



MAKING DISCIPLES IN THE TEMPLE AND IN THE HOUSES (Sermon)

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Scripture: Acts 2:46, 47

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Worshippers in Jesus’ time were called “Christians” for the first time in Antioch (Acts 11:26) because they were following the example of Christ, their greatest Leader. The early Christians walked, talked, dressed, smiled, and even played like Christ. This is true Christianity—following the example of Jesus to the point of saying like Paul: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). In this context, it is interesting to note that one of the things Jesus did most when He was on this earth was to meet in houses. This is more than obvious when we read the gospels¹:

1. Jesus in the house of Peter (Matthew 8:14).
2. Jesus in Matthew’s house (Matthew 9:10).
3. Jesus in the house of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10).
4. Jesus in the house of Lazarus and his sisters (Luke 10:38-42).
5. Jesus in the house of Jairus (Mark 5:35-42).
6. Jesus healing two blind men in a house (Matthew 9:28-30).
7. Jesus in the house of Simon the Leper (Matthew 26:6).
8. Jesus and His disciples in a house (Mark 7:17-18; 9:33; 10:10).
9. Jesus forgives and heals a paralyzed person in a house (Luke 5:19).
10. Jesus in the home of a Pharisee (Luke 14:1).
11. Jesus instituting the Lord’s Supper in a house (Matthew 26:18).
12. Jesus sending the disciples house to house to fulfill the mission (Luke 9:1-9; 10:1-11).

If Jesus used the strategy of houses as an effective method of evangelism and transformation of lives, it is important that we follow His example. If Jesus, being the best and greatest leader of evangelism, did it this way, who are we to make it different?

Purpose of the message

It is important to understand that there is much work to be done in our homes, as well as in the homes of our friends, neighbors, and families. Our job is not only to go to the temple.

¹ Joel Comiskey, *2000 Years of Small Groups*, 11.

We have to go to the homes and out into the community in order to faithfully fulfill the mission as mentioned in Acts 2:46, 47.

DISCIPLES IN THE TEMPLE

In the book of Acts 2, Luke says: “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts” (v. 46). Their weekly and punctual attendance in the temple was the first characteristic of the disciples in the early Christian era. The biblical writer uses the phrase “they continued to meet together,” and it is not easy to have a united church. The Greek word for perseverance is *proskarterountes* and it means “to dedicate oneself,” “to go forward with devotion,” or “to remain as one”.

It is not an easy task to have a united group or a united church. It is necessary to pursue this every day. The Greek word for “united” is *homothymadon* which means “in common agreement,” “with the same thought,” “all to one,” and even “with the same mentality.” This is amazing! How is it possible to be united if we are so different? When we are all focused on the same thinking, when we all have our eyes and minds set on the accomplishment of the mission, unity is a natural consequence.

The first disciples lived in the community, but they did not detract from the meetings in the church. Not that anyone said: “It is not necessary to go to the temple if we also have God in our homes.” No. The Bible tells us that David would rather be in the house of God for only one day than spend a thousand days outside of it (Psalm 84:10). And Paul, in this same spirit, would later say: “not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing” (Hebrews 10:25).

There are churches that are not united. Why? Because they are not focused on the same mission. When a church is focused on a common mission, then there is unity. If you want a united church, then stay focused on the mission.

On the other hand, from time to time, some people come to the church who undermine the meetings or worship at the temples. And there are those who even say that there are too many meetings or services in the temple. When you read the Bible, you find that the People of God was like a church that continued in unity every day. Every day, every day. Imagine that. And the results of a church that held meetings or services every day were amazing. The Holy Spirit impacted their lives and filled them because they were fervent, action-oriented disciples!

DISCIPLES IN THE HOUSES

Luke goes on to say, “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people” (Acts 2:46, 47). This text definitely shows us that the disciples of Jesus, the Christians of the first century, did not only commit their time to the life of the church. That is, they were not only in the temple, but also in the houses. This is very important to note. Christian life is not limited to a life locked up in the temple or church, but we are to also go to the homes. This is what I call: FROM THE TEMPLE TO THE HOUSE!

For many years, the Roman Christian church taught that God was only in the temples and that they had a connection only through their priests or the religious leaders. Moreover, it was taught that there was no divine protection if you went too far from the temple, which is why many Christians believed that if they were outside the temple or far from it, they could sin freely or make their lives whatever they wanted. However, when we read the texts, we find that the same disciples who were in the temples together, are those who were also in the houses, and not only in the houses, but also in the community.

In the houses. In the houses they had very interesting opportunities. The Bible says that (1) they broke bread, (2) they ate together with joy and simplicity of heart, and (3) they praised God. These three elements made the houses small churches, community centers, lights of hope in their communities. This is pure relationship. It is not a social gathering, but RELATIONAL. However, it is clear that we are not presenting rules but principles that can be adapted to every place and time. The problem arises when we are inflexible with plans².

In the community. Here lies the importance of meeting in homes. When there are house churches, or church in the houses, the neighbor, the friend, and the family member will easily realize who you are; that you are an Adventist, that you are a Christian, and they will be impacted by your testimony, more than by your words. The Bible says, “And having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). This indicates that the disciples had a good testimony, and this is powerful!

Our Sabbath School groups should not only be limited to temple meetings. You and I must also live the experience of living in the community and growing relationships; that is, hosting small groups in our homes. There is no other way to grow as Christians but to put into practice what we learn in the Bible and in the temple, and to turn it all into a meeting of friendship, fellowship, and mission. This takes place in a small group meeting, a place where we also preach Jesus.

NEW DISCIPLES!

The scripture says: “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (v. 47). These words are profound. The people who were added to the church were not people who were going through a campaign and decided to be baptized. The Scripture makes it clear that these people were being saved, and for this to happen they had to be prepared.

Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, tells us that these people who were added to the church every day would be saved. The biblical writer was able to say that because he knew about the preparation of those being baptized. Another important detail is that these activities did not only take place on the Sabbath. In fact, the most special day is the Sabbath, and surely great baptisms took place, but the Scripture says, “daily”. It means every day. Baptisms were not only on the Sabbath but every day. Amen?

Here you can clearly see the work of the small groups in the community, in the neighborhood, or in the town. This is about small groups during the week and on Sabbath at

² Melchor A. Ferreira Castillo, *I Want to Organize Small Groups, What Do I Do?* (Buenos Aires: ACES, 2003), 16.

the temple. When the small groups also meet in homes to evangelize their friends, neighbors, and family members in their mission field, we will see the birth of new disciples every day. Not unprepared disciples, but prepared ones, who have learned from the Bible and agree to give their lives to Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Baptisms every day! Can you imagine? Were there big public campaigns? There were. However, there were also daily gatherings. And the fact is that evangelism is a daily affair, an everyday issue, because it is a lifestyle. This will only happen when we as Adventists, you and I, leave the comfort of the temple and dare to impact our neighborhoods, buildings, communities, etc., through small groups in homes. Amen? New disciples every single day. This is also how we keep members in the church and reclaim the wandering flock.

The first century Christian church and the disciples of Acts 2 were simply following what their teacher, Jesus, had taught them when He was on this earth: conducting evangelism and intentionally working through small groups in the homes. There is not much difficulty in seeing that this was a very remarkable strategy in the ministry of Christ. In that sense, when we read Acts 2:46-47, we see the dynamics of the work which guaranteed explosive growth, strong daily growth.

Decision:

Small group evangelism is an extension of Sabbath School. The small groups are part of the Sabbath School and not the other way around. For small groups to be successful and grow they must be an extension of the Sabbath School. Otherwise, as a separate or isolated structure, they will have a fake growth that will depend on launches, meetings, parties, and more. But if we rely only on these isolated campaigns our members will disappear without the nurturing that happens with the small groups. These isolated actions can be a contributing factor to attrition in the church. A church in Peru experiences joy with great movements and parades of many small groups at the beginning of the year. But at the end of the year, they may only see small groups and their leaders discouraged and decimated.³

We must organize small groups based on the Sabbath School which is the most solid structure that we have as a church historically. We have done so little for the Sabbath School, and it is still steadfast and “strong” in spite of everything. And we have done so much for the small groups, and yet the small groups have not had the sustained success over the years. It's time to return to our origins. It's time to return to Sabbath School as the ideal platform for experiencing biblical discipleship and maintaining our members and reclaiming those that have been lost.

Remember, A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST:

Celebrates in the temple!
Teaches in the house!
Saves in the community!

³ Isabel y Daniel Rode, *Growth: Keys to Revolutionizing Your Church*, (Buenos Aires: ACES, 2003), 87-93.