

# Consolidation

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[0:00] So, thank you, I'd like to open your Bibles then at this passage, if you've got one in front of you. If you've got one in front of you. Let me remind you, once again, I put it up on the screen there, that agenda that the Lord Jesus Christ set before he left his disciples in the beginning of Acts.

Acts 1 verse 8, he says, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

So, this passage we've got before us now is, as it were, the end of phase 2, the advance to Judea and Samaria.

You notice that he actually says that in verse 31. Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.

It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. In a sense, this is the counterpoint to that passage in Acts 2, in verse 42 and so on, where Peter had preached in Jerusalem.

[1:28] And there was a time of peace and the people met in the temple and had the favour of all the people. How long ago was that?

This passage we've got to now. That event, the coming of the Spirit, is usually dated to AD 30 in our calendar. There's some doubt about the dates of the events in this chapter.

The next possibly datable point, really, is the famine that takes place in Jerusalem in around AD 45 and AD 48, which we read of in a couple of chapters.

So, we can say it's almost certainly between AD 45, but it's not instant. There has to have been some time for these events to have taken place. Some people put the conversion of Saul as early as AD 32, in other words, only two years after the coming of the Holy Spirit.

I have to say, that seems to me to be a rather short time frame. Others would put it around AD 35, 34 or 35. So, perhaps four years after the coming of the Holy Spirit and five years, perhaps, when Paul goes back, Saul goes back to Jerusalem.

[2:51] Better we can't. That's more or less the timeline put forward in Howard Marshall's article in the Lion Handbook. I doubt if you suspect if you looked in other books, you might get slight differences in timing.

But we can say, I think, that it's not next week. It's not something that happened instantly. Certainly, there are several years have passed in which the events of Acts 3 through to Acts 9 have occurred. And yet, it's not a long time either. We're not talking about a generation later or anything like that.

We're talking about a matter of a few years. And yet, in one sense, everything's changed.

Now, there is relative peace, we're told at least after Saul gets out of the way, in Judea, Galilee and Samaria.

Which, of course, is the bounds of the ancient kingdom of David and Solomon, pretty much speaking. In a sense, the gospel had been preached now in the ancient land of the Jews.

[3:55] And there were disciples there. We read about several of them here, don't we? And yet, it has not yet gone out to the Gentiles.

There are those of sure who are Gentiles who may have heard some of this. But there's been no real effort to preach to the Gentiles. And in fact, that starts in Acts chapter 10, the next chapter.

So, this last bit of Acts chapter 9, as it were, a sort of drawing of breath, a consolidation. Almost like the first few months of the Second World War, where nothing really happened.

They called it the phony war, because people were just preparing to get on with it. And I think there's this time of consolidation here. But Paul wants us to know that the church was strengthened

and encouraged by the Holy Spirit.

I don't know why the NIV insisting put a semicolon at the end of strengthened. I mean, there's no punctuation in Greek anyway. It was there as far as I know. Surely, both the strengthening and the encouragement were by the Holy Spirit.

[5:17] And that, therefore, leads you to the question, well, how did he do that then? How did that happen? And I think Luke is trying to tell us how that happens by just looking at what happens to the various characters that he describes.

It's not something independent of the rest of the history that he's talking to. He's saying that these events that I'm telling you about, these are the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and particularly, perhaps, the Holy Spirit at work in various people.

In strength, because we could also equally say it was Paul and Peter who strengthened the church. That would be true also. That's certainly what they thought they were about.

So this is the work of the Holy Spirit. So I thought, rather than go through this in detail, verse by verse, or anything like that, I think I'd just like to lead you in a kind of a meditation in some ways, but based on the scripture, I think, I hope, anyway, about four of these people that we have described to us here.

There are more than four people in the passage, but these seem to me to be the four key people, even though, actually, Barnabas only gets mentioned in one verse. But that's what I'm going to do.

[6:38] Anyway, it's interesting that three of these people needed a change of name. Barnabas is a nickname. It means son of encouragement. He was given that name by the apostles.

Saul, of course, when he took up his role as an apostle, changed his name to Paul for, as far as I know, no very clear reason. But he seemed to think it was a necessary thing to do, perhaps just to signify the change.

Peter, of course, the name Peter is a nickname. It's given to him by Jesus himself. It means the rock. In the case of Tabitha, though, it seems that her parents got it right first time.

She didn't need a change of name. It seemed to be very much the appropriate name for her. So I'm just going to lead you in just looking at these four characters, what they were up to, what they were about, and then we'll just close with drawing those threads together.

So let's look at Barnabas first of all. Actually, in this particular passage, we only meet Barnabas once, and that's in verse 27, where it says, Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and he told them how Saul, on his journey, he had seen the Lord, and that the Lord had spoken to him, and so on.

[8:05] But Barnabas actually is a key player in the book of Acts, and what he's doing here is what he does all the way through. In Acts 11, verse 24, Luke describes Barnabas as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.

A good man. A good man in a crisis, Barnabas was. A good man to keep things going. As I said, his name is actually a nickname, and it means son of encouragement.

Barnabas is a man who believes in the changing power of the gospel. And so we always find Barnabas is about oiling the wheels, as it were, smoothing down people's ruffled feathers, bringing people together.

As far as Barnabas is concerned, the gospel, the Holy Spirit, really can change people, and so they should be given second chances. Remember Jesus said, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

And by that measure, Barnabas is not just a son of encouragement, but a true child of God. And it's worth thinking about this a bit. Those who make peace are often described as compromisers, aren't they?

[9:33] Woolly thinkers who don't understand the issues. But actually Barnabas was not neither of those things. You see in verse 27, he understood the importance of thinking clearly.

He didn't say, Oh, yeah, yeah, but we've just got to brush that stuff under the carpet that Paul did before, that Saul did before, and forget about it. He said, No, no, you're right. This is that same guy.

This is Saul, the one who was persecuting you. But he's been changed. He's been changed by an encounter with Jesus. And he's actually been preaching Jesus in Damascus.

So it's not a sort of compromise pushing the issues under the carpet. In fact, it's all about clear thinking and accurate reporting. Now, of course, such people, if you're one of those people who your gift, your role is making peace in this way, you do have to be careful.

And in Galatians 2, verse 1, we do read that once, that Barnabas tolerated hypocrisy and an unacceptable compromise for the sake of peace.

[10:44] But that's the only, really, the only criticism we find of Barnabas in the whole of the Scripture. He wasn't perfect. Only the Son is the perfect image of the Father.

Barnabas, we need our Barnabases. Barnabas is the guy who makes things work. Troubleshooter, as we might say.

Without Barnabas, well, what would have happened if Barnabas hadn't been there? Perhaps the disciples would have rejected Saul. And perhaps he would have said, well, blow this, I'm off then. And obviously this gospel of Jesus Christ doesn't work. And if that had happened, well, the whole history of Christianity would have been quite different, wouldn't it?

I mean, half our Bible would have been missing, half our New Testament would have been missing. Barnabas, in bringing Saul to the disciples and smoothing things over, is one who makes a major contribution to the life and work of the Church.

[11:55] He is the one who, through the Spirit, encourages Saul, encourages the disciples in Jerusalem. And sometimes strong leaders actually have difficulty with this.

And I think that's one reason why we have different gifts in the Church. You may remember, you may be familiar with the fact that Saul, who by them was renamed Paul, himself had difficulty when it came to giving Mark, the gospel writer, a second chance.

Mark had deserted them on the first missionary journey. But Barnabas said, no, he's changed. Now, as it happened, they disagreed with it and God overruled and they went off in different directions. And so we'll end up with two missionary journeys instead of one. But sometimes those who are strong can actually think, well, you know, he's had his chance, I'm not going to give him a second chance.

But Barnabas knows that people can be changed. And so again, in that dispute, Barnabas stepped in. And so if that had happened, we would have lost, hadn't happened, we would have lost Mark's gospel, wouldn't we?

[13:09] And it's because of Barnabas that Mark was encouraged to write his gospel. through Barnabas, the church, the Holy Spirit strengthened the church and encouraged him through the son of encouragement.

And if we didn't have our Barnabases, then the church really wouldn't work at all. It would just blow itself apart. So we need to encourage, we need to look for our Barnabases amongst us.

What about Saul? Saul, of course, who is still using his old name at this point, but who is, of course, the Apostle Paul, the one who wrote much of the New Testament.

And actually, verses 19 to 30 reads like an episode from The Three Musketeers, doesn't it? I don't know whether you saw that television series on The Three Musketeers a year or two back.

It was great fun, it was. Lots of climbing out of windows and stuff like that and sneaking around and escaping from places by the skin of their teeth. Well, that's what Paul is, that Saul is about here.

[14:18] And Saul, we read from one or two other things in his writings, appears to have been quite physically, quite small. But in what he says and does, he's larger than life, isn't he?

Saul is an iron man, seems to be larger than life in everything he does. Saul doesn't do compromise. Saul is always full on. And what are his priorities?

We think of Paul as the great apostle to the Gentiles. In fact, he describes himself as such in some of his writings. But actually, in this passage, that hasn't happened yet. Saul here is engaged with the Jews.

And like any dramatic convert, I suppose, he's most vocal in his arguments. We look at verse 26.

Oh, sorry. I haven't put the slide on. Have I? Move the slide on. Verse 26.

Is that what I meant? Yes. No, that's the wrong verse. Sorry. I meant verse 22.

[15:28] Sorry. Verse 22. Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus, proving that Jesus is the Christ.

Yes, I've put the right verse up on the screen now. It's wrong in my notes. Verse 22. He was full on in his arguments, his engagement with the Jews.

Having previously tried mightily to suppress the gospel, he's now quite clear on what he's about.

He's going to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Now, Luke doesn't actually tell us how he did that, but given that he's arguing with the Jews, I think it's a reasonable supposition. But he did that by showing how he fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies.

Difficult to see how he could have done it any other way. And we are told that his opponents were baffled. And in the end, they couldn't silence him. They had to resort to violence to silence him.

[16:39] Throughout his life, that would remain Paul's priority to prove that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the coming and present King.

Everything was directed to presenting Jesus as the anointed King and the church as the true people of God.

not those who claim Jewish descent, but the true children of Abraham. Those who are ransomed by Jesus and who live by faith.

You can't have a king without a kingdom, of course. And in proving that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, Saul is actually preaching the gospel in its purest form.

This is, if you like, the gospel, that Jews or Gentiles, whether we're Jews or Gentiles, we need to submit to the rule of Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

And that if we do that, then we find salvation in him and all those promises that the Lord will love and look after his people, we can apply them to us.

[17:49] I think it's worth noting one other point here, though. There is a slight suggestion here that Paul is going a bit over the top.

But we want to say that Paul is zealous, but he isn't a fanatic. And there is a difference, I think, and I think we need to be careful of that. There's a story that's told about Lord Baden-Powell, who was founder of the Boy Scouts, of course, among other things, also an eminent soldier.

And the story is told that a young man came to him and said, Sir, I'm prepared to die for my country. And Baden-Powell replied that he didn't need people who will die for their country, he needed people who will live for their country.

And the same is true here. A fanatic will seek martyrdom for its own sake. But a true disciple is one who's prepared for martyrdom but doesn't actually seek it out.

Paul, of course, will eventually return to a rest in Jerusalem. But he had much to do first. It wasn't time.

[19:08] As the old proverb says, he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day. And in this case, twice here, in fact, and in many times in the future, Paul's life is in danger.

But the opportunity to escape was there and he took it. And I think Saul was probably not naturally a patient man. He tells us, doesn't he, that he needed to learn patience.

He learned patience through sufferings, in fact. There's a well-known event, actually, in the life of Martin Luther, the great reformer of the 16th, 15th century, 16th century.

At one point, he refused to take reasonable precautions against a rest. And so, in fact, he was more or less kidnapped by his own friends in order to stop him falling into the hands of his enemies.

Luther wouldn't take sensible precautions and his friends were more prudent. And, in fact, there seems to be a suggestion here that Saul's friends have a similar role in verse 25 and verse 30.

[20:17] And here, perhaps, the spirit speaks to Saul by his friends and followers. And particularly, the wording in quite, about his escape in verse 30 is quite strong.

They didn't just say, well, perhaps you'd better go undercover for a bit. How about going home to Tarsus? It actually says they took him or brought him, led him down. You almost get the idea that they sort of got hold of him and said, come on, we've got to get out of here.

And then, when they got to Caesarea, they didn't just say, what are you going to do next, Paul?

They said, no, Saul said, no, you'd better go home. Go home, Saul. It's not your time yet.

Go home and wait. Tarsus is where he came from, of course. Presumably, he went back to his family. Go home and wait.

When we need you, when the Holy Spirit needs you, we'll send Barnabas, which of course is what happened in chapter 11, verse 25 and 26. Sometimes, preaching the word in an excessively confrontational way can actually be counterproductive, I think.

[21:32] Sometimes there's a need for it, but sometimes also prudence is required. There is a time for being fearless, but not all the time, perhaps.

Sometimes discretion is the better part of valor. And sometimes the word is spread by other means, and that's what happened, as we see, if you look at verse 42 here.

Of course, these events that are described, they became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. So that's Saul, the Apostle Paul, escapes from Damascus, turns up in Jerusalem, gets chased out of Jerusalem, and he goes home.

But that same priority, that same strength, that same fearlessness, even if here it was a bit of a handicap, would eventually be tamed, as it were, by the Holy Spirit, and would be that which drove him to become the great preacher to the Gentiles and the great theologian, that he became, the great apostle.

So let's look now at Peter. Peter also leaves Jerusalem. We'll see that in verse 32.

[22:55] Possibly because of the hornet's nest that's been stirred up. you'll notice that what Luke says here was that the believers had peace in Judea and Galilee and Samaria.

It actually leaves out Jerusalem itself. Perhaps things were too hot in Jerusalem now, but the believers scattered about.

The land had a time of peace. We're not talking about enormous distances here, any more than we're talking about enormous time scales. and it's 25 miles from Jerusalem to Lydda.

You could walk it in a day if you were used to walking, travelling my walk. It's only 11 miles from Lydda to Joppa. And we find Peter here in pastoral mode.

He didn't go to Lydda to plant a church there. He went to visit an existing group of believers. believers. Now, of course, Peter, like all the apostles, did preach the gospel.

[24:00] And he did have that general command that was given to all of them, to go into all the world and make disciples. But if you think back to the end of John's gospel, the particular command, the particular charge that Peter was given by Jesus, this was of course after Peter had denied Jesus, and Jesus says, do you love me?

And Peter says, do you know I love you? And what does Jesus say, then feed my sheep? Peter was particularly given the role of the pastor, and this seems to be what he's doing here.

Of course, he does preach the gospel also, he did in Acts 2, as we saw, and he will do again in Acts 10. But in these two works of healing and these encouragements, they do turn, sorry, I say that in a different way, Peter does preach the gospel, but it's in these two works of healing and this work of encouraging the believers that turns men and women to God.

We see that in verse 35 and in verse 42. These works point to Jesus. Jesus, they're not pointing to Peter, and he's not doing them even really to prove he's right.

He's doing them to point to Jesus. We see that in verse 34. Anais, Peter said to him, Jesus Christ heals you, not Peter heals you, Jesus Christ heals you, get up and tidy up your mat.

[25:44] Yes, Peter had said it was not good to neglect the ministry of the word to wait on tables, but at the same time, Peter is far from averse in caring for the needs of the saints.

That's really what he's about here, attending to the needs of God's people. Peter's attitude is worthy of note here, as well, isn't it? By the spirit, you notice, he makes no objection to leaving Lydda and rushing off to Joppa when it's requested, even though it was only for a woman.

He makes no objection to that. And in fact, even his accommodation, one of the commentators points out, shows a servant heart. You notice in verse 43, he settles down with Simon the tanner.

Now, we don't have many tanners around nowadays, but tanners are generally not people you want to go and stay with. Tanning is a notoriously smelly occupation. But Peter is prepared to stay in the house of Simon the tanner.

Peter no longer felt that his place was in the centre of things in Jerusalem, and he had a care for God's people wherever they were. He was going about that charge that Jesus had given him to feed the sheep, tend the lambs.

[27:19] So he went to Lydda, fed the sheep there, and then he moved to Joppa. Of course, he was asked to come over to Joppa, but he said once he got there, he stayed there, tending the sheep there.

and because of that, when the big push came, he was in the right place. He wasn't very far at all from Caesarea. And we'll look at that, of course, in the next chapter, where God eventually does tell him to move on and start on phase three, preaching to the Gentiles.

So let's look now at Tabitha, the gazelle. A gazelle is a kind of deer, but it's one that's noted particularly for its grace and its speed.

This is the only place, actually, in the New Testament where we read of Tabitha. And yet Luke obviously considers her to be someone worthy of note. And he even goes to the extent in telling us what her name means.

Tabitha is the gazelle. And he obviously thought that's an appropriate name. So what should we make of Tabitha? How was the Holy Spirit displayed in her life?

[28:43] Well, as I've already pointed out, the first thing to note, of course, was that she was a woman. Luke clearly thought that Tabitha was an appropriate name for a lady of grace and gentleness.

God's And actually, I don't know if you've ever noticed this, but Luke is particularly keen to tell us of the ministry of women. If you look back at the descriptions of Jesus' birth, in Matthew's gospel we get Joseph and we get the three wise men.

Nothing about women. But in Luke's gospel we get Mary, the story of Mary, we get Mary's song, and we get Elizabeth, and as has been pointed out by many commentators, it's really Mary and Elizabeth, who are the, not Joseph and Zechariah, who are the heroes of those first few chapters of Luke.

Luke is keen to tell us of the important role that Tabitha had. See, the poor widows that we read about in Acts 6, verse 1, those who were being neglected and not properly looked after in the distribution of food, they were a problem, or a challenge, as the management people would insist you call it.

But Tabitha isn't a problem, Tabitha is a solution. She clearly has access to resources, there's no mention of a husband, but she wasn't poor herself.

[30:22] We don't know exactly what her background was. Perhaps she was a widow whose husband had left her money. Perhaps she was an unmarried daughter of a wealthy family.

Perhaps she was herself a successful businesswoman. She might have been married, but we read nothing of her husband. But she had resources.

She was in a position to help people, and she had the ability to respond, and she acted in faith. So whatever detailed circumstances were, Luke describes her, first of all by giving, say, telling us what her name means, but then he also says she was a disciple.

Now Luke uses various words to talk about the people of God, he talks about the saints, he talks about brothers and sisters. But the particular one he chooses to use here of Tabitha is that she was a disciple, one who seeks to follow the master faithfully.

That's what a disciple means, isn't it? One who follows a teacher, a master, a discipline. And her brand of discipleship, of following Jesus, was doing good and helping the poor.

[31:43] A more literal translation is that she was full of good works and donations to the poor. As we might say, that was what made her tick.

That was what she did, and in a sense that was who she was. In one sense, of course, we're all what we do, and that's what she did, and that's who she was, a disciple who followed the master in doing good.

most of those poor widows would have known how to do basic weaving and sewing, but Tabitha didn't just hand out yarn, she put her whole heart into it.

She obviously was a craftswoman. You might have thought, well, nowadays wouldn't she have been better teaching the widows to sew for themselves? I don't know, maybe she did that as well.

But certainly she produced things that were worth showing off. It's not entirely clear, actually, whether the widows that are referred to as mourners were believers or not.

[32:48] If you look in verse 41, Luke talks about he called the believers and the widows. So it's possible that these widows were not believers.

We can't be entirely sure about that. But either way, they were mourners, they were certainly mourning Tabitha, and the way they did it was to say, look, these are the things she did, these things were worth showing off.

She didn't just hand out rags, sacks, you know. She produced things that were worth showing, look, this is what we're losing here. This is the work we're doing.

It was good stuff. She was a craftswoman, as we might say. And those garments would have been her legacy if she had actually died, finally died then.

They showed what kind of teacher she followed. And so in doing that, she demonstrated the coming of the Holy Spirit in power. And thirdly, she was a doer of the word.

[33:55] A doer, yes. But a doer of what? A doer of the word. She illustrates exactly that teaching of James, doesn't she? Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves.

Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at it himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does.

That's James 1, 22 to 25 if you want to note the reference. And doesn't Tabitha exactly illustrate that?

She was a doer of the word. She did things by faith and her faith made her put the word into practice. I hope I'm not going to spread further confusion here but I think there is a certain confusion.

[35:03] In the late 20th and the early 21st century I think, evangelical Christians have created almost a problem for themselves which earlier generations I think really didn't have.

So we've reacted against a liberal and a social gospel and we're influenced by modernist and post-modernist thought and we've created divisions between things I think that the New Testament doesn't really acknowledge.

Indeed it actually decries them. And we could sum that problem up in this question of what is the church's priority? What is the church supposed to be doing? What is the most important thing for the church to do?

And you get at least three answers to that. The first answer is it's preaching and teaching the word. That's what the church is there for.

Other people will say no, that's not the important thing. The important thing is enhancing the experience of God through worship and direct spiritual experience.

[36:07] Through coming to the Holy Spirit as it were raw, not filtered through the word. Some people will say that. And other people will say no, well this is all just nonsense pie in the sky stuff.

The real duty of the church, the real purpose of the church is to do good. To help the poor, to change political transformations and just to make the world all together a better place.

And the church, I think, the evangelicals in the last sort of 70 years or so have asked themselves that question. Possibly because the previous ones had almost reacted against the idea of any sort of idea of social, doing social good, helping the poor.

But they seem to have made it into a problem. And I don't see that it is a problem personally. And you can discuss this with me afterwards if you like. But because, well if we do ask that question, what is the church priority, then we have to say the scripture says, yes it is the word, it is written, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

The word is where it starts. Jesus said that to the devil, didn't he, when he was tempted. It's in Matthew 4 verse 4, but he's quoting Deuteronomy 8 verse 3. The first thing is the word of God.

[37:36] Seek first the kingdom of God and these other things will be added to you. And the word has primacy. And yet there's a very big but

attached to that.

We have to do it in the right way. Because Jesus also said this, by their fruit you will recognize them. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? And I will tell them plainly, I never knew you.

Away from me, you evildoers. Notice what he says here. One of the things he says here, did we not prophesy in your name? That's what these evildoers will say.

Well, we spoke about you. We proclaimed your word. But no, Jesus said, no, you didn't. You might have thought you were, but you didn't. I never knew you.

[38:43] And actually, I think Tabitha's story in many ways, well, both these healings, but Tabitha's story particularly, gives us a great illustration of this. What is it that restores her to life?

Well, you can look at verse 40. Let me just read it again, verse 40. Peter sent them all out of the room. Then he got down on his knees and prayed.

Turning towards the dead woman, he said, Tabitha, get up. She opened her eyes and seeing Peter, she sat up. I think Peter must have had a certain sense of déjà vu there because it was very much like the healing of Jairus' daughter, of course.

But what is it that makes, as it were, Tabitha get up? It's not sending out the mourners. They were a hindrance. They were getting in the way, but that was just clearing the decks, as it were.

Notice, it's not actually even Peter's prayer. He does pray, but she doesn't wake up then, doesn't come to life then. It's when he declares the word of Jesus.

[39:52] He turned towards the dead woman and he said, Tabitha, get up. And then she opened her eyes and seeing Peter, she sat up. And if you look back to verse 34, you can see the healing of Aeneas is very much the same.

Peter said to him, Jesus Christ heals you, get up, tidy up your mat. The word must be spoken. It doesn't happen.

Even the praying doesn't bring about the result. It's the word proclaimed that brings about the result that restores Tabitha to life.

And that's true, if it's true in this physical realm here, it's an illustration, I think, of the spiritual realm. It's the word spoken that calls people to spiritual life.

But, why was Tabitha restored? Why were the disciples, the believers, so keen to get her back? Why? Why was she restored?

[41:05] Well, basically, so she could make more clothes. She could carry on with her ministry. She could carry on with her work, because it was something the church needed. This is what the bystanders had asked Peter for, and that's exactly what they got.

They got her back. They got more garments, more help. So we must give primacy to preaching and teaching the word, and I believe we do do that here, but we have to be careful always that we don't make it into a dead letter, and that we don't say, oh, we just preach the simple gospel, it's not worth doing anything else.

That certainly is not what was happening in this passage. Peter, as I say, was in pastoral mode, was encouraging people, and Tabitha was in the business of doing good works, as we might call them.

In a sense, so was Barnabas. We don't preach a dead letter. We have to make sure that we don't preach a dead letter, because the writer to the Hebrews, 4 verse 12 says, for the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.

It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. We're not proclaiming a word that really just speaks to the mind and even just lodges on the surface of that.

[42:37] Or if we are, we're not doing what we should be. We should be doing the equivalent of Peter's, Tabitha, get up. Tabitha, be restored to life.

And if we're not encouraging those who are restored to life and teaching in that sense, not teaching for the sake of increasing people's knowledge, but teaching for the sake of changing people's lives. So just a few concluding remarks. church, we are told, was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit.

Whenever you read of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we're not given a list here, but whenever you do, there are various lists in the New Testament, of course, of gifts of the Holy Spirit. And what is always there is that diversity.

And although we're not given a list here, we are presented instead with these examples of people who were filled with the Holy Spirit and were the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church, the ones who did indeed encourage and strengthen and build up the church.

[43:54] And they were different, quite different. Let's just remind ourselves of Barnabas, the troubleshooter, the one who makes things work, the peacemaker, the one who brings things together.

And we have Saul seem to become Paul, the fearless preacher, the great theologian, the great evangelist. And we have Peter, who learned gentleness through his own mistakes largely, I think. He was always jumping in with both feet. But he learned that if you do that, you're just going to get into trouble. And so he learned to be a pastor.

He learned how to feed the sheep, how to tend the lambs. And we have the gentle pastor. And we might be none of those things, but we can be faithful disciples like Tabitha.

We can go about presenting the love of Christ, pointing people to Jesus in practical ways, by being faithful disciples, putting the word that is preached into practice, being not just hearers of the word, but doers, looking in the mirror of the word, as James said, and checking whether your hair is straight, whether you've got your...

[45:23] Brenda says, I never do that before I go out. She's probably right. I should check in the mirror before I go out. But that's what a mirror is there for, isn't it?

To check that we're the... You know, our clothes are on straight, whether we've got tomatoes spilt down our front, whether we've got... whether our hair is right.

And that's what the mirror of the world is supposed to do. It's supposed to change us, bring us up short and say, no, hang on, we're not... I've got that wrong, I wouldn't do something about that. And so all of us need to be faithful disciples.

And so Saul drops out of the story of Acts, just for a few chapter or two now. He's gone home. He's gone back to Tartus, out of the firing line, as we might say.

It doesn't go quite as long as Moses did. Moses disappeared for 40 years. Probably only for two or three years. But those were very important years in Saul's life.

[46:35] Of course, he decided he needed to change his name, along other things. But he also thought, meditated, thought through. He'd had this Damascus experience, but he needed to digest it, to understand it.

Yes, he understood now that Jesus was the Messiah and was could give quite a good argument for that. But he needed to think through all the implications of that. And Saul then, because God does have a job for Saul, and he does send Barnabas, actually.

We read it in chapters later. We need Saul back, guys. Barnabas. Go and find him. And so let's give Saul, now rename Paul, the last word in that great book of theology in Romans that he wrote.

Because he wrote this, Romans 12, verses 1 and 2. Therefore, I urge you, brothers, or brothers and sisters, that's all it means there, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your spiritual act to worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

[48:05] Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is. Living sacrifices, spiritual act of worship. What Tabitha did was worship by this measure.

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Well, how does that happen? It happens, of course, by the application of the word. So let's not drive a wedge between these things.

Let's not say, oh, somebody who... Because, frankly, we should be doing all of these things. We should be preaching the word. We should be teaching people to meet with the living God, to be still,

