

THE NEW COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

Scripture reveals that the salvation on the world is what is on the heart of God. It is for this reason that Jesus died on the cross, but the story doesn't end there. After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus met with His disciples over a period of 40 days before ascending to the Father, revealing to them God's plan for saving the world through them! The church, the new community of people who have come to know Christ as Lord and Savior, is God's vehicle, God's dream, God's plan for accomplishing His mission for the world.

The purpose of this study is to understand the church and look at how we operate as a church at H2O.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

~ Matthew 16:13-18

- *What did Jesus say about the church in this passage?*
- *How does that change your understanding of what the church is?*

The church belongs to Jesus. It is His idea, and HE is the One who will build it, which implies that it is supposed to grow and that it most assuredly WILL grow because the church is led by Jesus. He simply never fails. Where does Jesus lead His church? He leads His church as far as the gates of hell to rescue people from their sin.

The beginning point of understanding the church is seeing clearly God's love for a lost world. What do each of these verses below show us about God's love?

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

~ John 3:16

"I urge that...prayers...be made on behalf of all men...This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"

~ 1 Timothy 2:1-4

"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

~ 2 Peter 3:9

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

~ Matthew 28:19-20

THE 1ST CENTURY CHURCH

The first century church took the truths revealed above and attempted to live them out in how they understood the church.

*"41 Those who believed what Peter said **were baptized** and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all. 42 All the believers **devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals, and to prayer.** 43 A **deep sense of awe came over them all**, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And **all the believers met together in one place** and shared everything they had. 45 They **sold***

*their property and possessions and **shared the money** with those in need. 46 **They worshiped** together at the Temple each day, **met in homes for the Lord's Supper**, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— 47 all the while **praising God** and **enjoying the goodwill of all the people**. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship **those who were being saved.**"*

~ Acts 2:41-47

Looking at the words in bold, what actions do you see the 1st century church doing? (In your own words)

1. They _____ (vs. 41)
2. They _____ (vs. 42)
3. They _____ (vs. 42)
4. They _____ (vs. 42)
5. They _____ (vs. 42)
6. They _____ (vs. 43)
7. They _____ (vs. 44)
8. They _____ (vs. 45)
9. They _____ (vs. 45)
10. They _____ (vs. 46)
11. They _____ (vs. 46)
12. They _____ (vs. 47)
13. They _____ (vs. 47)
14. They _____ (vs. 47)



SO, WHAT DID THE EARLY BELIEVERS DO THAT WE CAN IMITATE?

They made a Break with their Old Lives through Baptism.

The early Christians realized they couldn't go back to their old lives. Jesus had died for them and these first believers took a public stand to unashamedly confess Jesus as their Lord. Porphyry was an enemy of the Christians, a man who was amazed that those who believed and were baptized could so quickly change in their character and morality..." For we are surprised and truly perplexed in mind at such things, if a man, when once he is washed from so many defilements and pollutions, shows himself to be pure; if by wiping off the stains of so much weakness in his life, fornication, adultery, drunkenness, theft, unnatural vice, poisoning, and countless base and disgusting things, and simply by being baptized and calling on the name of Christ, he is quite easily freed from them, and puts off the whole of his guilt just as a snake puts off his old slough." -Porphyry

They had a Deep Love For One Another

Acts records that the early disciples shared their meals together, enjoying genuine relationships with one another, and sharing in communion to remember what Jesus had done to forgive them. They formed a brotherhood of those who believed. In fact, the New Testament reveals that they actually called one another brother and sister as a reminder that they, indeed, were part of a new family. They also gave sacrificially to meet one another's needs. It is important to realize this was not an early form of communism. Instead, since the ONLY church after Jesus rose from the dead was in Jerusalem, many people, after becoming believers, simply didn't return home. They had no church to go to back home. As a result, there were significant financial needs among the early church, and the believers were sacrificial toward one another out of love. History actually records that many Christians sold themselves into slavery for the sake of others. They had a sense of unity based not on denominational affiliation but because of a common calling and mission.

Lucian of Samosata (c. A.D. 115-200) was called "the Voltaire of Grecian literature." He was another opponent of early Christianity. Though he never denied the existence of Jesus, he wrote against Christianity with a patronizing contempt. In his book, *The Passing Peregrinus*, Lucian declared that

Jesus was worshipped by his followers and was "...the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world." Peregrinus, the main character in his book, was a Christian soon to be martyred for his faith, also called Proteus as a nickname. Though he intends to mock the Christians, his description is revealing about the great sacrifice the early believers made for one another.

"Then at length Proteus was apprehended for this. He was thrown into prison...Well, when he had been imprisoned, the Christians, regarding the incident as a calamity, left nothing undone in the effort to rescue him. Then, as this was impossible, every other form of attention was shown. Not in any casual way, but with assiduity (constant or close attention). And from the very break of day, aged widows and orphan children could be seen waiting near the prison while their pastors even slept inside with him after bribing the guards. Then elaborate meals were brought in and sacred books of theirs were read aloud...Indeed, people came even from the cities of Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense to encourage the hero. They show incredible speed whenever any such public action is taken. For in no time, they lavish their all."

~ Lucian of Samosata

They were Accountable to Living a Christian Lifestyle

by being very aware that an unbelieving world did not understand the gospel message AND that they were watching the lives of the Christians to see if they were legit. The early believers were totally committed to living out their faith in every way. The Christians not only called themselves brother and sister to remind themselves that they were now part of God's family; they were also called saints, or holy ones, to remind themselves that because of what Jesus had done, God had now fully accepted them. This acceptance by God did NOT lead them to living like people who didn't know Jesus. Instead, God's unconditional love deeply motivated them to live out their faith in every way.

"It is the Christians, O emperor, who have sought and found the truth... They do not commit adultery. They do not live in fornication. They speak no untruth. They do not keep for themselves the goods entrusted to them. They do not covet what belongs to others. They honor father and mother. They show love to their neighbors...Their women, O emperor, are pure like virgins. Their daughters are chaste, kind and gentle.

Their men refrain from all unlawful intimate relationships. They keep free from all impurity; for they live in the expectation of the recompense to come in the other world...They love one another. They do not neglect widows. Orphans they rescue from those who are cruel to them.

They are ready to give up their lives for Christ, for they observe the words of their Christ with much care.

Their life is one of consecration...This O emperor, is the rule of life of the Christians, and this their manner of life...And see, because of them, good flows on in the world! Truly it is they who have sought and found the truth, and from what we have understood here, we must conclude that they alone are close to the knowledge of truth."

~ Aristides, AD 137

They Received Mentoring and Practical Help in Overcoming their Sin Struggles

Instead of hiding their sins, the early believers were transparent about "their stuff", knowing that if God had given them grace, they were now free to be honest and to get help from others. Origen, an early church leader, explained, "Individuals are taught as hearers, and only when they have given ample proof that they want to lead a good life are they introduced into the community. Some of the Christians are appointed to watch over the lives and appraise the conduct of those who want to join them. They refuse to receive into the community those who have become guilty of evil deeds (without repentance), while they receive the others with great joy, making them better from day to day."

They Celebrated the Resurrection with a Bold, Uncompromising Witness

The center of their faith was the bedrock belief that Jesus had not only died for them, but had risen again, and if Jesus had risen from the dead, the early believers were fearless in sharing their faith with others. They were even being willing to die for their faith, which multitudes did. As Lucian sarcastically noted, "The poor wretches have got it into their heads that they are altogether immortal." This belief in the resurrection enabled these young believers to face the ultimate test, being put to death in the Roman coliseum to provide entertainment to those who didn't understand or believe the gospel. Historian Will Durant concludes..."There is no greater drama in human record than the sight of a few Christians, scorned or oppressed by a succession of Emperors, bearing all trials with fiery tenacity, multiplying quietly, building order while their enemies generated chaos, fighting the sword with the word, brutality with hope, and at last defeating the strongest state that history has ever known. Caesar and Christ had met in the arena, and Christ had won."

- *How does this description of the early believers affect you?*
- *Does this study help you see a next step for you in your faith? If so, what is that step?*



SUMMARY: HOW WE OPERATE AS A CHURCH AT H2O

Pathfinders & New Members Class

We want everyone involved with H2O to have a good understanding of all that we do and to understand what we expect of our members. The first step in this process is our Pathfinders class, which is a general orientation consisting of who we are and where we've come from. The New Members class is the second step in our connection process, explaining in more detail what Jesus' dream for the church is and how to be an active member in H2O.

Baptism

We encourage each believer to be baptized in obedience to Christ's command (Matthew 28:19-20), just as the 1st century believers did. If you've not been baptized yet, talk with your Life Group leader about this.

Life Groups

H2O is comprised of communities on mission for Jesus. We gather in homes, eat meals together, learn more about Jesus and then seek to make Him known to the world through our deeds and our words, all in the context of genuine relationships. Therefore, we encourage everyone to find a smaller community within H2O to do life with!