

16. The Powerful Presence of the Risen Jesus with His Saints

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[0 : 00] Well, if you'd open your Bibles to Acts chapter 9 and to the passage that we read, which is all about the powerful presence of the risen Jesus with his saints.

I'm not sure what kind of a week you've had. Maybe like me it's been a difficult one, a draining one, even at times a discouraging one. And I guess there's plenty to worry us and to discourage us in the world today.

We've got our televisions constantly telling us about this swine flu. We even got it in Scotland. I hope it's not fluing around in here. But added to our economic woes, it seems to be fomenting a sense of panic around the world.

Strange, isn't it, that our mighty world of humanity is being humbled by monetary systems we invented but can't seem to understand, and by tiny little particles and viruses we can't even see.

Humanity is easily humbled. Then I was reading on the front page of the Christian newspaper Evangelicals Now, an article all about the growing challenge to the Christian faith that there is in Britain today.

[1 : 19] It quotes Melanie Phillips, the columnist, saying this, with multiculturalism discriminating in favour of all who challenge the established values of this country, it would appear that it's Christians who have become the oppressed minority.

At every level, Christianity is being displaced from its core position in this country's national story. That was in one of our national newspapers. And the article goes on to tell how the BBC has recently sacked its head of religious broadcastings and seems very likely to appoint a Muslim to that position, and apparently a Sikh person is already directing the programme Songs of Praise.

Did you know that? Then on top of all of that, closer to home, as we've mentioned in prayer, is the shocking business of our own General Assembly coming up, which threatens to effectively approve open homosexual practice, utterly overturning the clear teaching of the whole of Scripture, and Jesus himself, and what it means to be human, what it means to be male and female, and therefore what it means to be obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, what the Gospel itself means is a call to repentance, to turning away from sin, to struggling with sin, not to affirming it and welcoming it. Well, it's all too easy to feel rather depressed and discouraged with the world in general and with the Church in particular.

Sure, of course, we're not in this country facing open violence and persecution, at least not yet, but we do seem to be more and more up against it, don't we, in the Church of Jesus Christ in Britain today.

[3 : 04] I guess that at such times, doubts inevitably arise in our minds, don't they? Just as doubts arise when you're up against it personally, in your own life, in your own family perhaps.

Thinking about issues with your own children, or husband, or wife, or your own workmates, things that you struggle with at home, and at work, and at school.

Does the Lord really know what's happening to me? Does he really care? Can he see? Is he even there at all? You ever feel like that? I wonder if it's only preachers like me that feel like that.

Well, you see, that's why Luke wrote these things for us. He wrote that his readers might have certainty, he says, concerning the things that you have been taught. That's what he says at the start of volume one of his book, Luke's Gospel.

So that people facing up to hard things, to doubts, and to fears, and indeed, very probably, to physical persecution, so that they would be certain that the Lord Jesus Christ has not abandoned them, nor has he abandoned his Church.

[4 : 12] Far from it, no. Even in the darkest days of trial and of hardship, Luke is reminding us of the powerful presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ with his saints, his Church.

And this little section that we have here in Acts chapter 9, at the end of it, is just packed with that kind of encouragement for us. Be still, says Luke, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

His glory is shining all around. His power is moving in this place among his people. So if you're doubting that this morning, because of what's going on in the world, or maybe what's going on in the Church, or even what's going on in your life, well, look with me at what Luke wants us to learn from this passage.

It's all about the presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ with his saints, with the people that he loves. About his effortless power, about his energetic people, and indeed about his eternal and extensive purpose.

First then, think about the effortless power of the risen Jesus at work through his Church in these verses. Whatever the world throws at the Christian Church, whether it's opposition from outside or from inside the Church, never forget that the risen Lord Jesus Christ is at work, and that his power is effortless.

[5 : 37] This passage is just full of the evidence of the victory of the Lord Jesus over his enemies. Indeed, more properly, over all our enemies, because that's who we need the victory from.

It shows us his effortless, sweeping aside of all the powers of darkness in almost every conceivable way. First of all, he sweeps aside the power of the enemy to exterminate the Church, simply turning on its head completely and effortlessly the determination of Saul and others to destroy it.

Look at verse 31. So, the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Now, to understand that verse, you really have to go back to Acts chapter 8 and verse 1, which is the beginning of the story. Acts 8 verse 1 says, And there arose a great persecution against the Church.

But the story ends, so the Church had peace and was built up and multiplied. Now, that's not how it was meant to be, is it? From the enemy's perspective. It should have read at the end of the story, So, the Church of God was wiped out all over Palestine.

[6 : 55] But no. With his effortless power, the risen Lord absolutely reversed the process. And far more than that. Because in Acts chapter 8 verse 1, you begin with a city church in Jerusalem, but at the end of Acts chapter 9, you have a multiplied church that is spread out throughout the whole of the territory of Palestine.

Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. It's the end. It's one of Luke's special marker verses. It's the end of stage 2 of what Jesus promised in Acts chapter 1 verse 8. You'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and then in Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.

And with effortless power, the risen Lord has achieved that end, and he has done it in such a way as utterly frustrates the power of the enemy who was determined to destroy the church, to exterminate it.

Just like when God rescued Israel from Egypt. The Egyptians charged after them into the dry seabed of the Red Sea to destroy them and slaughter them. But of course, the waters engulfed them, and they were destroyed, and God's people were set free.

Just like what happened in China when all the CIM missionaries were thrown out of China after the Cultural Revolution. Well, before in 1951. But far from exterminating the Chinese church, the Chinese church never looked back since that day.

[8 : 22] And not only that, it led on to a huge expansion of the mission of Christ all throughout Southeast Asia, not just China, through OMF today.

Then look at the effortless power of the risen Lord over the power of the enemy to enslave human life. Look at verse 32. Peter goes to Lydda and finds the saints there, and among them he finds Aeneas, who's been a paralytic for eight years, or maybe even it means since the age of eight he's been a paralytic.

And with a word, he's healed. He's released from that bondage of paralysis. Not by Peter, verse 34, do you notice?

Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed. The powerful presence, you see, of the risen Lord Jesus in the midst of his people.

It's just like Jesus, isn't it? It's so familiar, it's so obvious. Luke is clearly meaning us to remember when Jesus used to do exactly this same thing. In Luke 5.24, for example, when Jesus says to a paralytic in Galilee, almost the same words, rise, pick up your bed, and walk.

[9 : 36] And then there's the next story that you see in verse 36 to 42. You see it again. Again, the effortless power of the Lord Jesus at work against the power of sin and death to extinguish life altogether.

Here's Tabitha or Dorcas, a godly believer in Joppa. She's loved by everybody because she cares for so many people and helps them. Verse 39, you see it tells us she was a wonderfully practical Christian woman.

I've no doubt that Tabitha would pray with people, would read the scriptures with them and all of these things, but what's emphasized here is that she made them clothed, you see? Tunics and other garments.

She got involved in their lives. Very probably they didn't have much money and she was helping them. She showed her love for the Lord Jesus Christ in her love for these people. But then what a tragedy.

Dorcas, Tabitha, the beloved, the helper, much needed Christian woman, she dies. And they're absolutely bereft. But they hear that Peter's not too far away in Joppa, so instead of burying Dorcas, they run and send to Peter and say, come quickly to Joppa.

[10 : 50] And when he did, well once again, it's just as if the Lord Jesus Christ himself was there with all his power, isn't it? It's just like a rerun of Luke chapter 8, verse 54, where Luke told us about Jesus healing Jairus' daughter who had died.

Do you remember that story? What does Jesus do? Well, he sends them all outside, just like Peter did here. And his words to the little girl.

In Mark's Gospel, chapter 5, in fact, it tells us in the Aramaic, Jesus' words were Talitha cum. And of course, what he said here was Tabitha cum.

Almost exactly the same thing. And then just like there, Peter puts out his hand and she's raised up. It's just as if Jesus himself was there.

But in fact, it's more than that, isn't it? Jesus himself is there. It's the presence of the risen Lord Jesus with his saints. And effortly, his power is at work through his church.

[11 : 54] And in this case, particularly through the Apostle Peter. Now notice here the variety. Notice the difference in the story. Aeneas is healed just with a word. It's a command given by Peter.

With Dorcas, it's different. It's not so. It's a cry to God in prayer. With Aeneas, there doesn't seem to be any faith exercise at all. Peter just heals him. In Dorcas' case, it's different.

And there does seem to be some expectation and faith exercise they send for Peter. I think perhaps that's deliberate that Luke is telling us both of these things that are so different. He's not saying to us, look, here's the magic pattern.

If you do things this way, if you follow things this way, it'll happen to you exactly the same way. No. That's not the point. The point that Luke is making is to tell us that the power of the Lord Jesus is present in his church and through his church to accomplish everything that he will decide to do and that we're never to doubt that.

And see also what that power is always seeking as its goal. That's the fourth thing here. Above all, the power of Jesus is at work to overcome sin's power to exclude people from the true life of God in Jesus Christ.

[13 : 07] Do you see that? Do you see how in both stories, verse 35 and verse 42, the end result is that those who have hitherto been excluded from the life of God are brought to new life in Jesus Christ.

Verse 35, in Lydda and Sharon they turned to the Lord. Verse 42, in Joppa many believed in the Lord all through the effortless power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember how Isaiah had promised, I will give you as a covenant to the people, God said about his coming servant to open the eyes of the blind, to bring prisoners from the dungeon of darkness.

What a comfort to Luke's first readers with all their fears, with all their doubts, to know that whatever they faced in the world, the risen Lord Jesus is at work with power through his church and that power is effortless.

It is not a great challenge to us too today. I've certainly needed to know that this week I can tell you and I'll need it next week too and so will you and always. When you read about dire things happening in the national church or in the world church or when we face difficulties in our own church life or when we face challenges and hardships and discouragements in our own Christian walk, we need to know that, don't we?

[14 : 32] And it's just as true today despite all of these things the presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ is at work in his church even here in Scotland even in the church of Scotland believe it or not and we should be encouraged and not despairing.

The Lord Jesus Christ is winning great victories of power over the power of sin to enslave and to exclude people from the life of God. People have joined our own fellowship here just recently that the Lord Jesus Christ has liberated from the enslaving power of addiction of various kinds.

People among us right now are having their eyes opened to understand the Lord Jesus Christ and are turning to him for forgiveness and finding life. Isn't that a wonderful display of the power of Jesus amongst us?

On Wednesday night those of us who were there at the meeting about Epaphras Trust were hearing how God is doing wonderful things through the ministry that we have here day by day and week by week.

Doesn't that encourage you and lift your spirits despite all the things that we read about? And as far as the Church of Scotland is concerned we've had a wonderful experience just this week of the reality of real Christian fellowship as messages of support and prayer have come from believing people in churches all around the world literally from every country and denomination.

[16 : 00] And we know don't we that all over the world today the risen Lord Jesus Christ is calling people out of darkness and into light by the powerful evidence shown to people of who he is and what he's done.

Not normally it has to be said by fresh evidence through mighty miracles of this kind though he does still do these things sometimes where he wills. It's important that we realize we shouldn't be too taken up with that if you go back to Acts chapter 4 you'll remember that a miracle in itself doesn't cause people to believe.

The opponents there were very plain we can't deny it it's been done right in front of us but they still rejected and still wanted to kill people. But God is all over the world today opening people's eyes to the evidence reliable evidence that we have in scripture of what Jesus did do and his apostles did do once and for all in history.

His effortless power is at work all through the world today in his church and we have to remember that especially in dark days of discouragement and despair and sometimes in his mercy God gives us special encouragements just to show us that he's alive and he's working and our work isn't in vain and that's what he did here in Lydda and in Joppa.

I had a little evidence of that last Sunday evening just in terms of our own work here I met a couple who were visiting us for the first time but they said well we've actually been part of your congregation because we listen in every Sunday to the ministry on the website because where we live we don't have a minister and there's very little Bible teaching and then what we do is we make our own CDs and pass it around our friends and so we've got a little fellowship going which is really a little plant from your own church here I didn't know that the guys who sit in a little back room putting the CDs together and putting things on the internet they didn't know that but the effortless power of our Lord Jesus Christ is at work through his church even when we don't know it to bring blessing to his people and glory to his name never forget the effortless power of the risen Lord Jesus at work through his church but the second thing this passage alerts us to is the energetic people of the risen Lord Jesus at work as his church and the message here is just as clear you see whatever the world is throwing at us never forget that we must be at work just because

[18 : 38] Christ's power is at work effortlessly through us so we as Christ's people can be energetically at work ourselves Dick Lucas always used to say the evidence that God is at work is that man is at work and George Campbell Morgan in his book here on Acts tells us that this is a great and wonderful example of the communion of saints at work and that's true because it gives us a picture of God's people together truly in mission as his church every part doing its own work and doing it energetically see verse 32 tells us that Peter went out and about in his ministry of apostolic teaching and encouraging but notice what he finds when he goes to Lydda he finds saints he finds a church well how did that come about well Lydda is northwest of Jerusalem it's on the way to the coast it's between Azotus and Caesarea does that ring a bell well if you look back to Acts 8 verse 40 you'll see that after

Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch we're told that he travels from Azotus to Caesarea preaching the good news to all the towns that he passed through so almost certainly what we see here at Lydda is a church planted by the evangelist Philip and the same goes for Joppa as well which is just a bit further up the coast before Caesarea so Peter you see is building on the work of someone else a church planter and an evangelist who's gone before him and it's interesting to notice by the way in the passing the kind of people that we find among the saints in Lydda and Joppa there's Aeneas he's rather a poor thing isn't he obviously he hadn't received miraculous healing from Philip so that wasn't why he believed in the Lord and joined the church he'd obviously believed the message of Jesus as the truth no doubt and even though he saw no immediate change to his own circumstances he believed and that's worth noting as is the fact that probably somebody made a great effort to enable him to hear the gospel maybe Philip sought him out himself perhaps more likely others brought him because he was paralyzed poor thing as he was he became one of the saints of

God church isn't just for beautiful people you see not just for highly gifted people I guess that Aeneas couldn't really offer very much in the service of the church could he but nevertheless the risen Lord Jesus Christ wanted him in his church it gets rather wonderful then there's Dorcas of course very different case clearly she was very able and very gifted with her hands but she'd been taught thoroughly hadn't she she'd been taught to open her heart towards other people and therefore to serve Christ using her hands by serving his people so Philip's work was obviously very sound and thorough it was very energetic it was very effective then came Peter's energetic labours notice by the way it's not just Paul who went on missionary journeys Peter did too in fact Peter had a very special job among the apostles and this whole section from here through the end of chapter 12 focuses on

Peter remember Jesus had said to Peter and the apostles I'm giving to you the keys of the kingdom and in a very real way it's Peter who uses that key to unlock the door of the gospel of Christ to the different areas of the world in chapter 2 it's Peter who's to the fore on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem in chapter 8 it's Peter and John who go up to authenticate the gospel coming to the Samaritans and the Samaritan Pentecost and then here and in chapter 10 it's Peter who paves the way for the gospel going to the Gentiles to Cornelius and his household it's only after that that the Gentile mission is mainly taken over by Paul but do you see how the people of the risen Lord are just like the Lord himself they're tireless in their energy for the kingdom back in Luke chapter 4 verse 43 Jesus said I must preach the gospel to the other towns and cities also I was sent for this purpose well to be an apostle means to be a sent one that's what the word means and they're animated by the same energetic desire of the heart as their master had of course it's not just apostles and evangelists here is it who are energetic servants for the

Lord no there's Dorcas verse 36 tells us she was full of good works and of charity not just generally a good worker but fool she was energetic and continuous here's a woman with a great great ministry it was obviously important to so many people and therefore it was hugely important to Jesus and yet nobody's ever heard of Dorcas have they I guess you might still find folk in Buchanan Street who've heard of the apostle Peter the apostle Paul I bet they've never heard of Dorcas unless perhaps they're a sewer I remember when I was young my grandmother used to have little boxes of pins that were called Dorcas dressmaking pins I don't know if those still exist today the dressmakers were able to tell me so somebody had heard of Dorcas and made a link there but nobody's really ever heard of her but if ever there was an energetic member of Christ's church it was Dorcas and she was loved and so she was deeply missed when she died because she was like her master too when I was young

[24 : 26] I used to sing a little song that said Jesus' hands were kind hands doing good to all and so it is with his people kind hands expressing kind hearts and they're all different aren't they?

Dorcas and Peter and Philip they had different ministries different gifts but because they were people who knew the effortless power of the risen Lord was truly at work through his church then they were unable to be energetic people of Christ whatever the circumstances whether as pioneer evangelists and church planters or through building up and teaching and strengthening the churches with apostolic teaching or whether just living their lives practically and powerfully for Jesus Christ caring for those who needed their help you see friends that's just the same for us today isn't it?

to have great confidence in the power and the presence of the risen Lord Jesus to have a great understanding of the sovereign power of God at work in the church is never ever at least as far as the Bible is concerned never ever an excuse for us just acquiescing oh well the sovereign Lord Jesus will do it all effortlessly no it's quite the reverse it's a call to action isn't it?

to energetic ministry of all kinds precisely because we know that the Lord's power is among us and that he is at work and will be at work through us and we all have a part to play sometimes it is a very specialist thing church planting and evangelizing and so on sometimes it's a very specific role of teaching and building up in the doctrine and faith as Peter was doing sometimes it's in all manner of practical ministries like Dorcas whether it's making tunics or whether it's cleaning toilets or whether it's caring for widows or just all kinds of other wounded souls in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the way I want to say that it's something that says a great deal about Philip's ministry that it produced people like Dorcas don't you think?

Philip if you remember he had experience didn't he of the need for care in the ministry of Christ's church look back to Acts chapter 6 he was one of the seven who was appointed for that task to make sure that the widows were properly cared for obviously Philip was a people person and you need to be to be able to nurture the Lord's people in his church the gospel isn't just about knowledge in the head is it?

[27 : 05] it's about Christ in the heart unless you see that unless you're striving to be like that yourself you'll never be part of building a church as Philip did that is a real Christian family a place of care and of nurture and love and shared life that's very very important sometimes keen Bible students forget that they think it's all about being in the head and it all becomes rather dry and impersonal it's all about assimilating knowledge of the Bible in your head now don't for a minute misunderstand me here I'm not saying not saying what we need in the church is less Bible and more social care not at all Philip would never have said that remember chapter 8 when he was in the desert with the Ethiopian eunuch he was straight to the Bible wasn't he?

straight to explaining the gospel to him but it's the kind of Bible ministry that not only confronts an intellectual African from Ethiopia but also produces the spirit of Dorcas in the church that we need and it produces people obviously who are not just spiritual dependents not people who are me focused all the time focusing on my problems and my needs but the energetic spirit of a Dorcas loving Christ and showing it by active love for his saints what do you see here in the picture in the story of Dorcas is a great picture isn't it of 1 Corinthians 15 58 Andy Smith was just quoting that to us on Wednesday evening at the prayer meeting here is a Christian woman always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that in the Lord her labour is not in vain 1 Corinthians 15 58 you see Dorcas knew that and so did Peter and so did Philip so whatever their circumstances they were energetic people of the risen Lord that brings us to the final thing to the expansive eternal purpose of the risen Lord at work for his church see the message is that whatever the circumstances whatever the world is throwing at us never forget friends never forget where it's all going

Christ's purpose is expansive and above all it is eternal see the extraordinary miracles that we read of in this chapter are real they're things that did really happen Luke is a physician we know that he's no fool he wasn't the kind of person to be taken in by mumbo jumbo and by quack pills and superstition of course not he was a man of fact cold hard medical fact doctors are like that you asked Norrie Miller what it was like trying to sell drugs to consultants you could never convince them that your drug worked isn't that right Norrie?

they always wanted more proof and they would love ripping you to shreds these are material medical facts we're dealing with here this man didn't have the wool pulled over his eyes but nevertheless these miracles are much more than just fact they're signs that's what John calls them all the way through his gospel isn't it?

signs because they point to something greater still something more they point to the promise of God's coming kingdom that's what the prophets longed for isn't it?

[30 : 39] the day of the Lord the new heavens and the earth when weeping and sighing and mourning would be no more when the curse of Genesis 3.15 when the curse would be no more when the serpent would be destroyed forever in God's world at last would be freed that's what Isaiah chapter 65 pictures for us doesn't it?

it ends by saying they shall neither hurt nor destroy on all my holy mountain why? because dust shall be the serpent's food because the ruler of this world and his curse will be absolutely destroyed forever and that's what the Christian gospel is really about it's about a new heaven and a new earth the home of righteousness a world with no more sin with no more curse with no more paralysis with no more death it's hard for us to believe that it's hard for us even to conceive of it isn't it?

and yet Jesus has given us glimpses of that eternal future signs that everything that we hope for is not fantasy but it's real and that it will come and we need that don't we?

we need to be reminded where it's all going even John the Baptist needed that do you remember? if you go back later to Luke chapter 7 you'll see just after Jesus had done something very similar to what we see here he'd healed a paralytic and he'd raised to life the widow's son and John the Baptist servants come to him on John's behalf and they say are you really the one who's to come?

and Jesus' answer is the blind see the lame walk lepers are cleansed the deaf hear the dead are raised and the poor have the good news preached to them what do you think John?

[32 : 36] don't be offended don't doubt you're seeing a glimpse of everything that was promised true it's not all that you longed for not yet but it's enough surely it's a sign to give you confidence that more and better is certain to come we sometimes think that don't we?

in springtime we have a few warm days and the clocks change and the lights get the evenings get lighter and then all of a sudden we're plunged back into the north wind and rain and you think is summer never going to come?

are we plunging right back into winter? well no it's not summer yet but there are some signs aren't there? I saw them yesterday walking in Rook and Glen rhododendrons in flower the cherry blossom out yes it's not summer yet still need my overcoat but it is coming see that's what Acts 9 is saying to us there are signs these things are pointing to where it's all going don't forget that that's what Luke's shouting to us of course these were wonderful and immediate encouragements to those people that these things happened to to Aeneas and Dorcas and their friends and their family but it's much more than that both Aeneas and Dorcas got sick again for certain and they died but their temporary restoration they're rising up did you notice that language in verse 34 and in verse 40 he rose arise they're rising up points to that great eternal purpose of the risen Lord that all his saints shall stand and rise forever for this is the will of my father said Jesus in John 6 that everyone who looks on the sun and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day that's his eternal purpose he has the key to death and Hades and one day he's going to unlock that door forever and the dead in Christ shall rise first says Paul then those who are left will join them and meet the risen Lord and so he says we will be forever with the Lord what Luke is saying is this is a sign of that don't forget it and when things are tough when you're downcast when you feel like giving up don't forget

Christian friends where it's all going we too shall rise and not only shall we rise but when we rise we'll see before us the fruit of all of our labors for the Lord as well just as Dorcas did when she was raised that day remember what Paul says to the Corinthians 2nd Corinthians 5 verse 10 we shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body whether good or evil yes that's true Revelation 14 verse 13 says our deeds will follow us you're not talking about being saved by our works of course not we're justified only by God's grace not by works lest anyone should boast Paul's very clear on that nevertheless the Bible is just as clear that what we are that what we've become that what we have done if we have built with treasure that will last that is if we've invested in the things that matter in the eternal things in the people of the Lord Jesus Christ and the people of his kingdom and done it for their eternal good then that will in itself be a great reward that meets us on the last day because no such labor in the Lord and for the Lord is in vain not ever and what happened to Dorcas on that day she was raised was a foreshadowing of that wasn't it out she came and there were all the people that she had helped and loved showing all that she had done she had done for them

David Gooding says in his commentary this if ever a woman caught sight of the lasting effect and value of her work it was Dorcas when she was raised from the dead it surely gave her an added impetus to go on working with all her might for the rest of her life I'm sure it did and Luke you see says to us don't forget where it's all going one day each of us each of us who trusts in Christ will hear the words that Dorcas heard arise and our works also will follow us what a motivation to go on energetically serving the Lord whatever the circumstances isn't it nothing in your labor for the Lord is in vain remember the eternal purpose of the risen Lord where it's all going lastly remember the expansiveness of that purpose don't miss the significance of that last verse verse 43 Peter stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon a tanner well you say big deal so what well it was a big deal because a tanner as well as being a rather smelly occupation was actually something far more significant than that it was an unclean occupation the tanner the tanner was unclean because constantly he was in touch with dead bodies and no good

[38 : 18] Jew could ever go near a tanner apparently if a woman found herself betrothed to a man and then discovered that he was a tanner she was allowed out of the betrothment out of the engagement with no penalty at all but Peter doesn't seem to care does he he's very happy to lodge with this unclean man in his unclean house just like Jesus remember this man receives sinners and eats with them they said but you remember when Jesus went to Levi's house similarly unclean a collaborator with the Romans a tax agent remember what they said why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners and what did Jesus answer those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick I've not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance his purpose is not just eternal to bring his saints to the great day of resurrection oh yes it is and that's glorious but it's expansive right now today to bring sinners to repentance to make them into his holy people to turn them into saints whatever their background however unclean they've been in the past in their eyes or in others however bad their social smell or their stigma might be to other people his purpose is to make such people into his true family and to bring them every one of them who trusts in his name to the everlasting joy of that day of resurrection when they too will hear those words arise arise

I guess there's few greater honours in our society than to kneel down as a commoner before the queen and to hear her then say arise sir Fred or whatever it might be that's a bad example isn't it oh dear sir David that's much better I doubt if I'll ever hear those words I doubt if most of you will hear those words but if we're Christ's people we shall all hear those far greater words won't we on a far greater day when he says to us arise arise to live and die no more arise and enter the joy of the master never ever forget where it's all going so friends when life is hard when you're discouraged at the state of your own life or the church or your battle for sin in your own life or whether you're losing heart in your own

Christian service listen to Dr. Luke's prescription he says remember the effortless power of the risen Lord he is at work always through his church don't be blind to the evidence there's plenty all around the world and even right here in front of your nose and remember the expansive eternal purpose he has calling even the lost even the outsider the sick the sinful calling them into his eternal belonging as his family with him and calling us to labor for him in a labor that will never ever be in vain however unseen it might be by this world remember that and so be energetic people of God and he'll do for us spiritually speaking what he did for Aeneas in the words of Hebrews 12 he'll lift our drooping hands and strengthen our weak knees and make straight paths for our feet so that our walk with him and with each other won't be out of step and won't be out of joint but will be strengthened and made joyful and made fruitful for his eternal kingdom as we rejoice afresh in the knowledge of the powerful presence of the risen

Lord Jesus Christ with his saints even a motley crew like us here today Amen let's pray Lord Jesus Christ how we thank you that you joy to presence yourself even with people like us and to work through us things which shall be eternal and things which will never fade and things which will never be counted as nothing on the great day of your coming help us and encourage us we pray we might be true workmen of God who never lose heart because we know what our God is like in Jesus name Amen we end by singing the words of that great hymn workmen of God who lose not heart but learn what God is like things and they could down to delicies

Amen. Amen.

[44 : 53] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.