

God's Church Continuing the Work of Jesus

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[0 : 00] When you read the book of Acts, in a sense, it's a story both of continuity and change. It's implied from the very first words of the book of Acts, chapter 1, verse 1.

Luke, who wrote the book, says, In my former book, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach. By implication, the book of Acts will be about Jesus continuing to be active, Jesus continuing to teach, only this time it will be as his spirit-filled followers take that message, Jesus is Lord, into the world.

And just like Jesus, they're going to do this through their words and through their actions. And that little section that we just read, chapter 9, 32 to 43, is one of the clearest signs, I think, that we have in the book that we're to read the story of God's church as continuing the work of Jesus.

And I hope that we'll see that as we work our way through the passage. I don't know how many of you have visited the Sagrada Familia Cathedral or Gaudi's Cathedral in Barcelona.

If not, you probably are aware of it. It's one of those buildings. The Great Unfinished Cathedral, which I think is due to be finished in 2026.

[1 : 24] But Gaudi began that work way back in 1883. And he continued it until he died in 1926, obviously leaving it unfinished.

But since then, the work has continued under five different sets of architects, but each one always following very closely Gaudi's original design and Gaudi's original concept.

And that's what I want us to think about when we read the book of Acts, when we think about the church today. The church of Jesus is considerably more bigger, considerably more beautiful than Gaudi's Cathedral.

But we have that image in the Bible that Jesus is building the church. The church is pictured as a temple. And he continues to build it down through the centuries across every continent and every culture.

Even just think about what we've been praying about this evening. But it's really important for us to remember, and we see it so clearly in Acts, Jesus remains the architect. He is the one who's building his church.

[2 : 25] It's his plan that comes to pass, and it's for his glory. And we, as the church, we have the privilege of being part of this great building project.

So let's think about that. Jesus continues to build his church for his glory. The evidence of continuity in this section is striking.

It's why we read from Mark 2 and Mark 5, because there's clear parallels. And as we read here, we can say two things. First of all, Luke wants us to be in absolutely no doubt that Jesus is still building his church.

And the second thing that becomes apparent is that Peter, as disciple, as apostle of Jesus, is utterly committed to continuing the mission of Jesus in the ways of Jesus and for the glory of Jesus.

So that's what we're going to see. But before we get there, just for a couple of minutes, it's interesting to see, I think, how the followers of Jesus are described in this section. Did you notice there's a couple of different ways that the church is talked about?

[3 : 29] In verse 32, it says, As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. Now, we hear the word saint and maybe all kinds of things come to our mind.

But here, when Luke uses it, he's not describing super Christians. This isn't Peter heading off to visit the other disciples, this elite group who are saints.

And so it's clearly also not describing what happens to Christians in the future, that we're on this progression and sometime we'll make it to be saints. This is a description of God's church now.

So the word saint, what does it mean? It means someone who is holy, someone who is set apart for God. And so we've got this lovely picture of the church that's been set apart for God, for God's purpose.

And Peter has got this role and responsibility, this pastoral responsibility, to travel from place to place seeking to encourage and build up those that God has chosen, those whom God has saved, those who are set apart to live for him.

[4 : 44] And then in verse 36, there's another word used to talk about the church. In verse 36, it says, In Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabitha.

Tabitha is not one of the original 12. She is, you could say, a normal member of a normal church. But the word disciple, in this usage, describes someone who is learning Jesus.

Someone who is learning his life, his words, his actions, and seeking to follow in his footsteps. That was the pattern of student teacher that there was in Jesus' day.

And so those who are Christians are called to be those who follow after Jesus, who pattern our lives on him. And so it's just to remind us that if we are Christians here today, if we are part of God's church, we are saints and we are disciples.

Now that's almost a by the by. We've got this section here where we have two, we could call them confrontation stories, where we see very much the power of Jesus versus the powers of sickness and death.

[6 : 02] It reads, in a sense, very much like what we'd have in the Gospels. Very much like what we had in the Gospel of Mark. Only this time, it's Peter, by the Spirit, functioning as Jesus' agent, bringing victory against these hostile forces.

And in both these scenarios, these victories of good over evil stand as a signpost of the salvation that Jesus brings. That Jesus comes to bring new life through faith in him.

And that the people in Peter's day understand that what he's doing points ultimately to the glory of Jesus. So their response, the response of many, is to believe.

So in verse 35, when they see the miracle performed on Anais, it says, all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. And then in verse 42, the miracle with Tabitha.

This became known all over Joppa and many people believed in the Lord. So let's very quickly, we're just going to do this for a few minutes.

[7 : 14] We're going to look at each miracle and see how it very deliberately follows the pattern that we find in the Gospels. First of all, that healing of paralyzed Anais.

And I hope even as we're thinking about Mark chapter 2, those first 11 verses where Jesus heals the paralyzed man, we can see some parallels. So Jesus, after healing the man, says, pick up your mat.

Peter says to him, get up and tidy your mat. On both occasions, the purpose is to show the authority of Jesus. So in Mark 2, Jesus heals the man to show that he had the authority on earth to forgive sins.

And here, Peter is very deliberately saying to Anais in verse 34, Jesus Christ heals you. It's by the authority of Jesus, by the power of Jesus, that you will be healed.

And as we've already seen, just as it was in Mark chapter 2, the response of many in the crowd is to believe in Jesus on the account of the miracle. So Peter seems to be deliberately following the pattern of Jesus in healing this paralyzed man.

[8 : 27] And I think we can see the same when we look at the story of Tabitha or Dorcas, and we compare it to Jairus' daughter in Mark chapter 5.

And remember that Peter was one of the three disciples who was there when Jairus' daughter was raised from the dead. And again, we can see some patterns emerge.

So in verse 38, people hear that Peter and some of the disciples are close by, and so there's that request, same as with Jairus for his daughter, please come at once.

By the time Peter arrives at the house, just as it was when Jesus arrived at the house, he arrives to a house of mourning. There is death in the house, and people have come to mourn with the family. And in verse 40, just as Jesus does, Peter sends the people out. And then there's this really fascinating little wordplay.

[9 : 33] So Jesus in Aramaic, in raising Jairus' daughter, says, Talitha cum, little girl, get up. And here Peter, who was also someone who spoke Aramaic, most likely said, Tabitha cum.

There's one letter of a difference. It's really striking how similar it is. And he too takes her by the hand, and there is rejoicing and believing.

What are we being reminded of by Luke as he very carefully records the miracles of Peter? He's reminding us that the church continues to grow, and it's down to Jesus.

It's down to the power of Jesus. It's not down to Peter. It won't be down to Paul. And it's not down to you or me either. It's down to the work of God through his church.

And Luke is also reminding us that Jesus is glorified. As people recognize that he is God's Savior, that he is the anointed one who has been sent to be the Lord, the King, the Redeemer, which is still as true today as it was then.

[10:50] And so we see the way Jesus is building his church in the lives of different people, Aeneas, Tabitha, others around them, takes different forms, but Jesus is at work.

And it's the same for us today. Whether our story is seemingly routine or very dramatic, whether we read of what's happening in the persecuted church where, you know, despite intense family opposition, people are still choosing to follow Jesus, even if it means they lose everything, or whether it's people brought up in Christian households to become followers of Jesus at a young age, Jesus does and will continue to rescue and gather people in for his own glory.

And so we've got this great encouragement. It's God who's doing the work. It's Jesus who works through his people. And there's a great incentive to us to continue praying for the people that we care about and for the world that God cares about.

So Jesus builds his church for his glory, but it's important for us to recognize the means that he employs here because Jesus uses his people to build his church for his glory.

So we need to be clear on two things. We need to be clear on God's sovereignty and salvation, that he is the one who eternally chooses, that he is the one who eternally loves, he's the one who eternally saves.

[12:28] Revelation reminds us that Jesus is the Lamb of God, slain before the foundation of the world, that we are chosen before the world ever came into existence.

If we are God's people, God is absolutely sovereign in saving people, but we also need to see that God's means of saving people most often involves his people, regular people like you and me, reading the Bible with someone, talking to somebody about Jesus, sharing something of our faith, living consistently as Christians before people to make them ask questions.

So while we are not called to be Peter, you know, Peter is center stage here, absolutely, as the human actor, you know, we're not called to be Peter, we're not called to be apostles, we're not writing bits of the Bible, we're not spearheading mission in the world.

But what about Anais? Verse 33, He found a man named Anais, a paralytic who'd been bedridden for eight years. Anais, Peter said to him, Jesus Christ heals you, get up and tidy up your mat. Immediately Anais got up. All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. So here's the great thing with Anais, his story of God's work in his life draws people to faith.

[13:53] That just by walking around, he has the chance to bring Jesus glory. It's a little reminder that our everyday life before God matters, our everyday life of faith matters.

How we are in our families, how we are as friends, how we handle success and disappointment, how we talk about others, how we seek to live consistently, can make a difference.

We don't know anything about Anais, but his life was something that drew people to Jesus, because they could see the power of God in his life.

And it's important for us to remember that our everyday witness, wanting to be a good neighbor, to live well for the sake of Jesus, that matters to God, and God can use what we think of as small for his glory.

And then we have Tabitha. And Tabitha's story, it seems to be one of a life marked by doing good, extending care, helping the poor.

[15:04] You know, you see the legacy of her life in this pre-funeral gathering of people who have come to mourn in her house and to pay testimony to all that she has done, the clothing, the robes that she had made.

Here is a woman who used her skill and resources to serve others. Here is someone who had received mercy from God and who is passing that mercy on to others in her community.

And so they're different, but they're both testimonies to God's grace and God working through them. For Anais, his story of God's grace transforming his life was powerful and drew people to faith in

Jesus.

And for Tabitha, her story of God's grace transforming the way that she lived, that she set that priority of being for the poor, of extending mercy to the poor, also had a profound impact on many people.

So as we read this section, there is an encouragement to us as regular Christians that we have dignity and purpose, that God can use our lives to extend his kingdom, to bring him glory, to extend his mercy into our world.

[16:34] I remember speaking to somebody who was talking about their grandfather's involvement in a great building project. And there was that sense of family pride still existing because they could look at that great architectural feat and say, my grandfather helped to build that.

And there's this wonderful sense that we can look at the church of God and we can be so encouraged as we see what God's doing in his world and to recognize that we're a part of that. We're not called to be gaudy, we're not called to be the great architects, that's Jesus' job, but all of us with our gifts, with our situations in life, we get to be laborers on the very best building project of all because Jesus continues to build his church so that he will be glorified and he continues to use his people, his church, people like you and me to that end.