

The Risen Jesus at Work in His Church

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Date: 15 July 2018

Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 00] I'll return now to God's words and to the book of Acts. So Acts chapter 9. If you have one of the church visitor Bibles, that's page 918, 918.

So Acts chapter 9, and last week we were looking at the first chunk of chapter 9 with the conversion of Saul. And so we pick up the story after that event in, I'll read from verse 31 through to the end of the chapter.

So Acts 9 verse 31. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you.

[1 : 16] Rise and make your bed. And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which translated means Dorcas.

She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died. And when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.

Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, Please come to us without delay. So Peter rose and went with them.

And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him, weeping, and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.

But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body, he said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes.

[2 : 24] And when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

And it became known throughout all Joppa. And many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. And may he bless it to us this evening. Good.

Well, please do, as folk are settling, turn to the chapter in Acts we read earlier. Acts chapter 9. And do have that in front of you as we spend some time together now, looking at it together.

Amen. Amen. What does a healthy, multiplying church look like when it's about to explode in missionary zeal and great gospel expansion?

[3 : 37] Well, that's a snapshot that we're given here at the end of chapter 9. In verse 31, which we read earlier, we read about the peace that the church in Judea and Galilee and Samaria knew.

The great opponent of the gospel, Saul, he's no longer a persecutor of Jesus. But rather, he's a proclaimer. And he's a partner with the church in that task.

Great turnaround that we saw last week. And so, because of that, the church knows great peace. It's being built up. It's multiplying as the spirit of the Lord is at work.

And at this point in the book of Acts, we're really on the cusp of a major movement of the gospel. As it really does begin to go towards the ends of the earth.

In the next chapter, chapter 10 and 11 and following, we see the gospel going into Gentile territory. And being given the approval by the Jerusalem church to go forward with that mission.

[4 : 38] So, we're on the brink here at the end of chapter 9. We're on the brink of a major shift in the direction of the gospel. We'll see that next week. But before we get there, we have this little section here at the end of chapter 9, verses 32 to 43.

And it records two healings undertaken by Peter. The healing of Aeneas, the paralyzed man, and Tabitha, or Dorcas, a dead woman who's brought back to life.

And at first glance, it's a bit of a puzzle as to why these are here in the book of Acts. It's sandwiched between two monumental moments. Saul's conversion in chapter 9.

And then the Peter and Cornelius story and all that follows from there. So, why does Luke, the writer, why does he include these two healings at this point in his account?

Now, these, of course, were very significant for the people that were healed. These were big deals. It's also true to say that these things actually happened. But there were a great number of things that actually happened, but which Luke didn't include in the book of Acts.

[5 : 52] He had to be selective. He had to choose what to include and what not to include. So, why has the Holy Spirit guided Luke to include these two healings at this point?

That's the question we'd have lodged in our minds whenever we come to any particular passage of Scripture. We're not just asking what it says. We need to ask why it's being said.

What is the meaning? First, for the original audience, but then secondly, for us. Why is this here?

What's the point? Well, I think Luke includes these two healings to show us the power of the Spirit of the risen Lord Jesus at work in his church as we're about to enter a major new phase of gospel growth.

We see in this passage the power of Jesus' Spirit at work in his multiplying church. And Luke is writing to give you and I and his first readers certainty about that fact.

Certainty. Certainty. About the fact the risen Lord Jesus is at work in his church. So, two things particularly tonight to notice. So, firstly, the multiplying church knows Jesus powerfully at work in its midst.

[7 : 12] It's the first thing we can't miss. The multiplying church knows Jesus powerfully at work in its midst. It's clear as we read these two paragraphs that Jesus is powerfully at work in the midst of his church.

And he's doing the work. He's doing the sorts of things that he did during his earthly ministry. He is defeating the great enemies that humanity faces. Disease. Death.

And, of course, sin. Two remarkable healings are recorded for us. Now, the first takes place in Lydda from verse 33. So, Peter.

We haven't seen him for a while in the book of Acts. But here he is. He's going about visiting the saints. The Christians in the area that Philip earlier had been in and was gospeling. So, Peter is walking Philip's tracks.

He's building up the church. And he meets one Christian in particular, a man called Aeneas. And he's been bedridden for eight years because of his paralysis.

[8 : 16] And Peter says to him, he speaks to him and says, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed. And immediately he rose.

It's clear, isn't it, that it is Jesus Christ who heals this man. So, very similar to the healing of the paralytic that Luke records in his gospel account back in chapter 5.

You can read it later. It's very similar. And in that account, once Jesus had forgiven the man's paralyzed sins back in Luke chapter 5, he said to him, I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.

And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he'd been lying on and went home. I think Luke, having recorded that earlier in Jesus' earthly ministry and again here in Acts chapter 9, Luke is saying to his readers at this point, Jesus, the risen and ascended Lord Jesus, is still very much at work in his church.

It's a great encouragement to them to know, to see that, to hear it. But it wasn't the only healing we read about. Others had heard about it down the road in Joppa, where a dear Christian woman, Tabitha, had fallen ill and died.

[9 : 36] The Christians there, they sent for Peter, verse 38. They heard he was around and heard what had been happening. And they said to him, please come to us without delay. And again, Peter, by the power of the risen Lord Jesus, performs a Jesus-like miracle.

And it's very much, again, like the raising of Jairus' daughter, recorded in Luke chapter 8. Peter enters the upper room. He puts the mourners outside, like Jesus did.

He kneels and prays and says, in the original language, he says, Tabitha kumi. And again, that brings to mind almost the exact same words Jesus said to Jairus' daughter.

He said in the original, Talitha kumi. Just one word different. Now, these extraordinary healings, they would have brought great encouragement to the multiplying church, wouldn't they? But also great encouragement to Luke's readers. Think of Theophilus there as he's reading through this account. Remember that Luke is writing in order to give certainty about the things that they've been taught.

[10 : 49] Certainty that the risen Lord Jesus was powerfully at work in his church, just as he had promised back in chapter 1, verse 8. Back there, he promised his disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

And that the result of that giving of the Spirit is an enabling of his people to announce the message of the risen Lord Jesus so that many would hear and respond and participate in God's saving purposes.

God promised, Jesus promised his disciples back there, he would equip them with his power. And here we see the risen Lord Jesus at work through his disciples, just as he promised.

So two things particularly to note about these powerful works of healing undertaken by the risen Lord Jesus through Peter. Two things to note. First, they are powerful healings that lead to widespread repentance.

Note that in both cases, the impact, the result of these things, these remarkable healings is widespread repentance. Look at verse 35. All the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him.

[12 : 01] They saw Aeneas walking. They saw him and they turned to the Lord. And again, down in verse 42, with the news of Tabitha's healing.

And it became known throughout all Joppa. And many believed in the Lord. And that's the real miracle, isn't it? That is the real source of comfort to the multiplying church.

That, even more than the remarkable physical healings, would have encouraged no end. The risen Lord Jesus was at work not just healing, but bringing people to repentance, turning to the Lord, believing in the Lord.

To know, for them to know that Jesus was powerfully at work, overturning the power not only of sickness and death, but also of the enslavement to sin.

Jesus was at work doing that. To know that he was calling people to himself, adding to the numbers of his church. That would have been massively encouraging, don't you think, to those reading this.

[13 : 04] The gospel, just as Jesus said, is going out. People are being added. There's growth. And that was, after all, his key task that he set for his church in this gospel age.

That's just what he said for them to do back in chapter 1, verse 8. They were to go to the ends of the earth as his witnesses, proclaiming the good news of Jesus as the promised Christ, the one who died for the sins of men, who rose again, who now reigns at the right hand of the Father.

So encouraging as they went about that task of calling people to repentance. So encouraging to know that Jesus was with them, equipping them in that task. He was in their midst, right there, helping them.

Encouraging for those first readers, but also for us today. It's something that's been clear all the way through Acts. God is, through his spirit, with his people, equipping them for their work.

But that is something that we need to hear again and again and again, isn't it? And particularly at this juncture in the gospel. It is about to make a massive step into Gentile territory.

[14 : 22] It's one of those take a deep breath and get stuck in sort of moments. This was the gospel going global in the next chapter. So for them to have at this point, and Peter in particular, as he's the one who's going to be making those big steps, significant for him to be reminded just at that moment that the Lord Jesus was with them.

Great power enabling him and equipping him. Reassuring him that he was indeed in their midst. He was with them. Very much at work. He was then and he still is today.

He is the one. It's the Lord who is bringing people to himself, isn't it? Every evidence of new life in this church. Every new profession of faith. That is the Lord at work.

It's greatly encouraging, isn't it? So be encouraged. Every time there's a baptism. Every time there's a profession of faith. Thank the Lord. He's at work. Be encouraged by that.

That's the first thing. But notice secondly that these are healings that point to a permanent restoration. They're healings that point to a permanent restoration.

[15 : 32] Now these healings of Aeneas and Tabitha, they are wonderful, aren't they? But they were temporary. They were real healings.

They really did happen. But Aeneas would eventually get sick again. Tabitha would face death. But they are healings that point us towards the permanent restoration.

It points us to the restoration that Jesus' resurrection guarantees. These healings are foretastes, little glimpses of what will one day be true for all who trust in the Lord when the new creation comes.

Now the last time we read about Peter and healing is back in chapter 3. And there, through the Spirit, Peter heals a lame beggar.

But Peter then goes on to give the explanation of that extraordinary healing. Let me read from his explanation, chapter 3, verse 19. So Peter is saying to those who have witnessed this, who have gathered, he says this in response to their witnessing of the healing.

[16:41] He says, Repent, therefore, and turn again that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring of all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

So that was Peter's explanation. Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring of all the things about which the prophets spoke about.

So the full and final restoration of all things, that will only come when Jesus Christ returns at that appointed time. Then, and only then, will the restoration of all that was promised through the prophets be finally and fully fulfilled.

Only then will every deaf man hear. Only then will every lame man walk. Only then will our physical restoration be complete. And so we must wait.

We must wait for that full restoration. So we must be clear in what we believe and what we proclaim about the Christian gospel. It is about a real restoration.

[18:03] A real physical restoration of all things. But only fully and finally in the future. It's a future restoration.

And so these wonderful healings we read about here in chapter 9, they were real. But they weren't permanent. They were a foretaste of what was to come. But the encouragement they bring is real. They do bring great encouragement because they demonstrate that Jesus' power is real. He can really bring permanent and lasting healing. They give us a little foretaste of what will be true for all eternity when he returns.

So it's clear as we read these two paragraphs it's clear that Jesus is at work with great power in the midst of his church.

And he's at work as they're about to take a huge step in the advance of the gospel. We're given certainty that Jesus is at work in his church defeating the great enemies that humanity faces.

[19:10] All our greatest fears all our greatest enemies Jesus defeats. It's greatly encouraging. He's still doing that today. His church is still multiplying across the globe.

He's still very much at work as he promised he would be. And the gospel is growing. It is going to the ends of the earth even if it seems like it's treading water here in the west.

I was just hearing today from a very good friend of mine who is heading out to Zambia shortly to head up some mission work there. And he was saying to me that there are more Christians today in China than there are people in the UK.

Isn't that encouraging? The gospel in almost every other corner of the world apart from the west is exploding. God is powerfully at work. And that's the first major truth for me to grasp in this passage. The multiplying church it knows Jesus powerfully at work in its midst. So be encouraged by that. He is at work. He is in the midst. He is enabling his church to do the work.

[20:17] So secondly then and our final point. The multiplying church works purposefully for Jesus. The multiplying church works purposefully for Jesus because it knows that Jesus is powerfully at work in its midst.

To put it another way the fact as we've seen that Jesus is at work in his church means that Jesus' people are themselves at work.

And we see this particularly in our second passage here the second event and it's the account of Tabitha's resurrection. Now this receives a lot more detail than the account of Aeneas.

Now why is that? Well notice some of the little details that Luke includes for us. We find out a lot more about this woman and about the impact she had on those around her.

Look at the end of verse 36. Luke records that Tabitha was full of good works and acts of charity. Look on to verse 39.

[21 : 25] Peter's arrived and we read that all the widows stood beside him weeping and showing Peter they were showing him tunics and other garments that Dorcas Tabitha had made while she was still with them.

So twice Luke emphasizes her good works the care the compassion that this woman had for those who were in need around her. This was clearly a woman who had been gripped by the gospel whose whole life had been transformed and put to work for the service of the Lord and for others. She had grasped hadn't she the full implications of the gospel. Think back to John the Baptist words as Luke recorded them back in chapter 3 of his gospel where John says to the crowds who are listening he says bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

repentance and the crowds then pressing for details and he answered them whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none and whoever has food is to do likewise.

So the evidence of Jesus at work in his people is not just that they turn from sin and repent it's also that their whole lives are then turned around so that they work for him and for the church for others around them.

[22 : 50] Spirit-filled Christians not only speak about Jesus they also like Tabitha here serve those around them. They work for one another and in so doing they strengthen the church.

It's just as we see in Acts chapter 2 after Pentecost the pouring out of the spirit we read a little passage which provides us with a little portrait of the restored community the early church who had received the spirit and not only were devoted to God's word but they also expressed real unity and real devotion to one another through sharing food possessions meeting needs and these are the marks of a multiplying church aren't they?

Yes of course great devotion great commitment to the word of God to the proclamation of the gospel absolutely the reaching out to the lost with the word building up the church with the word but also real love acts of service to one another caring for the widows just as Tabitha had done here meeting real needs and loving one another in practical ways and that's an encouragement to all of us isn't it I think we shouldn't relegate practical care for one another in the life of the church so key it really does build up the church we don't just preach the word and sit back we work don't we living out the implications in the life of the church all we need to do is open our eyes and look around us and see those sitting next to us seeing the needs that are in front of our eyes we don't need to wait for someone to come and tap us on the shoulder to direct us we can see a need and do something share food provide someone with company offer babysitting walk with someone through their grief join them in their rejoicings it's an encouragement isn't I think because so many of us are already doing these things and they do matter listen to the way

David Gooding put it and I'm indebted to him really for these observations but listen to what he says picture Tabitha's situation she had been busy at her social relief when death intervened and brought all her work to an end but soon she opened her eyes and there stood none other than the apostle Peter himself who raised her up and took her to the next room and there were the people for whom she had worked so hard before she died and they were greeting her with unbounded joy and gratitude and there too was the work she had done the garment she had made such gratitude such honour such recognition of her labour if ever a woman caught sight of the lasting effect and value of her work that woman was Tabitha when she was raised from the dead it must surely have given her an added impetus to go on working with all her might for the rest of her life that's wonderful isn't it if ever a woman caught sight of the lasting effect and value of her work it was Tabitha there's a line in one of my all-time favourite films Gladiator it's a bit cheesy at points I'll admit but one of the characters Maximus says what we do in life echoes in eternity and that is absolutely true for the Christian isn't it the fact of Christ's resurrection means that you and I have the certain prospect of our own resurrections at his coming and the assurance that all our labours in this life have not been in vain what does the Apostle Paul say at the end of 1 Corinthians 15 he says therefore my beloved brothers be steadfast immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain what we do in this life is not in vain all we do for the Lord and his people is not in vain and that is a great encouragement isn't it what we do now what we do for one another it matters it matters eternally no small act of kindness is wasted not one tunic that tabitha made was wasted and that is a great encouragement but it's also a challenge it challenges us to be

[27 : 41] Christians who generally do seek to work for the church to look to the needs and interests of others again the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians reminds us he says that we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what is done in the body whether good or evil so we must ask ourselves are we marked by good works for Christ and his church not to earn our salvation we can't do that our salvation is a gift but do we do good works because of our salvation in light of all that Christ has done for us so are we genuinely are we really looking to the interests of others serving them or are we just so wrapped up in our small worlds we can't see beyond our own concerns it's a challenge isn't it but it's also a great encouragement the Lord sees each act of kindness and we know because of Christ's resurrection that even the smallest act of kindness and service will last beyond this life and on into the new creation forever that really ought to encourage us this evening so what does a multiplying church look like what does a church that is engaged in gospel expansion look like we've seen in this passage that it's a church that knows that Jesus Christ is at work in its midst and amongst his people and because it knows that because it knows that Jesus is at work it too is also at work witnessing to the truth but also evidencing the fruits of repentance real love real care for one another so let's pray that these would indeed be the marks of the Tron church let's pray shall we our heavenly father how we thank you that you are a working father through the Lord Jesus Christ you are working in your church you are really in our midst powerfully bringing people to yourself overcoming our greatest enemies so Lord encourage our hearts and help us to be a working people praying proclaiming and practicing loving each other welcoming serving knowing that not one thing we do in your service is in vain so encourage our hearts for we ask it in Jesus name Amen con Be five in