

The Church and Jesus' Lordship

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[0 : 0 0] Okay. So if you've been following our series, you'll know what book we're in this morning. So I'll let you turn to that now.

Oh, come on. It's Acts. There you go. I'll give it. It's the book of Acts. We're in Acts chapter 2. We're going to pick our reading up from verse 42 onwards.

So I'll fill in the first part before we get to the reading. The book of Acts begins with a waiting period where God's people, those who have followed Jesus, those who've believed in Jesus, are to do nothing but wait.

They're not to go out into the world until the Holy Spirit comes. And the Holy Spirit comes, and we have what's called in the beginning of chapter 2, the day of Pentecost.

And that is where the Holy Spirit, that's God the Spirit, comes in place of Jesus. Jesus goes back to the Father, and the Holy Spirit comes. Okay.

[1 : 1 7] So we have the triune God of Scripture in different ways throughout the whole Bible. In the Old Testament, you had God speaking through the burning bush. And then at the end of the Old Testament, you had the Lord Jesus Christ, the person of God on earth.

And then, of course, as Jesus ascends back to the Father in heaven, you then have the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, that come upon people in order that they become witnesses.

Peter preaches. Peter preaches a sermon, and thousands turn to Christ on that day. And then after that, after that great revival, the church grows very, very slowly all the way up till today.

The church never decreases in size. People simply exchange their earthly membership for a heavenly one. That's where they all go. And that's essentially the story of how Acts begins.

But Acts is also the birth of something. And it is the birth of the church. Okay, the moment you have a group of believers together on earth, the word for it is ecclesia, and it's the birth of the church.

[2 : 3 7] God's gathered people. And so, this is what these people do. Verse 42 onwards. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship and to the breaking of bread and to prayers.

And all came upon every soul and many wonders and signs being done through the apostles. And all who believed together had all things in common.

And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who are being saved. So, anything else you read in Acts as you go, that is the one thing that continues to happen.

And it even continues to happen today. May not be to the same measure as Scripture, which is a sadness. But those few verses there, verse 42 through to the end of verse 47, is simply the description of who we are.

[3 : 58] We're going to come back to that after we've sung this next hymn together now. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Okay?

[6 : 36] to be saved is to receive something which God has given. But to live under Christ as Lord, that's a different kind of standard now. It's the same person, but Lordship presupposes that the people beneath him who acknowledge his Lordship live obediently before Christ.

And therefore, the tension that you have in the book of Acts is one where people are faced with Jesus is Lord, and by the way, you're not. Okay? Jesus is Lord, and you are not. So the message is fairly simple. Jesus Christ, Savior of the world, Lord of all, risen from the dead for the forgiveness of sins. He and he alone is able to save men, women, boys, and girls, and only he can do it.

And those saved people, once they are saved, live obediently under the Lordship of Christ. Now, what doesn't happen is that Jesus is just Lord of saved people. No. Jesus is Lord of all, the whole world. And the distinction is those who live obediently under that Lordship, and those who don't live obediently under that Lordship. So the argument that, well, Jesus is your Lord, okay, is ruled out entirely in the book of Acts because he's Lord of all. Okay? Jesus is King of the world. He is the Lord of everything. This means that whenever we measure anything in this world, there's one basic measurement. Does it operate under the Lordship of Christ? Or does it under, does it operate under a worldly standard? And if it operates under the worldly standard, then it has to change. Okay? If we are praying in our homes, Lord, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, then we must recognize that the Lordship of Christ doesn't change people's lives from being unsaved to being saved, but it transforms the police service, the fire service, hospitals, schools, employment agencies, employers, employees. The impact that it has is on everything. And this is why the Lordship of Christ can often be diluted to the point where Christians are quite willing to say, well, he's my Lord.

And the answer is, no, he's not. He's everyone's Lord of whom you and I ought to live obediently before him. But the message to the world is, no, everyone has to live obediently before him. I can remember once back in the day taking a lesson on the Ten Commandments and asking the question, who should obey the Ten Commandments? And of course, all the hands went up. You know, these are teenage children.

And all the hands, well, God's people should obey the Ten Commandments. The world should obey the Ten Commandments. And too often we can think, because it's in the Bible, this is something that only Christians have to do. That's not the message. The message of the book of Acts is this is something that the world has to live under, of whom Christians model that, of whom Christians are the witnesses to that. And so right at the very beginning of the book of Acts, we have the power of the Holy Spirit coming so that you may be a witness. Okay? So whatever mark you want to say is the mark of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. Okay? The first thing that it is, a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit is a witness of Jesus Christ in this world. That's the defining mark of a person who has the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 35] So let's just summarize ever so briefly the book of Acts. Those who belong to God have to wait because their power to witness in the world doesn't come from them, it comes from God. So as I've said, the defining mark of their witnessing is not that they're able to do it, but they have been given the power to do it by being given the Holy Spirit. All Christians have the Holy Spirit, bar none. If you're a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. This is the very thing that Acts 1 wants to make clear right at the very beginning. It's not possible to be a Christian without the Holy Spirit. When John says back in the gospel, I baptize you with water, but the one who's coming, who's greater than me, will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, that's conversion. John is relating to Jesus who is speaking about the conversion of men and women, boys and girls. And so the Holy Spirit comes, first and foremost, to make God's people a witness on earth because some might say,

I'm not that type of person. Well, nobody's that type of person. They have to wait for the Holy Spirit to be made that type of person, to be able to go out into the world and say, Jesus is Lord, which means you're not. Okay? Jesus is Lord is effectively saying to the world, you're not. And that's the difficulty and the challenge of the message of the Lordship of Christ. It is true that the message of the gospel transforms lives, but the message that Jesus is Lord is an offense to those who want to hold on to the power that they have. The other thing that we notice when the Holy Spirit comes is it produces a brand new community of people who live a very ordered life, at least basically.

They follow the apostles' teaching, they're engaged in fellowship, they're engaged in the breaking of bread, and they pray. Okay? Whatever you think church is, it's at least those four things.

Whatever you're engaged in in terms of church, those are the four things, if you're part of the church, that you'll be engaged in with each other. Okay? There is no Robinson Crusoe Christianity here.

It's fairly plain that if you are exiled to an island like John was, okay, that's an exception to the rule. But the general generalization is that the church meets together to come under the teaching of God's word, to fellowship, to break bread, and of course to pray together. But as they go out into the world, they take this message that Jesus Christ is Lord, risen from the dead. And the message is met by different people at different times, with different responses. Peter on the day of Pentecost preaches this message, and thousands get saved. And then after that, Paul goes and preaches it elsewhere, and there's a riot breaks out because nobody wants to bow the knee to Jesus. The message that Jesus is Lord is a message that is a front to anybody who thinks they are. And I've often said that if a police force or a government does not acknowledge God above them, then they are pretending to be God. Okay? If there is no God above government, then government is acting as God. If there is no God above the police force, then the police force is acting as

[14 : 12] God. If there is no God above the schools, then the schools are acting as God. And there is no way of getting away from that because somebody has to set the standard. So the question is, who's it going to be? By what standard are we going to live our life to? Is it under the Lordship of Christ, or is it under somebody else's? I don't see there being any other option than those that are put out there. And so Christians learn, not necessarily the right way, but they know how to stick to the safe sins. Okay? So they're a witness in the world, but they're a witness in the world in accordance with the safe sins, not the unsaved ones. So a safe sin would be something like murder. You go out into the world with your non-Christian friends, and you're able to sit down over a cup of coffee and discuss that murder is wrong. Okay? That's a safe sin because both you as a believer believe that it's wrong, and they as an unbeliever believe that it's wrong. And so you can both condemn the same thing, okay, without ever talking about Jesus. Until that is, you get onto the subject of where the murder takes place. And then suddenly you'll find people in the world go, we're going to have to differ there. Because I believe murder is murder wherever it takes place, and it's not murder if it takes place inside of a woman's womb.

Okay? Be careful what you're saying, because, you know, the world will want to say, well, it's not murder then. It's only murder when it happens outside the womb. And I'll know. Murder is murder wherever it takes place. And so the sin is safe when you define it on the world's terms, but the moment you define it in biblical terms, suddenly you've got a problem on your hands. And the problem is not the issue at hand, but it's the other person who's disagreeing with you. So Christians know how to play it safe, okay, but you're not meant to. Okay? I'm not asking you to go out and pick fights, but what I am asking you to do is to stand up and fight for what is right. Either people are going to live under the lordship of Christ, by what standard will we live our life by? Will it be under the lordship, or will it be in disobedience to that lordship? And so these early Christians knew what was at stake.

They knew what it meant to go out into the world and say, Jesus is Lord. It meant that Caesar was not. Caesar was not. I'll give you a simple illustration of how that works out within a family context.

So my children don't get picked on, even the slightest, for going to church on a Sunday morning. Not once. Not once has any of their friends, including Christians once, taken the mick out of them for going to church on a Sunday morning. However, they do get the mick taken out of them for not being allowed out on a Sunday afternoon to do many of the things that they are.

Okay? The issue is not that their witness is not allowed to be a witness in church, but the moment their witness has an impact on the world around them, then suddenly, right? Because what are they saying? Okay? They're saying that Jesus is not just Lord in the church, he's Lord out there as well. And where do they get that from? Well, their terrible father, of course, who tells them such things. Okay? Because how do they know this? Well, because I teach them that. So let's not blame the child, let's blame the parents. Okay? And that's the type of blame that I'm willing to accept, because the Lordship of Christ is at stake. Okay? The Lordship of Christ is at stake. And that's how the book of Acts begins. Jesus is Lord. Never, ever forget that. And the question that the world is being asked is, by what standard, by what standard are you going to live your life? That's the standard, the question that the world is faced with, in the knowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Of all.

[18 : 24] The next thing that we move on to, then, is the question of mission rather than the birth of the church. Now, mission is important, but most people who want to talk about mission often start in the wrong place. They want to say, well, what is the church's mission? Right? But mission existed before the church existed. And the reason we know that is the case is because God's mission in sending Jesus led to the birth of the church. It was God's mission to seek and to save the lost. It was God's mission to send Jesus into the world that rejected him. It was God's mission to send Jesus to the cross.

And that mission resulted in the birth of men, women, boys, and girls becoming Christians, becoming saved. So, if we truly want to understand the mission of God, then we need to begin with God, not with the church. The church is the product of God's mission. The church is the result of everything that God did before we even got here. So, what does that mean? Well, you go read the end of Matthew, and what you'll read is Jesus giving what? The great commission to his disciples. And the reason it is a commission is because these new disciples are now being co-opted into the mission that already existed.

They're now being co-opted into the mission that God gave Jesus to do on earth. So, the reason it's a commission is because the mission's already around. It's already up and running. Join it, Jesus is saying.

Go out into the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That's the mission. And so, this early church has its marching orders. And its marching orders come from Jesus Christ. Out you go. Go and tell the world that I'm Lord of all. You will be my witnesses to this truth, that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, risen from the dead. Jesus has showed us how it's done. In fact, Jesus even told his disciples that they would do greater works than him. And that's not greater by means of standard, because Jesus is the standard. It's greater by means of amount. So, it's not surprising to say something like that Billy Graham witnessed to more people than the Lord Jesus Christ did. Because the Lord Jesus Christ was around for three and a half years on earth in his ministry capacity, and the church has been around for 2,000. So, the greater works that Jesus is referring to is to do with a greater amount of time that the church has been around, and the greater amount of people it has witnessed throughout the generations in comparison to the three and a bit years that Jesus did. So, when you read John, and you read great, you'll do greater works, don't, don't, don't get to think, I'm going to be able to do things that Jesus couldn't. That's not what it's saying. What it's saying is, the greater works is the greater amount of good works, because you're around for longer. Okay, you're, you're in this world for a lot longer. Jesus was around for three and a bit years, and the church has been around for 2,000 so far. They're the greater works done over a greater period of time. And the reason that's possible is because Pentecost happened.

Jesus ascended back to the Father, and he gave us his spirit, so that we would be able to take our marching orders and go get the world. Go and tell the world that Jesus is Lord. And the only reason we can do that is not because we can, but because God's spirit gives us the power to do so. Okay, who is going to have courage to go and tell anybody that Jesus is Lord? And the answer is no one.

[22 : 29] Unless, of course, they've been given the power of the Holy Spirit, God the Holy Spirit, who gives them power, I should have put it that way around, to go out and say those kind of things. And so throughout the book of Acts, you find, in some cases, a revival breaking out. In other cases, a riot breaking out.

Okay? Because telling the world that Jesus is Lord brings its associated risks. It's risky work to go and tell someone that Jesus is Lord. Now, of course, the lordship of Jesus Christ, of course, it means that he is able to save, but it also means that he's able and he has the right to direct your life according with all of his words, that we are to live obediently underneath him.

Now, this is demonstrated then in Acts 2.42 onwards, to begin with, by the identity of what a people like that look like. What do they actually do? Well, one of the first things that they do is that they meet together, and they meet together to listen to the apostles' teaching, who are the founders of the church. They're the ones who tell the church what to believe and why to believe it, and we have God's word so that we can imitate and copy the same. And out of that consensus belief, we then have fellowship.

Because two people can only walk together unless they're agreed. They have to be agreed to walk side by side. People who aren't agreed either have to not talk about those things, right? They're off the table, or they agree. And of course, one of the defining marks of the Christian church is that nothing's off the table. Nothing's off the table. Everything gets talked about, okay? If you want to talk about everything, we have to talk about everything. And that's one of the defining marks of the early church. It's not necessarily a defining mark of the church today. Out of sadness, I say that, but it is a defining mark of the church as it was established in the beginning. That then leads to, of course, fellowship.

And of course, fellowship involves serving one another, helping one another, being with one another. It doesn't just mean meeting together, but it means a number of different things that a fellowship should look like.

[25 : 03] Helping each other out, you know, parents helping parents out with each other's children. The younger people helping the older people out, the older people being able to instruct the younger people with wisdom. This is why you have passages in Timothy to tell you what men are to be like.

And you have passages in like Proverbs 31 in Titus 2, what women are to be like. The older ones instructing the younger ones. And the reason why that's to happen is because that's the definition of fellowship. That's what's meant to happen. But when you're in a church, right, where certain things are off the table, then there's just a breakdown in all of this happening. So the moment the first one goes, the rest of it goes immediately. And that's a real sadness. The moment you lose the first one, you lose the others. Of course, by the time then you get to the breaking of bread, this could be talking about meals as in around each other's house for hospitality. And I'm sure that it is.

And as a church, that's something that we ought to do. Okay, have each other around for meals. I'm willing to be invited at the end of this service today. It's just a joke because I understand what it's like. The moment you have two children, you're invited a little bit. But when you get to three, game over. Five, you're not even on the list anymore. You're just, no one considers you.

How are we going to get seven of them around the table? We just won't invite them. Okay, listen, I don't take it as a criticism. I understand that it's purely practical, but shame on you.

No, I'm joking. I, of course, it's not. Listen, I understand entirely. That's just the way that it is. Okay, unless, I guess, that's just the way. But the breaking of bread is more likely to be that communion is a serious matter. And communion is one of those things which people guard in the wrong way.

[27 : 03] It's right to guard it in the right way, but it's wrong to guard it in ways that it shouldn't be guarded. Because in the book of Corinthians, it clearly teaches that communion, taking communion, participating in communion, is of spiritual benefit, which if you do not participate in, and you stop people participating in, of course, if they're allowed to participate, and you stop them, but if they participate in the wrong way, then God's going to deal with them for that. But participating in communion means that you're spiritually fed in a way that you're not in any other way. So to skip the meal is to lose the benefit that comes with it. And to skip the meal often, or to only have that type of meal every now and then, means that the church is necessarily weaker by virtue of not having that meal that often. Okay? I mean, in a worldly sense, in sort of a natural sense, it makes perfect sense that if you only ate one good meal a month, okay, what kind of physical condition are you going to be in? You're not going to be that great. And so why do we think it's going to be any different if we elevate it to the meal that God gave us? Why are we expecting a, and that's not to say that there's something special about the meal, other than the blessing that God gives associated with that meal. And you can read 1 Corinthians, well, read the whole of 1 Corinthians, but read 1 Corinthians 10, 11 in particular, and you will see what I'm saying in those two chapters in particular. Both the warning of taking it in the wrong way, and the warnings against not taking it at all, and sort of missing out on the spiritual benefit. Now, once you've gone through all of those, then you're able to pray. Then the church is able to come together and pray. And too often, we mix these up, but that's the order that God gave us to them in. And I think God doesn't mess things up when he talks about order. I think the order here matters. Because teaching leads to fellowship, which leads to the breaking of bread, which then leads to prayer. It leads to prayer eventually, because how do we know what to pray unless we've received the word of God? Okay, well, we just, we just, we just perhaps hope for the best. No, the reason we come under the word of God is so that we know the type of prayers that God answers, is so that we learn to pray in accordance with God's will and God's ways. Not so that we're just stabbing in the dark, or perhaps, perhaps this one will please

God. Or perhaps this one might make him happy. Or I've done it three times today, he's bound to give me what I want. Okay? Those type of things exist, even if people don't speak about them out loud, because people are naturally assumed that if I pray more, okay, that I'm naturally going to be brought back to God closer. It could be true. But there's a number of other things that need to take place before that. The teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers.

We can't get top marks for all of them if we're only participating in one. That the identity of the church is that we participate in all of these areas. As the church grows then throughout the book of Acts, it grows by the proclamation of the word, and so a distinction has to be made. And that is, who are those going to be who go out into the world evangelizing and in prayer, and those who are going to look after the cares of the church? And so in Acts 6, you have this defining mark where deacons are set apart to look after the physical cares of the church. People who are needy, people who need help, people who need looking after. That's a deacon's role. And then, of course, the elders, as we read in Ephesians, they're given the spiritual work. The apostles here are the ones engaged in proclaiming the word. And throughout the New Testament, you have a well-structured church. It's beautifully ordered. And therefore, I get a little bit frustrated having taught on the church for a number of years, a couple of Bible colleges, to then, and have the experience of visiting a number of churches, why you want to do it differently than the way God's laid it out. Wouldn't it be better just to do it the way God has it, with pastor, teacher, with elders, with deacons, okay, with evangelists?

What's wrong with the way God has done it? Now, we don't have that problem here because we have that structure. But that's not the case in the church everywhere. And that's a real shame because I think God knows what he's doing. When God makes something, he makes it in a certain way so that it works. And I think if you start messing around with the nuts and bolts of the church, then, okay, it pretends to work. But even if it does work by the by, it doesn't honor the order that God put it in. Just because you can say, yeah, but I can do it this way, doesn't mean that you're honoring the person who wants it done the other way. Okay. And probably, I've had a few conversations like that growing up. Just because you can do it that way, doesn't mean that I've asked you to do it that way. By what standard are we going to live by? The issue is not that you can do it a different way, but whether or not you're doing it the Lord's way. So what we have then is a church that exists because of the mission of God. The identity of the church is spouted in Acts 2, 42 onwards through to 47. And the reason is so that the church may be a witness. When we tell the world that Jesus is Lord, what we're saying is by what standard do you live your life by?

That's what's going out into the world. So when Paul writes the book of Corinthians, one of the challenges that he has to overcome is that he's writing to people who are already married in a worldly sense. And then he has to tell them what a Christian marriage is because they have no idea. So now he's speaking into a context where you've got a believer married to an unbeliever, something that he can do nothing about because they were already married before one of them got converted. But he has to spell out to them by what standard should a marriage look like. Okay? And so the message of Jesus being Lord is not just that he's the Savior of the world.

[34 : 01] He is the Savior of the world. And people are saved by that message. But he's also Lord of all. This means that every man, woman, boy, and girl has to bow the knee. Every knee will bow. Every knee will bow.

And the question that the book of Acts is sort of implying all the way through is, when are you going to do it? Are you going to do it now in the day of grace where there is forgiveness and salvation in Christ Jesus, or then in the day of judgment, when there's no time left?

There's no time left. The message of Jesus being Lord is by what standard are you going to live your life and witness that to the world? That's what's being said. Okay? We're not saying that everybody who's married who isn't a Christian that their marriages are terrible. No, what we're saying is that that's not the standard to be married by. Jesus indicates what that standard is. The same with families. The same with a number of other things.

So when we go out into the world, what kind of a witness should we have if we're really going to believe that Jesus is Lord? Because one of the defining marks of the early churches is that they meant it.

When they said Jesus is Lord, they meant it. They really meant it. That's why they got themselves in so much trouble. So I have written, if you ever come into the manse, which you're more than welcome to, if you make your way through back to the room with the big table and where we have our dinner, it's not that big, but it gets all seven around just about. If you go to the back on the window, you will notice I've got this white chalk pen, this liquid chalk, and I write it on the window.

[35 : 59] And it's so that I see it every day I go in there. And it simply says this, that if we do not have, or I do not have, we do not have a Christian culture, okay, here, in whatever context it may be, then I am obligated to build one. It's not just a good idea, but if I mean that Jesus is Lord, then I'm obligated to build one. We have a very simple standard in our home, and that is we're not allowed to complain about anything, absolutely anything, unless we're willing to show how it's to be done better. Okay? I don't like the way the teacher at school is telling her, okay, take them out then. Do it better. I don't like the way the hospital, do it better. Okay? We don't have a right to say to them, that's not how it should be done, unless we have the courage to be able to say to them, it needs to be under the Lordship of Christ. Okay? Because that's the only way it should be done.

So if we're claiming that we truly believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, then one of the joys that come out of that is all of your complaining about everyone else in the world is going to stop. Aren't you going to feel happy about that? And it's going to stop because now you mean it.

Now you mean it. You're not going to complain about your employer. You're not going to complain about people at the hospital, or at the doctor's surgery, or in the police force, or other parts of your family. And you're not going to complain about it because they don't live under the standard of the Lordship of Christ. Don't complain about if the way they're doing things wrong, unless you're willing to tell them how to do it right. And the way for it to be right is under the Lordship of Christ. That is the only way. So no complaining. Show them how it's done. Okay? Same with the children. Don't get frustrated with them. Show them how it's done. And it's done by operating under the standard of the Lordship of Christ. Here's the exhortation then as I finish. In Acts 7, Stephen is killed. And he's killed because he's preaching a gospel message to God's people of old who have rejected not only Jesus, but who rejected God in their past. And so he points out that even in the days of Moses, you didn't listen to God. In fact, you turned to worthless idols instead of worshipping the triune God of Scripture. Jesus comes along and does what you failed to do, in that he represents God to the world, something which you should have done.

Stephen's basic message is sort of imitated by John Stott, who's sadly gone to be with the Lord, who said that the worst thing that can ever be said about a Christian or to a Christian is that you don't look any different than anybody else. You don't sound any different than anybody else.

Okay? If that said to you, me, then something's wrong. Something is wrong because we really should look and be like someone very, very different. So, in conclusion, the mission of the church benefits the world, but not in the way that you think. The mission of the church may benefit the world socially, but our real mission is to be a voice in the wilderness, a light in the dark, salt in corruption.

[39 : 52] That's what our witness really ought to be. Our message that Jesus is Lord is a confrontation to the world in telling them that they're not. It is the standard by which everything should operate under, which means that we don't have then a right to complain. Rather, we have a message to tell.

We need to show them how it's done. We need to imitate to them how it's done. Okay? Okay? It's Jesus doesn't complain from the cross about what unbelievers are doing to him.

He says, Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing. So, we shouldn't be imitating to the world the wrong kind of message. Okay? We should not be imitating to the world the wrong kind of message. I don't like what they're doing. That's not what Jesus said. He says, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing. And so, the message of the New Testament, at least the beginning of Acts onwards, and all the way through the Gospels leading to this truth, is that Jesus Christ is Lord, risen from the dead. Lord, overall, the whole of life for all of life. That is a great security for those who believe, and a great conviction for those who don't. Amen.