

The Difference **Acts 4:31**

In the June 2003 issue of *Facts and Trends* the numbers for 2000-2001 church year for the Southern Baptist Convention were reported. We claim to have **16,052,920** Southern Baptist members. In that church year we baptized **395,930** people. That is a ratio of baptisms to members of **1:41**.¹

In other words it took 41 Baptists to win one person to Christ.

Would you like to know how your church compares to this? Let me challenge you to take your total membership and divide it by the number of baptisms. That is the ratio of baptisms to membership.

Now compare this to how the early church did.

We know from the book of Acts that the church multiplied greatly in the early years. They were a growing church.

We learn in Luke's account of the early church that leading up to the Day of Pentecost there were 120 believers gathered in the upper room. There they prayed and the Holy Spirit came upon them. They then went out and preached. Do you remember how many we led to Christ on that day? 3000 were saved in one day.

That is not a ratio of **1:41** but of **25:1**. There were 25 baptisms for each person in the upper room. Today's ratio is one convert for every 41 believers, their ratio was 25 converts for every one believer. On average each one in the upper room went out that one day and led 25 people to Christ.

Can you imagine what it would be like if everyone here came back tonight with 25 more people each? That is what happened in Jerusalem that one day.

And that was just for one day. That was not 25:1 for the year, but for the day. The people were continually adding believers to their numbers. They did not even wait till Sunday to join.

Acts 2:47b (KJV)

And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Today I want us to ask ourselves, "**Why is there such a change in the ratio?**"

What is the difference?

Do we not have the same Savior as the early church? Is not the same Holy Spirit ours to guide and to empower? Don't men and women have the same need for salvation now as then. What is the difference?

We must not be doing something that the early church did. I think we can find our answer in the book of Acts. And it is this:

The people in the early church were telling others about Jesus. It is that simple.

It was not magic that brought the people in, it was witnessing. It was not great displays of miracles, but the word of mouth that brought people to Christ. It was not great preaching — have someone stand in the pulpit and read one. It was not the preaching, but the willingness of the people to witness.

The message has not changed, but some things have. In our text I believe that we can see some things that I believe we (you and me) need to be doing differently today, if we are to be the soul winners we ought to be. These are some differences between the majority of believers today as opposed to the early church.

Acts 4:31 (KJV)

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

The first thing we notice about these people is that . . .

They were Seekers.

Our text for today is clear. These people were the kind of people who spent time seeking the Lord and His will. They were willing to take the time to pray.

Have you ever really considered our times of prayer. I do not know how your prayer meeting goes, but in most churches it is like this:

There is a long list of people with physical needs. There are the bereaved, the sick, those with earthly needs. These we need to pray about. The Bible is clear that we are to pray for one another. It is our Christian duty and joy to do so. I am not denouncing praying for physical needs.

But how much time do we spend on physical needs compared to the spiritual needs. We have many reports about the sick,. How many do we have about the lost?

How often do we mention prayer requests concerning someone to whom we have been witnessing? How often do we have a report on an on-going witnessing effort?

What do we add to our list about missionaries and sister churches? Do they even get named at prayer meeting.

At Brunswick Baptist we read the names of the missionaries from the birthday calendar and prayed for two of the sister churches in our association. We go through the list

alphabetically. But if I did not mention these, they would not be mentioned.

How is it at your church?

Someone has said that the modern church spends more time praying to keep the saints out of heaven than it does to keep the sinners out of hell.

Is this an accurate statement?

What about your private prayer lists? Are they filled with names of the sick or the lost?

The early church was a growing church and I believe that a part of this is that they were busy praying for the lost about them.

They were not praying for things of this world. They were praying for the kingdom of heaven to be realized on earth. They were calling on the Lord to make His will known on earth.

They were seekers of the Lord's will. They spent time on their knees seeking the Lord and His will, not just in their lives but in the lives of those in their world. They wanted the Holy Spirit to convict the lost. They wanted to be able to witness to them effectively in order to bring them into the church.

And they were not seeking the Lord's will as an intellectual exercise, they were doing it so that they could be a part of it. They did not just want to know what He was doing, they wanted to get in on it. They wanted to know what He was doing so they could be a part of it.

Henry Blackaby says in his study Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God, that God is always at work in the world. It is our job to find out what He is doing and join in with Him.²

That is what the early church was doing. And until we are willing to spend that kind of time on our knees, with that kind of motivation in our prayer life, we will not know the difference today that the early church made in their world.

They were seekers of the Lord. As a part of this we can see that . . .

They were Shaken.

The Holy Spirit descended in a mighty way and shook them.

One day I asked the workers at the Dollar General Store in Brunswick, if they could tell it when a train came by. The store is right beside the railroad tracks. They laughed and said that they never had to dust the wall by the tracks because each time a train came by, it dusted itself.

Since that time I have been in the store when a train came by and I can testify to the truthfulness of that statement. The whole wall shook. Each shelf shook. And each item on the shelves shook.

If a train can shake a wall like that, it is not hard to imagine the Holy Spirit shaking the place where they were gathered together.

We can faithfully assume that as a result of that shaking two things happened.

1. The first way was that the people's lives were shaken so that only that which was solid remained.

Jesus in one of His parables compared two buildings. One was built on sand, one on solid rock. When the winds blew and the storms came, that which was built on the sand collapsed. But that which was built on the solid rock endured.

The shaking of the Spirit would shake out that which was not of value to the kingdom of God. All the weights that so easily beset us were shaken off.

Have you ever listened to anyone tell of surviving a major disaster? Perhaps you have been their yourself. It may have been an earthquake, a tornado, they may have been at the World Trade Center or the Pentagon. It may have been a personal disaster — a home fire, a car wreck, a major illness.

So often these people come away with a fresh outlook on life and what is truly important. They will remind us that what was lost was just things, they have their lives, their loved ones.

When things shake us, so often we are shaken back to the basics and what really matters.

The members of the early church were shaken by the Holy Spirit. The shaking helped them to understand what was truly important.

2. Secondly in the shaking the believers felt the power of the Holy Spirit.

When something shakes you, then you know it has power. Especially if you weigh as much as some of us do. It takes a lot to shake some of us.

There is a difference between a small firecracker and a stick of dynamite in your hand. There is a difference between the plane that hit the bank building in Tampa and the ones that hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The first did minimal damage, and the latter ones destroyed entire buildings and killed many people.

When we are shaken it is by a great power. The Holy Spirit has the power to shake us to our very being. He has the power to move us. And as we feel this shaking we know that He has all the power we need.

So why isn't He shaking us? It is because God is the perfect gentleman waiting to be asked. He shakes those who have spent the necessary time in prayer with Him.

The early church longed for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Today many people dread it.

Today many people worry that if the Holy Spirit shows up in the worship service that it will run too long and they want be able to leave after only one hour.

It has been said that the preacher only works one day a week. And if he goes past noon then he is working too long. Another has said that if the Lord had wanted the preacher to go past noon, He would not have not invented the National Football League.

The early church spent ten days in prayer and they were shaken by the Holy Spirit. They were not watching the time. They were not concerned in getting home in time for the ball game.

Only when we are willing to pay the price of time in honest seeking prayer will we today know the difference that is made by the shaking of the Holy Spirit.

The early church knew this shaking and because of this . . .

They were Saturated.

One night after church I heard a teenager ask her father if he had a gas can in his car. She was not sure if she had enough gas to get home from church and did not want to be stuck on the side of the road between the church and their house.

The father was a little out done with his daughter. As I listened to them talk, it became clear that this was not the first time this had happened. It seems that the girl was in the habit of not having enough gas to get where she needed to be.

Many believers are like that. They go off on their ministry efforts, but they have not filled up first. They do not have enough energy to see them through the project. They start with a flash of brilliance but soon tire in the work. They give up on their committee duties. They grow tired of teaching their class. They decide they do not have what it takes to do their work.

And they are right, because they are not filled with the Holy Spirit. They have not been saturated through and through with Him. They have just enough to think that they have what they need.

So how do you become saturated with the power of God?

You spend time with God. This is done through prayer, Bible Study and meditation

on Him. All day long your thoughts continue to come back to God and what He is doing and what He wants to do.

Secondly you must be fully yielded to God. You can not be filled with the Holy Spirit, if you only allow Him to have a part of your life. He must have it all, if He is to fill it all.

I spoke to a man recently that I had not seen in some time and asked him about his family. He began to tell me about Christmas at his house. He has a two year old, so I said something about her being at the age where she was beginning to enjoy Christmas. His eyes lit up as he told me about it. Then he said, but what she really liked was Halloween. It only took about three houses for her to get the idea that all you had to do was knock on a door and the people would give you candy.

As I think about kids and Halloween, I am reminded that you can tell who has done this before by the size sack they carry. Some go out with one of this little plastic pumpkins that they sell at the discount stores. But for those who have been before, these do not want one of those puny little plastic pumpkins, they carry grocery sacks. They want all they can get.

The early church wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit. They wanted all that they could get.

Today, some people go to God with just their hand held out. Others come to Him with both hands. Some open their hearts to Him, others their heads. But those who are truly saturated, filled by the Holy Spirit are those who have opened up to Him their all to be filled by Him.

The early church was filled with the Holy Spirit and overflowing. Their cups were full and their saucers were filling up as well.

And because of this they had all they needed to finish the task before them. They were ready to go into the world and witness for Christ.

And because of all this, . . .

They were Speakers.

The early church members were bold witnesses for Christ. Everywhere they went they were speaking about Jesus. They wanted others to know.

We often pray for opportunities to share, they made their opportunities. They did not wait to share, but we pray for a sign from God that we are to witness to someone.

Norman Cates shared the story of a guy who prayed this prayer every morning: "Lord, if you want me to witness to someone today, please give me a sign to show me

who it is."

One day he found himself on a bus when a big, burly man sat next to him. The bus was nearly empty but this guy sat next to our praying friend. The timid Christian anxiously waited for his stop so he could exit the bus.

But before he could get very nervous about the man next to him, the big guy burst into tears and began to weep. He then cried out with a loud voice, "I need to be saved. I'm a lost sinner and I need the Lord. Won't somebody tell me how to be saved?" He turned to the Christian and pleaded, "Can you show me how to be saved?" The believer immediately bowed his head and prayed, "Lord, is this a sign?"

Are you looking for a "sign" to start witnessing? It can be found in Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8. 3

Our sign that we are to be speaking for Christ is found in the command to be witnesses for Christ.

When we learn this truth and we learn to see people as Christ did, as the early church did, then the world will not be able to keep us from speaking.

While speaking in London, evangelist D. L. Moody was approached by a British companion who wanted to know the secret of Moody's success in leading people to Christ. Moody directed the man to his hotel window and asked, "What do you see?"

The man looked down on the square and reported a view of crowded streets. Moody suggested he look again. This time the man mentioned seeing people--men, women, and children. Moody then directed him to look a third time, and the man became frustrated that he was not seeing what Moody wanted him to see.

The great evangelist came to the window with watery eyes and said, "I see people going to hell without Jesus. Until you see people like that, you will not lead them to Christ."

What do you see in five o'clock traffic, a busy restaurant, a crowded waiting room, your neighborhood, or your extended family? 4

The early church was a speaking church because it saw people without Jesus as lost and on their way to hell.

Today, I want to ask you to make a commitment to God to be a witness for Him. This will not be easy.

It will mean that you will have to be a **seeker** of Him and His will. It means you must be willing to be **shaken** by the Holy Spirit and **saturated** by Him.

And it means that you must be a **speaker** for Christ.

Effective witnessing is more than just living a godly life for others to see. It means telling others about Jesus. Even pastors can get into the habit of not being quick to witness.

Are you willing to make that commitment to Christ? Only when you are will you be all that God wants you to be. Only then will we be like the early church.

Or it may be that today you need to come to Christ and make Him Lord of Your life. Will you surrender your all to Him today? He gave His all for you on Calvary's Cross. All He asks is that we believe in Him and give up all to follow Him. Will you lay down your life today and pick up the cross He has for you? There is no more important decision than this.

¹ ***Facts & Trends*, June 2003**

² **Blackaby, Henry, Experiencing God,
Knowing and Doing the Will of God,
Nashville,**

³ ***Deacon Magazine*, Jan.-March 1995, p. 34**

⁴ **Rodney Gage, 1993 SBC Pastor's Conf.**