

Study on Acts no.8

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[0 : 00] Turn to the book of Acts, chapter 9, verse 31.

Acts, chapter 9, verse 31. I take this verse really by way of hanging a few thoughts upon it. With reference to the passages we read here tonight.

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria and were edified. And walking the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Ghost were multiplied.

Since the beginning of October, we've been trying to study the book of Acts here on Sabbath evening.

And dealing with the conversion of Paul, Saul of Tarsus, in this chapter last week, we have reached a natural break in the unfolding story of the church's extension in the first century.

[1 : 28] And for that reason, I want to break off these studies now for a brief period, maybe for a week or two, and then resume them.

And perhaps, though, preachers of the gospel really shouldn't have reason to thank people for coming to hear them, perhaps a word of gratitude on my part wouldn't be out of place here. Because when I began these studies, I was afraid that this kind of thing might not appeal to you, particularly, if I might say so, to the younger element in the congregation who tend to sit on the gallery.

And perhaps because of the concern that I had at the outset, something happened which I want to tell you about here tonight. Maybe I shouldn't do this either, but I'll tell you anyway.

The week I began these studies on Sabbath night, I had a very strange dream. Now, I don't believe particularly in dreams, but this was quite a strange one.

[2 : 52] I woke up one morning feeling very, very depressed, and I couldn't understand why I had this sense of depression.

And then I remembered that I had dreamed through the night. And I saw myself in this pulpit preaching from the Book of Acts.

The downstairs area of the church was half empty and was hardly a soul in the gallery. And that explained the sense of depression that I had waking up.

And I wondered whether the Lord was speaking to me, saying to me that I shouldn't continue these studies, or whether it was the devil trying to stop me.

And I reasoned that it was the devil. And I determined then to persevere. And that's why I said that perhaps a word of gratitude might not be out of place.

[3 : 57] I think it's only right that I should encourage you to continue to request the means of grace. And you have certainly done that.

Though there were times when I wondered after preaching here at night if some of you would ever again come back. And it heartens me.

It gladdens me. It thrills my soul to see you week after week after week sitting through a series like this.

I hope that you won't lose by it. And I must say that in some respects my own soul from a study of God's word has been enriched anyway. And perhaps you may have reason to look back in years to come and see that you benefited something, that you benefited somewhat from it yourselves.

And I want to say that to you. And to encourage you to keep coming. And to plead with you indeed to keep coming.

[5 : 08] Perhaps you heard the story of the minister who used to minister in this island many years ago, who was preaching on a particular theme for a period in his own congregation.

And one night a woman got up and walked out of the meeting in high dudgeon and slammed the door behind her. This was her way of registering her protest at the particular type of preaching.

And he turned, I'm told that he turned to the congregation and said to them, friends, he said, never turn your back on the gospel because there's nothing else to turn to.

And that's what I would encourage you to do. You keep coming to hear the word of God. You never know when the Lord might bless it to your heart.

So I feel that here's a natural break in these studies with the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. And tonight, really, I just want to briefly review what we've been seeing in the Book of Acts and perhaps homing on one particular aspect of the church's function in the world.

[6 : 21] The Book of Acts, as we've been seeing, is really a history of the extension of the Christian church, the founding and the extension of the Christian church in the first century.

The main actor on the stage is the Holy Spirit. Who is operating here, changing the lives of men and women, young and old. And who was active in encouraging and enabling the apostles to preach the gospel with boldness to friend and foe.

The churches we've seen increased rapidly over a period of three to four years. At the beginning in Jerusalem, there were only about 120 in the church.

On the day of Pentecost, there were over 3,000. And within a short period of time, by the time chapter 4 opens, we're told that there were 5,000 men converted in Jerusalem at that time.

So you see, over a period of two or three years, you have this tremendous increase in the membership of the Christian church from 120 to well, well in excess of 5,000.

[7 : 32] Now, the public witness of the church at that time, we read in chapter 2, was very well received by the people. They were held in respect by the people in Jerusalem.

The only real hostility to the church we saw came from the Sadducees, who were in the majority in the ruling Sanhedrin. But they failed to gain the support.

They didn't have the support of the public, and therefore the church was spared from much persecution at that time. The persecution arose when the Pharisees turned their venom upon the church, and this we saw particularly with the death by stoning of Stephen.

From the time of Stephen's death, though, the church spread. It spread because of the persecution that came as a result of the Pharisees rising up against the teaching of the Christians.

And from then on, from that time on, numerical statements of the strength of the church couldn't be given because, as we read here, the church was spreading from Jerusalem throughout Judea into Samaria and the rest of Galilee.

[8 : 56] And it was impossible then to give an accurate numerical estimate of its strength. Yet, though it spread like that, we know that the church remained organized and efficient and active.

It was constantly exerting itself both in its external growth through the preaching of the word and in its internal development through the application of that word to its own life.

And it's that aspect of the church's existence that I want tonight to home in on with you and with perhaps a slight word of apology if one or two of you may find this rather repetitive.

There are areas, or there were other areas, of the church's existence in which you see the influence of the word being brought to bear upon itself as an organization.

And tonight I want to look with you at its attitude to the word, its attitude to its own members, to Christian fellowship, its attitude to the sacraments, its attitude to prayer, its attitude to the world around it.

[10 : 21] Now these are the things that I want to look at very briefly with you tonight in the light of the passages we read here tonight. Before proceeding to that, this word, church, what exactly do we mean when we speak about the Christian church?

Well, there are two ways in which the Bible explains to us something of the nature of the church. It is a body of people called out of the service of sin by the grace of God and called into the worship and the service of God by the same grace.

They are called out of darkness and called into or called out of the service of sin and called into the service of God.

And they are brought together in that service. They are brought together as a group of worshipping people united together by the grace of God with their mind and their attention centered upon the God who called them by his grace.

That's just a very brief definition of the church that we're speaking about. When we speak about the church, we're not speaking about a building. We're speaking about a body of people.

[11 : 50] And they are those who have been saved by the grace of God and called together by the grace of God to worship God. Now, how does this church, how is it presented to us in the book of Acts?

Well, we read there, for example, in chapter 2 that they continued, they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine.

They were, in other words, a group of people, a community of people in belief. Now, of course, there are some people who tell you today it doesn't really matter what you believe. We're all going to the same place, aren't we?

And we all worship the same God, don't we? So it doesn't really matter what you believe? Of course it does. It's, it's one of the most ludicrously ridiculous statements to say that it doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you believe in God.

You know, that's one of the most stupid statements that any person could make. You wonder how anyone with any intelligence could say anything like that. Do you know why? For this reason. How are you going to know what God to believe in?

[13 : 05] How are you going to know? Remember the story I told once, I'm sure I told it here, of the young girl in a congregation in Glasgow who was a Christian girl.

She had made a profession of faith. But under pressure at school she stopped coming to church and she stopped reading her Bible. And she said that she was going to start from scratch with an open mind, whatever that means, with an open mind.

And she was going to find God for herself. She wasn't going to be influenced by the teacher of the church or her parents. She wasn't going to be biased in that direction.

She was going to start on her own and look for God. And then when she found God she would worship that God. Now that's all very well and it sounds terribly, terribly fair, doesn't it?

But it's got one fearful problem and one great flaw on it. It's this. How are you going to know God? How are you going to recognize Him? Where are you going to find Him?

[14 : 05] Where are you going to begin? You see, the New Testament church had no problem here. It knew what God to worship. What God?

The God who was communicated to it and conveyed to it in the doctrine of the apostles. They continued steadfastly in the doctrine, in the apostles' doctrine.

They were a community in belief. It was profoundly important to them what they believed. Very, very important. And you see, the people who make shipwreck of the faith and the people who branch out into every and any kind of ludicrous religious practices are the people who don't accept or believe what we have in the apostles' doctrine.

Now, this people, this group of people continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, which leads, of course, to this question, what was the apostles' doctrine? Well, there were two strands to the apostles' doctrine.

There was, first of all, the Old Testament teaching. They were steeped in the teaching of the Old Testament. And then, there was this other strand to it, they were steeped in the teaching of Jesus.

[15 : 24] There were the two things in the apostles' doctrine of that day, what the Old Testament said and what the Lord had told them. And for us tonight, the apostles' doctrine is the Old Testament and the New Testament, in other words, the Bible.

And you'll always find this, that the Christian church gathers round the Bible. An American theologian Charles Hodge has said, that it is the Bible in the hand of the Holy Spirit that has given the church being.

Every Christian here tonight, every convert, every member of this church in Stornoway is a member because, and a Christian because, and a convert because, and a believer because, the Holy Spirit has blessed the truth to their heart one way or another, somewhere or another.

And this is the church. It is, it is in existence, a Christian's existence because the Bible has been blessed to him and to her. Now, the person to whom the Bible has been blessed values the Bible and gathers with other people around the Bible, continues steadfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine.

In other words, it isn't just the case of an initial act of faith upon the base of what God says. It is continuing in the exercise of that faith. It isn't just, as I said, an initial act.

[16 : 55] It is a, or an initial response to the truth. This happened, for example, to them at Pentecost, these 3,000 people. They heard the Apostles' Doctrine from Peter.

They heard the truth. They didn't like what they heard. They were convicted by what they heard. But then, you see, they were also blessed by what they heard. They were converted through what they heard.

This is often the case. Some people may come to church and they hear the gospel and they don't like what you hear. And if it goes in deep and it begins to prick your conscience, it begins to annoy you, you may stop coming to church.

You don't like this kind of approach. Getting too close to the bone. He's becoming too personal.

People don't like, you see, they are, as these people were at Pentecost, cut to the heart.

The Bible is like that in the hand of the Spirit. The preaching is like that at times in the hand of the Spirit. It cuts people and it's painful and some people don't like the pain and so they stop coming.

[17 : 55] But you see, the people are going to be blessed by God are the people who continue to come or who come back and the gospel, the same gospel that cuts them is the gospel that saves them or rather the hand of the Spirit saves them.

This is what happened to these people. When Peter explained this doctrine to them, they were converted and then they continued in it. You see, it wasn't just an initial response on their part. They continued together to understand this, to hear more and more of this, to grow in knowledge of the Word of God.

If I might say this, it is never a mark of progress in a person's spiritual experience or Christian experience when he or she can do without the gathering together of the church around the apostles' doctrine.

I know that there's a sense in which you and I can have too much in the way of public gathering around the truth in a sense. In a sense in which you allow yourself to do that and you don't do anything as a result of it in the community in which you live.

On the other hand, there's a sense in which you can never have enough of it because it is by the knowledge of the truth that you grow in the knowledge of God. You come to know Him.

[19 : 24] And if I may say so, we come to this in a minute, you come to know one another as well as you gather together around the truth. Well, they continued steadfastly.

This was their abiding attitude. They needed the word. They needed the light of the word, the knowledge of the word. They needed the word as their food and their drink day by day. They needed its freshness in their lives, its sanction in the hands of the spirit in their lives, its motivating influence and its molding influence.

They needed it as their guide, their leader, their lamp, their light. So they continued steadfastly in it. They couldn't do without it.

That's a mark of the Christian. can you do without the truth tonight? Can you do without gathering to hear the gospel explained to you?

Well, if you can, my friend, I don't think it's a very healthy sign of your spiritual condition. You'll always find this, that when people are in the process of backsliding, this is one way where you see it always, where you see it people don't come the way they used to, to the truth.

[20 : 47] That's a bad sign in a person's life. And then, there was another thing that they had and it was really connected with this. They continued not only steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, but in Christian fellowship.

In Christian fellowship. fellowship is a very important word in the New Testament, very important. Indeed, it's one of the most important words in the New Testament. And the importance of it is seen here in that the basis of fellowship is a person's attitude to Christ.

You see, fellowship is, another word for fellowship and word that we often use in Gaelic for it is the word communion. Communion. Cochum. And communion is based upon union.

It is com union. The people who are united to Christ are brought together as a result of the union that exists between them and Christ Jesus.

[22 : 08] Now, that's of fundamental importance in Christian fellowship. Its basis is their union with Christ by faith. And then it has something else.

What brought them into this union with Christ in the first place? Well, I explained it. The word blessed to them by the Holy Spirit. And Christian fellowship therefore becomes union, a communion on the basis of our union with Christ and communion around the word.

Around the word. And that leads us to say this thirdly about fellowship or Christian fellowship.

People gather for Christian fellowship to discuss, to share one another's experience of the truth in

their lives.

You remember the story that John Bunyan tells when he was in the throes of conversion. Remember that. I know that I told this as well. He was in Elstow one day and he was really under conviction and he knew, awful man that he had been, renegade that he had been, he knew that there were some very godly women in Elstow.

And he knew that they used to gather together around as people used to in the old days. They used to stand together outside in the street and the cobbled streets round the door.

[23 : 37] And he sidled up beside them one day. He was a bit, he wasn't a Christian but he wanted to be. And he wondered, he knew that he was convinced that if he heard these people talking he would get some benefit from what they were saying.

So he sidled up as unobtrusively as he possibly could to be near these old women. And when he got within earshot he heard them speaking about their Christian experience.

He heard them speaking about the visit of the Holy Spirit to their hearts, the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ with them, the trials and the triumph of their faith, their ups and downs, their doubtings and their misgivings and so on.

And with a sinking feeling in his heart he realized that he didn't understand what they were speaking about. Why? Because the truth, because his experience of the truth and his experiences based upon the truth hadn't yet come to light to him and he hadn't yet got an understanding of them.

And I know that there are people not only in this island but beyond the island. I know that there are people who find fault and readily find fault because Christian people gather together for what is called Christian fellowship.

[25 : 04] Well I would say this, if people gather together for Christian fellowship, remember, because they are united to Christ and remember, because the truth has been blessed to them and remember, because they want to share their experiences of the truth in their own lives, if people gather together for that purpose, that's exactly what the New Testament church was doing.

Exactly. And of course, again, if people do nothing else but that, when they could perhaps be doing other things as a result of that, they are to be faulted.

But people shouldn't be faulted just because they gather together to discuss what the Lord has done in them and for them and what the Lord has been to them.

They gather together for Christian fellowship. They shared. What they shared particularly in these fellowships was their experience of the truth in the hand of the Spirit.

When you read these accounts of revival in the Christian church, you know the booklet that is circulated just now, written by Mr.

[26 : 35] McCauley, the senior minister of Bakken, which is available in the seminary. That ought to have been intimate today, but I forgot all about it. The book that tells about the history of the church in Carloway and the history of the revival that broke out in that district in the mid-30s.

When you read a book like that and many others, there you have a graphic account of the way in which the Holy Spirit was poured out in mighty power upon a group of people, gathers people together for Christian fellowship.

And if you and I don't do that, perhaps my friend, that's not an indication of spiritual development on your part or on mine at all. It may rather be the exact opposite.

It might not be an evidence of any liveliness spiritual in your part. It might, as I said, be an evidence of your spiritual torpor, your spiritual deadness.

in the first century, they gather together for Christian fellowship. And I'm sure of this, that when the Spirit of God touches a person's heart, that it moves him into a desire to get together with other people around the Word of God.

[28 : 07] God, and if you want to do that, you do it. And if you're afraid of people finding fault with you, well, you remember this, they'll find fault with you anyway. People will find fault with you anyway.

They found fault with the church in the first century. They took note of them that they were always together. You couldn't be in better company. Well, that was another aspect of their life.

They continued in Christian fellowship. And then there was something else. They continued, as we read here in chapter 2, in the breaking of bread.

Now, there are two things to be said about this. And I don't want to take up too much time with it. It's really a reference to what they did at the Lord's Supper, at the Lord's Table, when they came

together to remember the death of the Lord.

Now, this pattern evolved in the church in the first century so that every Lord's Day, in the morning, when they gather together, or in the evening, it seems as though they observed the sacrament.

[29 : 10] They had the sacrament. Don't you know that in the free church we only have communion twice a year? Twice a year? And some people ask, why is it that in the free church we only have communion twice a year?

Why in Stornoway only twice a year? There's no reason. The Kirk session of Stornoway free church could have communion as often as it lacked. It's in the hands of the Kirk session.

There is no law to say that you should only have it twice a year. The one reason is that there is always a fear that familiarity breeds contempt. And as I said, there's no reason why this congregation should have communion four times or six times or ten times a year.

of course, I know, as others have said, that there will be people up here, there will be people here as everywhere else who would be appalled at the idea of having communion more than twice. And yet, there are some people in this congregation who have communion at least twelve times a year, and some even twenty.

But if you were to have communion twenty times a year in this congregation, there would be up in arms. There's no reason why the church shouldn't have it, as often as it like, depending on what the Kirk session decides.

[30 : 26] The thing is this, that it is a sacrament or an ordinance which the church must observe from time to time. And what does the breaking of bread mean? Well, it means that as people sit together at the Lord's table, they share again the benefits of the Lord's death.

You see, the gospel preaches Jesus Christ crucified as a saviour. At the Lord's table, what is preached, what is presented? The same thing, Jesus Christ as a saviour, but not by word of mouth, but rather by the symbols of bread and wine.

Jesus is presented. And is presented to the eye of faith, eating bread and drinking wine is of no good spirit to anybody sitting at the table unless they recognize by faith that this is them signifying to all around what Jesus Christ means to them.

He's their food and their drink. He's their all and in all. They live by him. Live by faith in him who died for them. And it signifies something else.

They show forth his death. They are publicly witnessing to the preciousness of the death of Jesus for them. They are showing what it means to them.

[31 : 47] They are showing that this Christ has saved their lives, has revolutionized their lives, has changed the direction of their life. And they are prepared publicly to testify to that fact to all around them.

They show forth the death of Christ. And they show forth the death of Christ till he come. Till he come. It means that here are a group of people, wherever they are, who know that the Lord Jesus Christ is going to come again.

And who rejoice at the thought that he's going to come again. And they're sitting together at the Lord's table. And what they're doing binds them in time to eternity.

Brings together the now and the then. and what binds them now and then together is this act of doing something in obedience to his will till he come.

And they're waiting for his coming. And that's what the New Testament church was doing. Every week they took the Lord's, they partook of the Lord's supper, knowing that he was going to come, waiting for his coming, looking for his coming.

[33 : 02] That's the Christian here tonight. He and she knows that the Lord is going to come again. Until he comes, they obey his will. And one way in which his will is obeyed is by the breaking of bread.

And then there was something else that they did. They continued steadfastly in prayer. Now there were these four separate meetings in the New Testament church.

A meeting around the world when the gospel was explained. A meeting for fellowship when their experiences were shared. A meeting at which the sacrament of the Lord's supper was administered when Christ in symbol was shared amongst them.

And then there was this fourth meeting when they met together for prayer. For prayer. meeting. And the more that I study the New Testament church here the more encouraged I am in believing that we are following its pattern as closely I believe as any church can.

Because we have all these meetings that I've mentioned. All these meetings that I've mentioned. And here's another one. The prayer meeting.

[34 : 25] They met together for prayer. And you know this is very very important.

Because they had a definite idea of who God was as they prayed. And the thing that I believe characterized the prayers of the New Testament church was the sense of the awfulness the holiness the greatness the majesty and the holiness and the power and the sovereignty of this great God.

Unfortunately and I'm not trying to be critical in any way of anybody but unfortunately I think that we tend to live in a day when the hallmark of prayer seems to be to make God just one of our own friends perhaps even a special friend amongst other friends and prayer becomes so commonplace and so trite and it's so easy to address them as our dear Lord and dear this and dear everything as someone said there seems to be more dear than Lord in prayer nowadays now I'm not trying to be discouraging or critical of people who engage in prayer and particularly in public prayer because if there's one area in the life in the church's life and witness that I wouldn't dare seek to criticize it is it is the prayer life of the church

I have enough to do looking at my own without having to criticize anyone else's but the thing that I don't like in prayer is bringing God down to our own level and addressing the almighty as though he's a five year old who must understand every single word that I say now I believe this that when I preach the gospel I have a responsibility to God to preach it in as intelligible a way as possible to you and I know that many a time I fail when people leave this church and they say I hadn't a clue what he was talking about I deem that a failure on my part to communicate intelligibly to people what I'm trying to say but I hope that I never bring

God down to your level no matter how much I respect you and revere you I hope I never bring him down to your level God is infinitely above any one of us and the thing about the new testament church was this they recognized it his greatness and his sovereignty and their thoughts of God were colored what by by the truth of God himself remember what I said earlier how can you know God but in the truth my friend get to know God in the truth and let the truth permeate your every thought and your every conception of God never let him be the figment of your own imagination never let him be a being whom you think he is but always let him be the being who he says he is and you have enough evidence of his being in the truth his greatness and his gloriousness and his holiness and that is why you and

[38 : 40] I should never rush with unholy boldness into the presence of God never and I'm sure of this that the greatest men in prayer you ever heard and I know that you've heard were people whose prayers were impregnated with that wonderful conception of the gloriousness of God and that is prayer the soul in communion with that being who is infinitely higher than any one of us prayer is the expression of the creature's dependence upon the creator and he is so great and glorious and holy that you and I will never appreciate or understand even in eternity the inexpressible greatness of God and there's a picture in Acts chapter 4 of a group of people who are bowed in the presence of this

God and who implored this great God to reveal his power and as they prayed in faith the very building in which they prayed was shaken to its very foundations what a conception they had of God what a conception and they believed what he said about himself they believed it to you and to us do you feel a warm in the presence of God do you feel your awful unworthiness and your unholiness in his presence let me remind you again of some holy beings tonight in heaven who veil their faces and who cry holy holy holy the whole earth is full of his glory this was the idea that they had of him he wasn't one of them and this is what has happened in the 20th century he's become one of us he is not and he never will he is infinitely beyond what we are the king immortal eternal invisible that's God I still have a picture in my mind and I'm sure I know that you've seen him here picture my mind of the late professor Murray addressing the almighty in prayer do you remember it with upstretched arms without without awareness and consciousness of the glory and the holiness of God prayer is the creature coming into the presence of that God ah you say sure there should be more sure there's joy do you mean to tell me that joy is devished from a sense of the holiness and the majesty of God do you not realize that the bible speaks of people who joyed with trembling do you not realize that that is possible not only possible it is the only possible joy in the presence of God because joy in God is never ever divorced from a sense of the holiness and the majesty of God sorry for having to spend so much time on this but I think it's vitally important my friend have

reverence for the almighty have reverence for him give him a place in your thought and your affections and your prayer life give him a place and always remember who he is and never make prayer commonplace and try it never well they continued in prayer that is in fellowship with him and then finally there was this as they met like that around the world in fellowship in prayer and in the breaking of bread there was a wonderful spirit of joy in their lives remember how it's put in chapter two they did eat their bread with gladness and singleness of heart praising God and having favor with all the people now what is this well I spoke now but this was now the joy of the church you see the joy wasn't divorced from all the things that were mentioned they praised

God they blessed him they had their hallelujahs of course they did they had their moments of wonderful rejoicing in their heart how couldn't they do that they after all look at what God had done for them for them of all people why them well they had just crucified him hadn't they there were many of them who had been eyewitnesses of his death people had been played a part in the people who had cried crucify him crucify him we don't want this man to be king over us people had rejected their saviour now saved by the same saviour how could they not but rejoice and praise God do you do you do that tonight do you know what it is to say I will praise the Lord though thou wast angry with me thine anger is turned away they praised him as one who had saved them and there was an inward and an inner togetherness there was a sense of unity and purpose they were worried here in the one place now that doesn't mean that they were in the one place locally because there were 3,000 of them at the day of Pentecost there was no building then that could house 3,000 certainly of the Christian church this building couldn't do that even if you put all the buildings together I suppose in the island of Lewis that they would scarcely hold 3,000 people the church buildings well it doesn't mean that they were together in one place but rather that they were together in the same there was a togetherness of spirit there was a oneness and a gladness of spirit as they rejoiced in the Lord and one of them and with this I close one of them Peter put it like this he wrote to some Christians who were again scattered by the persecution many years after the day of Pentecost and he reminded them of their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and he put it like this he says your faith at the moment is being tried and you are going to find that as a result of the trial your faith is going to become precious to you when the

[46 : 14] Lord Jesus Christ appears whom having not seen ye love in whom though now ye see him not yet believing you rejoice with joy and speak and full of glory and I want to leave this thought with you at the close of this service here's something very very unusual and unnatural here were a people who were rejoicing in someone that they had never seen and here was a people who were rejoicing in someone whom they were not seeing now how is that done natural well I'll tell you and there are people here tonight who can tell you this the two things that feed love are these a person's presence and a person's fellowship and when both presence and fellowship are lost love becomes sadness and there are many homes in stormy tonight who are sad because the one they used to love is no longer with them and the one whose fellowship they used to share is no longer there they don't see them anymore but you look at the

Christian church what does it have faith in someone they have never seen and a rejoicing in hope in someone that they don't now see isn't that inaccurate how is it possible well I'll tell you faith tells them all about him you see they believe the apostles doctrine about Jesus they heard what the apostles were saying and they believed what they were saying same with Christians here tonight they have never seen Jesus Christ no one in stormy has ever seen him never but they've heard all about him and they love the one they've heard about they love him there's no one here in stormy tonight with whom Jesus is literally physically before the very eyes they can't say when they go home tonight that he's going to be there sitting by the fires that was physically they won't see him but there are many in stormy who are rejoicing in the

Lord tonight whom they don't see why because they know by faith that he's alive and he can communicate with them through his spirit though he's not with them physically and this is what was true of the new testament church they were all of one heart one mind they rejoiced in the Lord and they had favor of the people their lives were characterized by joy the joy of the Lord did that mean that they were smiling their faces all day that they were never at Jerusalem laughing their heads off no it was an inner feeling of peace and contentment and satisfaction with the Lord Jesus Christ they were saved by his grace and that was the source of their joy and they knew that he was alive to intercede for them to pray for them to enrich their lives and that filled them with joy that was the joy of the

Christian churches it met around the world met in fellowship met at the Lord's table met in prayer with a sense of the greatness and the glory of God who by his spirit was present with them filling their minds with peace and with joy may I ask you this are you a member of the church this church have you been brought together by the grace of God have you been saved by his grace have you been brought out of a life out of a service of sin into a life of service to the Lord Jesus Christ have you that makes you a member of his church and as a member tonight do you rejoice in the truth do you want more of the truth would you like to know more about if you're a Christian you would do you want to meet with people who are

Christians like yourself of course you do of course you do this is the nature of the church it wants to be together it's function as a Christian do you want to sit at the Lord's table of course you do why because the Lord has saved your soul by the power of his grace not because you're interested in religion that doesn't bring you to the table whatever you do don't come because of that but because God the Savior has saved you by his power and then do you want to pray of course you do it's natural for the Christian to lift his heart in prayer and in adoration to God and always give God the chief place in your life God remember this God the God of the Bible and then finally do you know what it is to rejoice in the

[52 : 01] Lord Jesus Christ to have the joy of the spirit in your heart and to know that the best is yet to be and that is true concerning those who love the Lord Jesus Christ ah my friend you make choice of this Lord and of this company and if you're with them in this world you can rest assured that you'll be an even better company in the world to come let us pray remember us now Lord and bless to us thy truth oh give us an understanding of what the word saying to us give us a hunger and a thirst for thyself and give us the blessing of the spirit of God in our lives bless thy word to us now and go before us and forgive all our sins for Jesus sake Amen