

Deacons

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[0:00] Well, it's really good to see everybody this morning.

! Welcome to church again. You are the church, so welcome when you gather and the church is meeting.! This building's not the church, right?

This is the building where the church meets. So we're glad to be together again. Am I too loud or is that about normal? Sounds okay? All right. Today we have a blessed opportunity to...

Where is young Mark? He ran for his life. Wow. I really wanted him to hear this first thing I have to say.

Drag that boy back in here. Today we have gathered because young Mark is being ordained as a deacon in our church. And it's been a while since we've ordained a new deacon.

[1:00] And it's a wonderful opportunity for us. And I have designed a sermon that very much speaks to this young man. So he'll be here in a minute. He probably had to run to the restroom.

So God bless him. These things happen. Let's go ahead and pray. Lord, we thank you that we can gather. We're here in the name of Jesus to seek your face, to draw close to you.

We pray, Lord, that today as we ordain Mark, that you will do a deep and great work in his heart, filling him with wisdom, filling him with the Spirit of God, equipping him to serve well in the church.

This is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen. Welcome back, brother. You can have a seat or whatever. But I got a sermon here that really speaks to you.

And I would want you to be here. Okay? All right. So first of all, I got to tell you all a true story of what happened when I was ordained to be a deacon. This really did happen.

[2:07] So the way you see how we're going to do this in a minute, we will be setting a chair. In fact, I'll go ahead and grab it now. So we're going to set a chair right here.

And we're going to let Mark, when we get to that part, come and have a seat here. And then everybody who is already an ordained person, ordained as a deacon, pastor, whatever, will be in a line.

And we'll come by. And we'll lean over. And we will pray for him in his ear. Brenda will be playing music. The rest of you will just kind of, you know, be in prayer, be in a time of worship attitude.

So we'll be praying for him. Well, that was happening to me. And I was sitting in a church. And these folks were coming by. And they were laying hands on us.

And by the way, the whole thing of laying hands on, it goes all the way back to the Old Testament. It always means that someone is being set aside to do special work and service for the Lord.

[3:12] So that's why we will lay hands on him. So that's happening to me. And I remember this one person came up. Each one is just sort of saying a quiet prayer in my ear.

And this one person leans over and says, Let 1 Chronicles 4.10 be your prayer. And they kept on going. And I thought, okay, I've got to remember that when I get home.

I have no clue what 1 Chronicles 4.10 is. I've got to remember that 1 Chronicles 4.10. Well, then there's probably 20 other people that came by and prayed for me. So when I got home, I thought, I've got to see what that was.

So I go straight and I get my Bible out. And I'm thinking, what did that person say? I know, I know. 1 Chronicles 10.4.

I opened it up. And here's what 1 Chronicles 10.4 says. Quick, kill me with your sword. The whole verse is amazing.

[4:14] Quick, kill me with your sword before these uncircumcised heathen capture and torture me. And I was thinking, man, this deacon thing is going to be a lot rougher than I expected.

Whoa. And then I thought, that can't be what they meant. And I thought, oh, maybe it was 1 Chronicles 4.10. So then I looked that up. This was obviously it.

He is the one who prayed, Oh, God, that you would wonderfully bless me and help me in my work. Please be with me in all that I do. And God granted his request.

I'm like, I can handle that. Okay. I can handle that. So, Mark, we're hoping that your experience as a deacon will not be like, quick, kill me with your sword.

We hope it'll be more like that the Lord helps you in all of your work. So, that said, let's go ahead and get into talking here. There are people who kind of undervalue what a deacon is and what they do.

[5:18] Sometimes the deacons themselves will say, well, I'm just a deacon. Nothing special about that. But I just want to point out what the Scripture says about a deacon. Paul wrote to Timothy, Those who have served well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

And I've seen that true many times, that a person in serving as a deacon becomes more and more bold in their witness over time, over years.

And they also, this part of gaining a good standing, their reputation of being a responsible, dependable, helpful, kind, I mean, the good standing that they have will grow.

So, this is exactly what we're expecting from Mark. So, now, let's back up and talk about why are there deacons, how did this get started. And I've got a lot of Scripture to read to you today, so I'm actually going to sometimes just tell you the Scripture.

Way back when the church first began, Jesus had just ascended back into heaven. The Holy Spirit had come. Peter preached his first sermon. 3,000 converts came forward at the altar call.

[6:33] They spent all day baptizing 3,000 people. And the church had begun. It's interesting. And the very first church right off the bat is a mega church. Wow. So, anyway.

And then the Lord kept adding more and more. So, it probably pretty quick got to be 4,000 or 5,000 people in the church. And so, as this is going on, the church decided at some point, this part's not written down, but they began to take care of people in need in the church, just like we do to this day. And one of the neediest groups would be elderly widowed women with no family. In those days, there was no job that an older woman could do or even a young woman.

You didn't go to work. There was no Social Security. And your children were supposed to take care of you. So, if you were a widow and no children, you were going to starve.

And so, the church started providing food and care for this group of widows. We don't know how many there were, but if there were 5,000 people, they might have had 100 widows like that.

[7:42] We don't know. So, a problem developed. And it shouldn't surprise us that churches still have problems that develop. And in this case, it turned into a bit of an argument.

Some people in the church started saying, wait a minute. The church is taking better care of that group of widows than they are our group of widows.

And the widows I know are not getting as much food and attention as that group of widows over there. And there began to be some controversy. And, you know, stuff like that still happens in the church.

So, the apostles are hearing about this. The 12 disciples are now the apostles. And they're hearing complaints about this. And so, they gather the church together and they say, listen, it doesn't really make sense for us to take our time to be deciding how much food a widow should get.

We're supposed to be spreading this good news of Jesus Christ. That's what we're called to do. So, how about find some people, some servants. The word in Greek for deacon simply is the word servant.

[8:49] Find some servants who will take care of this. And they said, here's the qualifications. Find people who are full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom and ask them to do it.

So, we don't know how it happened exactly. But they had some kind of an election. And they picked seven men. And the scripture in Acts 6 names all seven. Now, two of them, the story goes on and tells us about them.

Five of them, we don't know any more about them. They don't get mentioned anymore. So, looking at what they're supposed to be doing, serving, helping the practical needs of the church.

Then, what happened? Well, they were just deacons. Only a deacon. It's about him. Now, Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.

Opposition rose, however, from members of the synagogue, who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

[9:58] So, they stirred up the people and seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. Now, let's back up and try to get a little background on that. Understand that at first, the Christian faith was not separate from the Jewish faith.

Every Christian at this time was a member of the Jewish temple and the church, or the temple. They didn't have a church yet, right? They were a church. I don't even know if the word was used yet.

And so, they are meeting and going to the temple. They're going to synagogue. Synagogue is more like small group. You know, they only had one temple.

That's where you sacrificed. But synagogue was like in every town. You only had to have 12 men. If you had 12 Jewish men, you could start a synagogue.

And so, they were like small groups that met together to study the Scripture. And there were those who were not liking how popular that Stephen was becoming.

[11:02] And these new Jewish Jesus followers were. They were getting opposed to this. And, of course, the Pharisees and the high priest and all, they never liked it.

They had just crucified Jesus. And now, this movement is going on in the Jewish tradition. They're really upset. So, they can't find anything wrong with Stephen.

They can't out-argue him. He's doing incredible things as a deacon. So, they cook up some charges against him. And they bring him before the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin is that same court of Pharisees that tried Jesus and found him guilty. And here's what the Scripture says happened. All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen. And they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. That's Acts 6.15. And then, continuing right on into 7, chapter 7, verse 1.

[12:06] Then the high priest asked him, Are these charges against you true? Now, I had skipped that part. The charges were, this guy is finding fault with Moses.

He's speaking against the Ten Commandments. He's blaspheming God. He's saying that this temple is no good. And they just made up all these lies. Stephen hadn't done any of that.

And so, the high priest says, Is this true? And Stephen, if you ever want to read a short history of the whole Jews from the time of Abraham through the time of Moses, that is what Stephen gets up and tells the Sanhedrin.

He recites for them the entire, everything that they would agree with. He recites to them exactly what they believe and teach the whole history of the Jews, right up through Moses.

And then he gets to the prophets. And then he says, And you are just like your forefathers. Your forefathers killed the prophets that God sent.

[13:10] And then you killed the Messiah that God sent. And you're as stiff-necked and hard-hearted as your forefathers were. Now, that's probably not the best case to present if you want to live.

And these guys get really angry. And they're saying, Shut up! I mean, they're really angry. And then an amazing thing happens. Right at that moment, Stephen received a wonderful vision from God. Stephen, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

And when that happened, they couldn't stand it anymore. He's talking about Jesus. He's talking about he sees Jesus. They grabbed him and dragged him outside of the city and threw him on the ground and immediately began to stone him to death.

Now, I want you to notice in this picture, over in that right corner, there's a guy standing there watching the coats. The robes of the people who are stoning Stephen to death.

[14:33] And who is that guy? That's Saul who is going to later become Paul. And he hears Stephen pray this prayer.

He hears Stephen say, Father, forgive them. It's his last words. That really hit Paul hard.

Or Saul, as he still is Saul at this time. So what did Stephen accomplish? Now, he was only a deacon, Mark. That's all he was.

What did he accomplish? Well, he performed great wonders and signs among the people.

Sometimes that might mean that a deacon here will pray for you and God will answer that prayer in a miraculous way.

But sometimes it might mean that you're just needing to move to a new house or you need a ride to the doctor or whatever and a deacon will come and help you with those things.

[15 : 29] And that will feel very much like a wonderful thing. You needed help. God sent someone to help you. Then he was able to out-reason and out-debate the Pharisees.

That takes a lot of study. And that goes over time. The longer you serve the Lord, the better you understand the Scriptures. And then, number three here, that he saw a vision of Jesus standing on the right hand of God.

Wow, this man is truly full of the Holy Spirit. And then he is the first Christian to die for his faith in the history of the Church. Since then, there have been millions more.

The statistics on this say that in the last two or three years, there have been more Christian martyrs than probably for the hundred years before that.

We're in a time where many parts of the world, Christians are being killed because, and only because, they're a Christian. Well, his death accomplished an incredible thing too.

[16 : 32] It helped lead to the conversion of Paul. I think the guilt and conviction, Saul must have just been eating at him. Like, how could that guy say he forgives us?

We're stoning him to death. What did he have? What's different? It must have just been eating at him. And he finally becomes a believer. Now look, we know really well what Paul went on to do. He writes about a third of the New Testament. He's the first one to take the good news of Jesus into Europe, where he leads people to Christ and starts churches.

And then Europe becomes the center of the Christian faith and takes the Christian faith basically around the world. And certainly to the United States.

It is, you know, this is an interesting thought. And maybe God would have found another way to do it. But if Stephen hadn't been willing to die for his faith in front of Paul, the Christian faith may not be in America.

[17 : 34] And we might not have this building, and you and I might not be sitting here as believers. Because one deacon was faithful to do what God showed him to do. We should never underestimate the role of a deacon or any believer.

The other deacon, Philip, that the story tells us about, let's look at what happened with him quickly. Philip left Jerusalem. He went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did. Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city. I mean, they, Philip, you know, a deacon in his home church.

But now he's gone to a new town, and nobody there has ever heard of Jesus. And he just starts preaching, probably in the streets. And God gives him the ability to perform signs and wonders.

[18 : 42] People are being healed. Lives are being touched. Folks are coming to know Christ as Savior. Great joy breaks out in the city. And there's a whole, several chapters there about that that we won't read through together.

And at the height of this great move of God, an angel speaks to him and says, Leave here, Philip. Go down. There's a road that goes down to Gaza.

By the way, the same Gaza that's in the news all the time right now that's in the war with Israel and all. That Gaza. Philip went down there. He goes to this road. And when he gets there, it probably took him two or three days to walk down there.

When he gets there, the Spirit speaks to him and says, See that chariot over there? Go over and get close to that chariot. So he does. He goes over and he gets close to a chariot.

And he's walking along. And he hears a man in the chariot reading out loud from the book of Isaiah. And he says to the guy, Do you understand what you're reading?

[19 : 46] And the guy says, How can I unless somebody explains this to me? And Philip says, I can't explain it. The guy says, Stop the wagon. Get in here.

And it turned out that this guy happened to be a very important official. He's called the Ethiopian eunuch. He was the head of all the finances for the country of Ethiopia.

And he worked for the queen of Ethiopia. He had gone up to Jerusalem, maybe on official business. While he was there, he had worshipped. He had learned some about this Jewish faith.

And he'd gotten a copy of a scroll of Isaiah. He was rich. He could afford to buy one. And now he's reading it, trying to understand, what are these Jews all about?

[20:48] That's the part he's reading at that moment. And so he says to Philip, the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip, Tell me, who is Isaiah writing about?

I believe that this Jesus is the Messiah. I believe what you're telling me here. I know this book was written 600 years ago. And you're telling me how this man, Jesus, did all of these things that Isaiah has here.

And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. So what did Philip accomplish? Just a deacon, but he was a very faithful witness.

He went to Samaria on a mission trip. And he went there and he preached. And then he left there on a second mission trip and went down to Gaza. So he was doing these things before Paul had even become converted.

Think about it. This Ethiopian took the gospel into Africa. Paul, through Stephen, took the gospel into Europe.

[22:58] And how can we even predict what God might do through young Mark's life? He's got many years left to serve him. But for that matter, it's true for every one of you.

Everything you do for God has great meaning and great potential. God is looking for people that will give their all to serve.

I came to serve. And so, we're going to set Mark apart this morning as a servant. Okay, Mark, if you will come down here and have a seat.

So, deacons and family members, whoever, come stand here. Pastors, whoever. doesn't mean you have to be an active deacon in this church at this time.

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