

How the Church Grows

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 April 2019

Preacher: Rev. George Macaskill

[0 : 00] Now let's turn in our Bibles to a passage of Scripture which we read in the book of Acts chapter 12. The book of Acts chapter 12.

And I would just like to read again what I want to refer to a lot in the chapter, in fact in the two portions of Scripture. We'll just read again verse 24. Acts 12, 24.

But the word of God increased and multiplied. But the word of God increased and multiplied.

The word but is one of the most important small words in the Bible.

And here it is at the beginning of verse 24. But the word of God increased and multiplied.

[1 : 11] The word but implies at least, at the very least, a challenge. What is it saying here? It is saying, despite all the persecution, despite all the opposition, despite the satanic attacks, the church of God prospered.

That's our text. That's our text. But, despite all that you've read, despite all that you know, the church of God grew.

Regardless of all the assaults and powers of hell. Christ's church grew.

Isn't it Christ himself who said, I will build my church.

And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. You know, one lesson that we have to learn from what we read is that the background, the context in which the church expands is conflict.

[2 : 34] What a long time we take to learn that lesson. God's ways of growing church are so different from your ways and my ways.

But, despite all we've read about the persecution of the church, the church grew. Against all the odds, the people of God, through prayer and worship, developed together.

What a question that gives to us personally. Can you and I worship God when we're being persecuted?

Can you and I praise God when we see iniquity advancing as a flood?

Can we praise God? Tell me. Here's a challenge. Are you asking yourself, are you a Christian? Can you love God when God's providence makes you suffer?

[3 : 48] That's a mark. Despite God's will that I suffer, that I go through this trial, I still love him.

What a mark of grace. What a mark of grace. Now, as we look at this chapter, three questions I find arise very much in my mind.

The first question is this. Verses 6 and 7. Tell me. How can Peter sleep so soundly the night before his execution?

How can he sleep so soundly? He's to be executed in the morning. And the angel is to wake him up.

Wake up. Keep dressed. He's sleeping like a log. Isn't it wonderful to agree with God's providence?

[4 : 53] Isn't it? Isn't it challenging to our own Christianity? That's the first question. How can he sleep so soundly the night before his execution?

That's what it is to trust God. That's what it is to be ready. That's what it is to have Christ. You can sleep soundly.

Whatever God does, you can sleep soundly if you have Christ in your heart. Second question is this.

Why was Peter delivered from execution and the godly James was not?

Why did God choose Peter and not James? What do you think James' widow was saying?

[5 : 58] What's wrong with my husband? Peter denied him. He gets deliverance. Why is my man taken? As far as we know, James never put a foot wrong.

But he's taken. Will we ever learn God's ways are not the same as ours? We have to learn that lesson.

Here's question number three. Maybe it's the most challenging question of all. How can King Herod murder James and live?

The same king, the same king, before the end of the chapter, sits on his throne. And he sticks his chest out too far.

And he's eaten of worms. We read it. Verse 23. Immediately. Oh what?

[7 : 08] Verse 22. The people were shouting the voice of a god and not of a man. And King Herod took it to himself. Proud. And he sticks his chest out.

Proud. Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down. Because. Because. Because. Because. He didn't do something.

Because he didn't give God the glory. And he was eaten by worms. But he's allowed to murder James.

Will we ever learn God's ways are not our ways? You make a catalogue. You write out a list of your besetting sins.

Now I really don't think there's anybody in here who committed murder. Maybe there is. I don't know. Maybe you know someone who did.

[8 : 11] Would that be top of the list? Would that be top of the list? Where would pride be in that list? Near the top or near the bottom?

What a lot was to learn about God. His standards are not the same standards that we have. Well. That's the background. That's the background. To the church developing. To the church growing. But. But.

Verse 24. But. The word of God increased and multiplied. Now. It's exactly the same story. In Acts chapter 6.

And that's why I read it. Verse 7. And the word of the Lord continued to increase. And the number of the disciples multiplied.

[9 : 13] Multiplied. We ought to be very careful. When we pray. For the Holy Spirit. To come in revival. Because when the Spirit comes in revival.

And the Spirit multiplied the church. Greatly here. It multiplied it greatly. As we're going to look at. When the Spirit comes down. To bless mightily.

The Spirit also comes down. To judge severely. Remember that. You want the Spirit.

You have to take the Spirit in all its dimensions. It's not just going to prosper the church. But when the church sins. When the church goes astray.

Judgment is severe. That's the context for Ananias and Sapphira. Well. The norm.

[10 : 10] We read there. And what the church was doing. In Acts chapter 6 verse 4. There was great need. To show. To do. To do Christian works.

But in order. That it will be done properly. The leaders. The apostles said. Look. Appoint deacons. To do that. We.

Are going to concentrate. On the ministry. Of the word. And prayer. The priority. Was word and prayer. The rest.

Was not to be neglected. Doing good. Is not to be neglected. And forgotten. But provision. Is to be made. Never. At the expense.

Of the ministry. Of the word. Or of prayer. Now. The church. The church. Grew. And developed. Notice.

[11 : 08] Notice. Definitions. Notice. How the church. Is defined. It does not say. In verse 24. The church.

Increased. And multiplied. It does not say. In chapter 6. Verse 7. And the church. Continued to increase. The number. Of the multiply. What does it say. It says. The word of God.

The word of God. Is used. Because it's synonymous. With the church. In these days. There weren't. What you might call. Private copies. Of the scriptures. That you could keep. In your pocket. Or your mobile phone. Any scriptures. There were.

Were large. They weren't portable. You could carry with you. There'd be in libraries. And synagogues. Big huge. Portions. Or scrolls. There would have been. But they knew it.

[12 : 04] They knew the word. They memorized the word. Is it. Basil. The church father. I remember being so.

So solemnized. And reading about him. He as it were. Locked himself. In a cave. For two years. What for?

To memorize. The scraps. Of scripture. That they had available. Then. Two years. In a cave. To memorize. The scriptures. That's commitment. That's how the church. Grew and expanded. Note.

How it. Defines. Christians. Disciples. Learners.

[13:04] Followers. The number. Of the disciples. Increased. Disciple. The word. Disciple. Is. Taken.

From the word. Discipline. Are we. Disciplined. By Christ. That's how our Bible.

Is. Defining. A Christian. Disciple. Someone. Who's. Under the discipline. Of Christ. Someone. Who. Hears.

Christ. Christ. Someone. Who. Who. Sees. Christ. In things. Someone. Who. Follows. Christ. Who. Learns.

From Christ. That's. How. They're. Described. Here. Note. How. Increase. Is. Defined. It's.

[13:56] Not. A simple. Addition. It's. A multiplication. That. When God. Does. Something. He. Does. It. Properly. The.

Number. Of. Disciples. Were. Multiplied. Greatly. Not. A few. Additions. From. Outside. Multiplied. From.

Inside. As. It. Were. Referring. To. The. Same. Not. An. External. Addition. But. Referring. To. The. Substance. When. God. Bless. God.

Bless. Notice. Note. How. Faith. Is. Defined. A. Number. Or. Is. A. Great. Number. And. A.

Great. Many. Of. The. Priests. Became. Obedient. To. The. Faith. You. Can't. Separate. Faith.

[14:50] From. Obedience. You. Say. I. Don't. Know. If. I. Believe. Jesus. Well. Do you. Obey him. Do you. Do what he says.

Same thing. The bible. Defines. A believer. As. Someone. Who's. Obedient. To. The faith.

Well. You see. We learn. The church. Cannot. Really. Grow. Before. God. By.

Dropping. Its. Principles. By. Lowering. Its. Standards. By. Reducing. Its. Qualifications. It. Cannot. Grow. That way. That's. One lesson. We learn.

What. Did. God. Use. What. Did. He. Use. So. That. The church. Would. Grow. He. Used. Persecutions. He.

[15:47] Used. Trials. He. Used. Suffering. Isn't that interesting? Isn't that amazing? That's what God uses. To grow. His church.

That we. Might. Might. Grow. A congregation. That we might. Grow. In faith. That we might. Grow. Stable. And strong. And serving.

God. We spend. A lot of time. Don't we? A lot of time. Praying. Against the very things.

That God. Has appointed. For our blessing. Don't we? Oh Lord. Don't let this happen. As a minister.

I've. Prayed for my congregation. And. I've said to God. Lord. Don't. Let that. You saw a danger.

Coming. To one of your flock. And he said.

[16:42] Lord. Don't let that. Happen to them. It will destroy. Their faith. Do you know what I've learned? It pulled up their faith. It strengthened their faith.

They became strong through it. I was speaking. To a man. Just back from the mainland. A week ago. Roughly.

And he said. He was. A backslider. For 17 years. 17 years.

Backsliding. And I said. What brought you back? What brought you back? Oh he said. 9-11. 9-11.

I was not ready. To meet God. He said. And it brought it all back. God uses the very things.

[17:39] We're praying won't happen to us. But God's got his purpose. All things work together for good. To those who love God.

Christ has promised us. Christ has promised us persecution. He said. He said. In the world. You will have tribulation.

Paul assured us. We would have it. We told you that we would suffer tribulation. He says to the Thessalonians.

Peter. Peter. Peter. One better you might say. Than Paul. And gives us advice. What to do. His first letter. Peter's first letter. Is given to those.

Who not only had endured. Much suffering. But who are appointed. To go through. Much more suffering. And he says. If anyone. If anyone of you.

[18 : 38] Suffer. As a Christian. Let him not be ashamed. When we get into trouble. For doing something. Right. When we get. When things go wrong. When we get into trouble. Because we've been loyal. To Jesus. Because we've done our duty. And everything blows up. We get embarrassed. Don't we? Peter says. Let no one be embarrassed. When you get into trouble. For obeying the scriptures. Don't be ashamed. Don't be embarrassed. Be like the early Christians. Who counted it a privilege. To suffer. For being a Christian. They thank God. That they were considered.

[19 : 37] Worthy. To suffer. As a Christian. Well. If. If. You. Find. The Christian life. Fraught. With difficulties. You're probably. Doing everything. Just right. Probably. Don't let. Anyone. Ever. Tell you. The Christian life. Is. Easy. Listen. It's wonderful. To be a Christian. It's well. Well. Well. Well. Worth it. Being a Christian. But. Don't let anyone. Tell you it's easy. Because it's not. That's why Christ said. I'm warning you. Through. Much. Tribulation. You. In this world. You will have. Tribulation. Paul. Assured. The Thessalonians. Are going to have it.

[20 : 32] And we get advice. How to handle it. Nothing's wrong. Don't think it's strange. Because of the fiery. Temptation. Trials. Trummel. You're about. To. Go through. Think it not strange. Brothers. Well. I read. Psalm. Sorry. We sang. Psalm 44. For a purpose. It's quoted. In the New Testament. Do you remember. What Psalm 44 says. And it's referred to. In Romans 8. In verse 9. We sang it. God. Is not with us. Here we are. God's sheep. God's flock. But Psalm 44. Verse 9. You are not with us. Lord. Verse 11. God made us.

[21 : 28] A sheep. For the slaughter. Verse 11. That was the experience. We were going through. Verse 12. The complaint is. Lord. You've devalued us. And sold us. For a pittance. Verse 14. You made us a laughing stock. Lord. We've been made a laughing stock. You don't come with our armies. You sell us for a pittance. We're made a laughing stock. We're just. I'm an embarrassment. In the world. An embarrassment. And in verse 15. We're totally confused. Lord. We're totally confused. Because. Verse 20. If we had forgotten you. We could have understand. What's going wrong. If we'd left you out. But wait a minute.

[22 : 25] Lord. We're like this. Because we're obedient to you. We're doing what you've asked us to do. And all this trouble. Has come upon us. Why? Why? Well. These verses. Are quoted. In Romans. Chapter. 8. Verse. 36. 37. For thy sake. Lord. For thy sake. We're counted. And regarded. As sheep. For the slaughter. It's for your sake. It's for your name. Remember. Jesus said. If they do these things. In the dry tree. If they do these things. To me. They'll do them. To you. Why? Why are you going through that? Are you finding it difficult. As a Christian?

[23 : 20] Why is that? Because you're Christ's sheep. Romans. 8. 36. For thy sake. We're regarded as sheep. Verse 37. It's amazing. In all. These. Things. We are more. Than. Conquerors. You say. What things? In what things? Are we more. Than conquerors? All these things. We've just mentioned. The difficulties. The problems. The disappointments. All. Ordained. By God. So that. You become. Strong. And stable. In the Lord. He's going to. Overcome. Them. All. For good. All. These. Difficulties. Problems. Disappointments. That. Have been ordained. By God. That.

[24 : 16] We might. Be strong. In the faith. Where you see. Suffering. And trial. And difficulty. It's because. Waiting for you.

Is glory. In the heavens. It's amazing. How often. The Bible. Puts together. Suffering. Down here. Glory.

Up there. God. Has joined. The two. Together. His ways. Are not our ways. His ways. Are better. Now. Finally. Let. Christ. Have the last word. We're talking about growth. Growth. Growth of the church. Growth of. Congregations. With problems. Growth. Personal. Growth. Growth. In our faith. Growth. Growth.

[25 : 09] Growth. In all that we do. It's Christ. He says. From me. Is your fruit. Found. From me. If you abide. In me. If you abide.

In me. You'll become fruitful. Now. It's Christ. Who said. On the sermon. On the mount. Consider. The lilies. How they grow.

Consider. How they grow. Do you want to learn. How to grow. Do you want to grow. Do you want to grow. As a Christian. Do you want to grow. As a congregation.

Listen to Christ. Do not seek. What you're to eat. And what you're to drink. Nor.

Be. Worried. Don't be worried. Don't be worried. Don't be worried. For all. The nations. Of the world. Seek.

[26 : 08] After. These things. And your. Father. In. Heaven. Knows. You need them. The only one question.

To ask. Do I need it? Well. God knows it. If you need it. God knows that. And here's how the Savior. Ended that. That. Paragraph as it were.

Instead. Instead. Of. Worrying. Instead. Seek. His. Kingdom. And all.

These things. Will be added. To you. God. That's not me. That's Christ. That's the Savior.

That's the one. That went to the cross. That's the one. That sacrificed. His life. That we. Might get.

To heaven. Hear.

[27 : 06] Him. Listen. To him. May God. The Holy Spirit. Make his word. Effectual. To every one of us.

Let's bow our heads.