to take you back, to your father's church. Not the one that your biological father worshiped in, but the one that our Heavenly Father started. It's called the New Testament church. We are going to begin our study in Acts, chapter 2. We are going to look at verses 42 – 47. "Regarding the believers," it says, "and they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of bread and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many signs and wonders were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all as anyone had need. So continuing daily, with one accord in a Temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of their heart; praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who are being saved."

This is a description of our Father's New Testament Church. It was a learning church. They sat at the apostle's feet as you were, and they listened to their teaching. In verse 42 it says, "... they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine." The word "doctrine" is used in the King James Version and in the New King James version, but in the New American Standard Bible and in the New International Bible the word "teaching" is used. The Amplified version uses the word "instruction." They listened to the instruction of the apostles. Now who were the apostles? The apostles were men who had to have had walk with Jesus that was a qualification. They had to have walked with Jesus. But you maybe thinking, "now wait the minute, but Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles." That's right! Did Paul ever walk with Jesus? We'll study about it when we come to the book of Acts. Jesus met him on the road to Emmaus; Paul became personally acquainted with Christ. In fact, Paul will later write in his Epistles that he did not learn the Gospel from other men, but from Jesus Himself. So Paul does qualify as an apostle.

Now these apostles were teachers. And they were teaching what they have been thought. Who thought them? Jesus thought them. Well, what did Jesus teach them? And if we can help find that out, then we have a picture of the type of teaching going on in our Father's New Testament Church. And I want to challenge you this week. I'd like you to take the Gospels, Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John, and I'd like you to read them this week. Read them quickly. Don't get bogged down with anything, just read them with this simple assignment. Look for the major brush strokes of Jesus' teachings. What did He teach,

what did He emphasize, and that will give us an idea of what type of teaching was going on back than in our Father's New Testament church. I will tell you I did this, and I found it rather fascinating. I discovered that the wide brush strokes of Jesus' teaching pretty much come down to the character of people and the relationships we have with other people and with God. How we treat other people and our character of the things emphasized in the teachings of Jesus Christ. When I think about the church today, I wonder do we really emphasize the character. Do we really emphasize relationships with each other, and relationships with God? Or are we all about preservation of what we were thought by the generations that went before us? And so we get hung up on things that maybe important, but brothers and sisters, eating and dress, and activities, and all that stuff, do not compose the major teaching of Jesus. A relationship with God and a life that demonstrates character that is connected with God, and a life that treats other people the way God wants people treated, that's what Jesus talked about. I believe the New Testament Church was founded on some pretty powerful teaching, how about you?

Well let's look on some of the things they thought, because they are listed here in the scriptures. If you turn to Acts 4, verses 1 and 2 it says: "Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they thought the people, and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." So one of the things they thought was that Jesus was resurrected from dead and his followers will be resurrected from the dead. Powerful, powerful message; without the resurrection of Jesus, we do not have Christianity as we have stated on a number of occasions from this pulpit. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the evidence that God accepted His sacrifice on our behalf. We are saved because of Jesus being resurrected, or our salvation is demonstrated as a result of Jesus being resurrected. An of course, we live in a hope of a resurrection.

Acts 5, verse 40 it says: "then they agreed with him and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commended that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presents of the counsel, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." Not preaching Jesus Christ, but Jesus as the Christ, Jesus the anointed One of God, Jesus as the Savior of men kind, Jesus as the Messiah. They were preaching about the resurrection, and they were preaching about the Savior named, Jesus. This is powerful teaching.

In Acts chapter 15 you can read from verses 30 – 35 how when they came to a decision about the Gentiles, of what they should know, and what they should practice. They sent it by letter, and then they thought them and there was great rejoicing. We will not spend time on that story today because we will get to it in our series on Acts, and we will spend time on it at that point. So we learned that the Father's New Testament Church was a learning church. Let's go back to Acts 2, verse 42, we read this: "and they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers." The New Testament Church was a fellowshiping church, they fellowshiped with one another. Acts 2, verse 44 it says: "now all who believed were together, and had

all things in common.” They had all things in common, common in unity, the combined words make community. That’s what they had. They had a community, they had a common belief in Christ, but they went beyond that, they had a common interest in one another because of their love for God. And they took care of each other, back in the New Testament church. Look at Acts 4, verse 32 it says: “now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul, neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power, the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. No was there any one among them who lacked. For all who were possessors of land and houses, sold them, and brought the proceeds, and things that were sold, and laid them at the apostle’s feet, and they distributed to each, as anyone had need.”

How do you like that? Does that sit well with you? How many of you worked hard for what you have? How would you like to give it to the church, and let them give it to the slackers who haven’t worked hard? That’s the first thing that comes to my mind. You know if we had some very, very wealthy people and we have some of us commoners, we could say, hey yeah, this would average out, if it just averaged out, it would come out better. It’s a troubling thing to think in terms of selling everything you have and giving it to the church, in fact, some people have thought that’s what is required here. And unfortunately, in some circumstance, they virtually in slave them selves to an organization. So what is happening here? Was the New Testament church a commune? Was it the bastion of communism? What was going on? Well I am going to show you in the scriptures that not everybody was doing that. Those who were able did it, as God called upon them. We’ll read in Acts chapter 5 when we get there, the story of Ananias and Sapphira, his wife; and how they were killed regarding the sale of their land, and many people have thought it’s because they didn’t give all that they had sold it for. It says in verse 4 that the problem was - they lied to God. That’s the issue, but we’ll see that when we study it.

What we have here is a principle that they made sure that the people in church were taken care of. That’s a good principle. That’s what we try to do. Last year, \$67,000 that you contributed went to help families educate their children. You know, I think that’s fantastic. I hope some day I could stand here and say \$300, 000 went to help families educate their children. Let me share with you just how it’s supposed to work. Now in our denomination, we are told statistically that half of us are in attendance at church on a weekend. Half of us attend. Of the half of us that attend, this is nationwide, of the half that attend, half return tithes. So you are about ¼ of us return tithes. So they’ve taken the amount of tithes that’s come in, and figured it with the ages, and all that kind of stuff, and projected it out, and you realize that if all of us returned tithes there would be enough money that Christian education would be free, from K, all the way to college. And if you’ve been forking out the bucks to educate your children, you will say, “Man, come on, we’ve got ¾ of this church that’s slacking off.” But that’s the principle. The New Testament church took care of each other, they helped each other.

Now let me show you that not everybody was selling everything they had and giving it to the church. Look at Acts 2, verse 46, it says: “so continuing daily with one accord in the

temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.” Somebody had a house, they had houses to go to, and that’s what they were doing. Not everybody was giving their land and their houses to the cause. But I’ll tell you brothers and sisters, if God calls upon you to make a sacrifice, you will be the one who is blessed. You will be one who is blessed!

Let’s go to Acts 2, verse 42 it says: “and they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread and in prayers.” The New Testament church was a worshipping church. There is something about a corporate worship. We encourage all of you to read the Bible by yourself; we encourage all of you to pray by yourself, and we encourage all of you to get involved in a Bible study. Be involved in a class, come to worship, come to corporate worship, something happens in the Body of Christ when they meet together. Something more powerful even, than being alone with God. But it’s not to take the place of being alone with God, but God acts when we are together corporately.

It says that they were breaking bread. The breaking of bread has two meanings in the Bible. Back in those days, the Jewish people had a saying. I can’t say it in Hebrew, don’t even want to pretend to be able to say it in Hebrew, but it basically would be this. If I invited Bryan over to my house for a meal, I could say, would you come to my home and break bread with me? Simply what it meant - it was a meal. It was fellowship, it was a meal. But, they also being New Testament believers knew about the communion service and how Jesus had established that, and the breaking of bread took on a connotation along with the communion service. So here is what the scholars say was happening back then. I will invite Bryan, my fellow believer to come to my house, Heidi you can come to, I would invite them to come and at the beginning of the meal, we will have some bread in memorial to the broken body of Christ. We would have some wine in memorial to the shed blood of Christ, and then, we would have a meal. So the meals, and the fellowship and the praying were done at homes, many times around the table, and it was worship that took place around the table. So the breaking of bread was not only a regular meal, but it was also associated with communion and worship. It says in verse 46 that they continued daily in one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of the heart. They still attended the temple. Not because they believed in sacrifices, but because they went there to pray and also to share Jesus Christ to anyone who would listen. They broke bread from house to house, and they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart. Their food and that whole thing was part of the worship, it means in exaltation and sincerity of heart, they were joyful in worship.

Now brothers and sisters we all know that this time period we are living in, will go down in history as the Christian time period called “the worship wars.” Worship styles, we are in constant war and battling about worship styles. Some want to be more joyful, some say oh no, no, and they want to pull back. And we don’t seem to find any happy medium anywhere. Well I would tell you that in the days when these folks worshiped, they worshiped with a joyful, exalted and sincere heart. There must be joy in worship. There must be joy in worship or we do not know God. It’s that simple.

I have a sentence here from John Stott, one of my favorite authors, he is a tremendous scholar from England, and if you come across any of his books, you will be blessed to read them. And I quote this: "It is right in public worship to be dignified; it is unforgivable to be dull." So we need to be dignified, we are in the presence of God, but to be dull? No! We need to be joyful. If we are not joyful, we don't know the Lord. One of the fruits of the Spirit is joy. David said, "I was glad when they said to me; let us go unto the house of the Lord."

When I was a kid, I came to church kicking and screaming, and I acted that way through the worship service. If you travel, and I will be traveling some here, the last time I traveled, I long to come back to this church because this is one of few churches I've been in where I get a sense of what worship might be like. There is a joy in singing, there is a hope in the heart, there is an expectation in the pulpit. There is a word of God that is shared. I think this church might be starting to experience something about worship. I go to so many places, and I see that the adults are there, just like I was as a child, they are kicking and screaming, and there is no joy at all. The New Testament church was a worshiping church. In Acts 2 verse 43 it says: "Then fear came upon every soul, many signs and wonders were done", the New Testament church was so filled with the manifestations of God, that a sense of awe in reverence came upon them. In a presence of God, there was a fear of God, a holy sense of God's presence in their lives. There is prayer that was offered, and we are going to get to the prayer experiences in the book of Acts, as we go through the book of Acts, so I will not turn with you to those now. But they met together in corporate worship, part of their meal was that they had a fear in a sense of the presence of the Lord and they had prayer.

The New Testament church was also an evangelistic church and this is where it gets interesting to me. Look at Acts 2 verse 47, it says: "Praising God and having favor with all the people, the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. You know what's amazing to me is that no methodology for evangelism is given in the New Testament. And E. (?) in his book about prayer says that church is forever looking for better methods, and God is forever looking for better man. And what I see is happening, is that in a learning church, in a fellowshiping church, in a worshiping church, something is happening to the people that are there, and God brings the growth. God brings the growth! Now they went, and they shared, but it doesn't tell us how they shared. And so apparently, methodology isn't the most important thing to God, but yet it is to us. You go to any program about church growth, and it's going to be methodology; what to do here, what to do there? It's even the same mostly in raising children. And I'm going to tell you something you parents, you have young children right now, it's not a method that's going to save your children, it's a miracle. And the best miracle that could happen is for you to get on your hands and knees and bow your heads before God and pray that your children don't end up like you. It's a miracle! It's a miracle, that's what we need, a miracle.

Now I know there some methods that are bad, they simply don't work. Last night, we pulled up to the civic auditorium where pastor Finley has the Revelation of Hope crusade going on. There were some guys with big, huge placard that says, Ellen White is a liar,

Seven Day Adventists are a cult. And I couldn't read what else was in there because I was driving. But I saw them, and they were standing there, and I knew immediately they'll have no affect what so ever on the meeting at all. Nobody is going to turn away, do you know why? They looked like they've just spent 40 days in the wilderness. They discredited them selves by appearance, and I thought "that method doesn't work." It's not going to have any affect at all. So I do know that there are methods that don't work. I'll tell you one that doesn't work either. A bumper sticker that says: "Seventh Day is a Sabbath and God never changes." You know how many people are wondering about that? You know how many people sit around at night, they can't sleep saying "what day are we supposed to worship on anyways?" I will tell you what has crushed the human spirit in our day. People are wondering how to survive financially. People are wondering how to keep their family intact and how relationships are supposed to work, and people are concerned about health. Those are the three things people sit at night awake, wondering and pondering. That method, those bumper stickers, and riding around proudly and piously thinking, just read that and I've done my job. That method doesn't work, and I know that.

The New Testament church was an evangelistic church. They were men and women of God, and God added to the church those who were being saved. Do you know how many plans we can make to go out and save people? Do you know how many? We can't make any because you and I can't save a single person. It is a miracle from God. What you and I have to do is place ourselves in relationship with God, so He can place us in relationships with others; so He, by His grace could speak through us to others. But it will be the Spirit of God doing all the work. It will all be to His glory and to His honor.

So we discovered that the New Testament church was a learning church, it was a fellowshiping church, it was a worshiping church, it was an evangelistic church. We believe it was a church filled with people who had been converted by Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. And God spoke to them, He thought them and they had community together. Now the staff here at Collegedale Community believes that God still speaks to the church. We believe that God is speaking to you, and that you are the body, His body on the earth. And you have a message, and that you have a direction from God for us. And here is what we want you to do. We want you to take that sheet of paper that we've given you. We want you to write down the ideas that God has given you. How does a church in a year 2006, how is it a learning church like the New Testament church. How can it be that? How can a church in a very hectic society and culture that we live in, how can it be a fellowshiping church, when we hardly have time to talk to our own families? What is God telling you? What ideas do you have? Please speak to us; we want to hear from God, we know He will talk to us through you. How can we be a worshiping church? How can we really be joyful, dignified, and sense the presence of God and have that fear and awe? How can we be that church? What is God telling you? How can we be an evangelistic church? We believe so seriously in what you have to share, that we are going to give you time to do that right now.

Again, if any of you need a pencil or a pan, or you didn't get a sheet of paper, we want you to have it. At this time, they are going to play music...