



November 14, 2010

Great Grace, Acts 4: 32-33

A person's birthday is always a good time to stop and take notice of how their life is going to that point. How has the past year been? Have I reached my goals? Done the things I wanted to this year?

Also there are milestone birthdays that have extra meaning. Such as turning 5 years old and being old enough to start school or more importantly being old enough for T-ball. Turning 10 and finally reaching double digits. Becoming a teenager at 13, getting your learners license at 15 and being able to drive at 16, becoming an "adult" and getting to vote at 18 all of these are important milestones in a person's life.

This morning we are celebrating the 17<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Heritage Baptist church. And even though this is not a milestone year for us it is still important for us to take a look at how we are doing. For every year is important to the life of a church. Reality is that not just every year but every moment is important to the life of a church. It doesn't take but just one decision not based in God's will to turn the life of a church around or end it completely. It doesn't take long for a body of believers to stop relying on God's leadership before the doors are closed. Or sometimes when a church starts becoming more like the world and starts watering down the Gospel, even though the building is full to capacity, the church itself may be spiritually dead along with the masses of people that attend.

So it is important not just on our Birthday but for Heritage Baptist to everyday take a spiritual inventory of where we are. Are we following the models God has given us in His Word?

Obviously a body of believers can't just build a building and open the doors and then say "come on in" and the world comes on in. That doesn't work.

I also realize that numbers don't necessarily reflect a growing church. But I can't help but notice that in the book of Acts that when it talks about the early church that the words "the Lord added to the church daily" "multitudes were added" "many believed" is often used. So I do think that God does bless numerically to a mature spiritually growing church.

Several years ago I had the opportunity to stand in the pulpit of the "Oldest African American Church" in the country. The church was constituted into existence in 1775 235 years ago. I have also had the opportunity to attend and speak at JoAnne's Grandmother's church Ball Camp Baptist in Knoxville, Tn. It is the oldest church in Tennessee it was constituted in 1798. And of course my previous church Central Baptist is 103 years old a baby in comparison. But I have also been on the opposite side of the longevity spectrum. The church I grew up in the church I was ordained as a deacon, ordained into the ministry in is no longer in existence; having closed its doors after 40 years. So as I stand before you this morning I have to ask two questions.

#1 Why would someone want to come to Heritage Baptist?

And #2 How does Heritage Baptist remain relevant for many years to come?

I find the answers to both of these questions in the book of Acts.

Acts 4: 32-33

Last week we talked about the Apostle Paul and his salvation experience and how he was given grace. Today I wanted to look at a church that was full of grace.

In verse 32: You see a spirit filled church

- A people that loved one another and willing to put others first.
- Willing to do anything for the body of Christ
- Who loved God so much that they turned the world upside-down.
- God's plan is always about relationships, our relationship to Him, to His church, and to the lost world around us.

The first thing you notice about this church is that there was unity among the church.

- They were of one heart and one soul
- The greatest Concern of God is that we are walk in a love relationship with Him and with each other
- That we love God so much that this love flows through us to others.
- The Bible tells us that if we love God we must Love our brothers. That if we say we love God and hate our brother then we are a liar.
- Unity is a natural result for the body
- You can still love each other and disagree
- You overlook each other's faults.
- The love of Christ unifies us as we love the church we love Christ
- Unity doesn't mean uniformed (you don't have to all wear sweater vest)
- We/the church needs our different gifts that God has blessed us with. Christ is the head and He has gifted His church to function in love & unity.

1 John 3:14 “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.”

- I heard people say that they love Jesus; they love God but hate the church. I’m going to heaven but I’m not going to church.
- People need to get a hold of this verse. How can you receive the love and salvation of God and not love your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Unity means that we get involved in each other’s lives.

- We sacrifice on each other’s behalf. It might be time or money.
- Sometimes this is messy. People’s lives can be messy at times

The first church saw a need and they met it.

- It does not mean that we should sell everything
- This passage is just telling what they did.
- It’s not a prescription of what to do but just a description of what they did.

Unity is important to us. But it is also good for the world to see this unity. They need to see us loving each other. This community needs to see us loving each other.

Unity is the natural result of loving Christ.

This community needs to see God’s love being lived out among us-unity becomes our witness.

This unity leads to a powerful witness. I believe a person loving each other is one of the most powerful witnessing tools we have. A unified church means that Jesus is alive in our lives. He is making a difference in our life.

Read Verse 33

This power comes from lives changed.

This power does not come from you it comes from the Holy Spirit within you.

We talked last week about Grace being unmerited favor from God. This great power mentioned in this verse is grace in action. It’s power that is beyond us. It’s the power to boldly speak the Word of God. It comes from God Himself.

When the Apostles spoke people witnessed that God had made a difference in their lives. It was this difference that drew people to that first church.

It was confirmed by what people saw. They saw that people in the church were transformed.

If the Lord has made no difference in your life whatsoever why would anybody want what you have? If you are claiming victory in Christ and your life is in shambles what about your testimony would make someone want to have Christ in their life?

It makes sense: we don't go to a:

- Mechanic whose car doesn't run
- A plumber whose pipes leak
- A personal trainer who weighs 500 lbs.

We say I hear what you are saying but it doesn't seem to be working for you. I think I'll go to someone else where it is evident that what they are doing is making a difference.

So looking at this verse it was evident that Christ was real in this church.

So as we stop today and look at our church is there evidence of Christ being real here. For us to remain a growing spiritually mature church for years to come He must remain real.

Why would anyone want to come to Heritage Baptist Church? Because there is a unified body of believers here that loves each other with Christ like love.

And #2: How does Heritage Baptist remain relevant for many years to come? By remaining unified in Christ, loving each other with Christ like love and boldly sharing this love to this community.

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