

The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus

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Date: 17 March 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I guess most of us will probably have been concerned about something this week, perhaps a health issue, maybe a financial concern, perhaps a family worry, maybe a relationship problem or job insecurity.

And whether we'd call ourselves a Christian or not, we may have been wondering, well, why is this happening to me? Or even, does God really care about my life and about my situation?

We might be wondering whether anything in this current situation will, in fact, turn out for good. And yet we don't just ask these kinds of questions when it comes to ourselves and our lives.

We ask them because of what we see going on in the world around us. Why is this happening? Or does God know what he's doing? Or where is all of this going to end up?

But what we get from our reading in Acts chapter 9 is really the assurance that God does care, that God does know what he's doing, and that God does work in our lives.

[1 : 0 8] And he also works in our world. In fact, the good news of Jesus Christ is our only hope, the only hope for your life and my life and the only hope for our world.

And the reason is because the Christian message is a message that tells us that God is at work restoring broken lives like our own. And he is also at work restoring this broken world.

And we all know it's broken. And so it's only as we grasp how God works and what God is working towards that we will be better equipped to cope with what we are currently facing, whatever situations are happening in our lives.

And we really see this through this passage in Acts chapter 9. We've given the title, The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus. And so I'd like us to look at it under three headings this afternoon.

First of all, we see the plan of the risen Lord Jesus. Secondly, we see the power of the risen Lord Jesus. And then thirdly, the purpose of the risen Lord Jesus.

[2 : 1 6] The plan, the power, and the purpose of the risen Lord Jesus. So first of all, the plan of the risen Lord Jesus. Now, remember, just to catch us up on where we've been in the book of Acts, Luke is the author of Acts as well as his gospel.

And so he's writing about the acts of Jesus in a sense in a two-volume work with Luke's gospel first of all, and then with the book of Acts. The gospel records the great acts of Jesus while he was on earth.

And then Acts, in essence, records the great acts of the risen Lord Jesus, showing us that he is still at work in his world by the power of his spirit.

And so the risen Lord Jesus has a plan, and he is working out his plan through his church, his people. And remember, he outlined his mission plan before he ascended into heaven in Acts chapter 1 and verse 8, where we read, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

So Jesus is sending his people out on mission in the power of his spirit to the ends of the earth. And his people, his church, are to be his witnesses until the day that Jesus returns.

[3 : 41] And so after Jesus rose from the dead, he went back up into heaven, he ascended, but he didn't just leave his people to get on with the mission themselves, because through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus promised that he would be present with his people.

And so the risen Lord Jesus continues to be active, then in Acts, but still today as he advances his plan. And we saw this happening last time when we looked at the beginning of Acts chapter 9 and the conversion of Saul.

In Acts chapter 9, verse 15, when Jesus converted Saul, he said, this man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles.

Okay, so what's been happening so far is the mission has largely been happening in Jerusalem, and now it's expanding out, as Jesus said it would, to include not just Jews, but Gentiles.

And so after Saul, we're back to Peter again, because Peter has got an important part to play in the advance of the mission plan of Jesus to reach the Gentiles. And we come to this next week when we get to chapter 10.

[4 : 50] But today's reading in Acts chapter 9, verse 32 to 43, in essence, prepares the way for the Gentiles. And that's you and me, prepares the way for the Gentiles to hear the good news of Jesus Christ.

And we pick up on this in the geography in our reading. So verse 32 says, as Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda.

So the people were in a place called Lydda, which was northwest of Jerusalem towards the Mediterranean coast. And it was on the road to Joppa, which is the other place mentioned.

You notice in verse 36 to 38, he was on this road. So Joppa was on the coast. And it's what we know today as Jaffa or Tel Aviv.

So if you're flying to Israel today, you'll probably land. The airport you'll land in will be in Tel Aviv. And Jaffa is just beside it. And so the church is spreading out here from Jerusalem.

[5 : 55] And the believers that Peter visits were possibly, probably the result of Philip. Remember Philip the evangelist preaching the gospel. Acts chapter 8, verse 40.

So all of this that is happening is part of the plan of Jesus for building his church. And so Peter is going towards the coast and his ministry is paving the way for mission to the Gentiles.

And that's why at the end of our reading in verse 43, Peter is staying at the home of a man called Simon, who happens to be a tanner. Now a tanner worked with dead animals.

So it was a job that made a person unclean. Not in the sense that if you've got a job with Glasgow City Council Cleansing Department, then you'll be unclean. Or if you've been out in the garden all afternoon, that you'll be unclean.

Not unclean in that sense, but unclean to the extent that Jews would avoid such people. It would be against the law to be near an unclean person, like somebody who works with dead animals.

[6 : 58] And yet what happens is that Peter is quite happy to stay with this unclean man in his unclean house because Peter is to be the one who is to take the message of Jesus to the Gentiles, along with the Apostle Paul.

As we get these two miracles just before, in essence to show that Peter is a true apostle. He's a true apostle. So what he's doing is the right thing.

Because the power of the risen Lord Jesus is working through Peter. And so Peter's words and Peter's actions carry with them the authority of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

And so Peter is going to offer the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles because the gospel of Jesus is starting to break down these barriers between people, between different groups.

And so before we look at these miracles themselves, let's not miss here what really is a welcome invitation that comes from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[8 : 04] Because the plan of the risen Lord Jesus, as we see it unfolding here, is to draw people from every nation, from different people groups, to himself.

So starting here with Jews, it's winding out to Gentiles. Because Christianity is not just for people who speak a certain language or who come from a certain place, like other religions tend to be for.

But Christianity is never restricted to a certain type of person or language or from a certain place. Christianity, compared to every other religion, is really the only true world religion.

Where you don't need to live in a place or speak a certain language or be from a certain culture in order to become a follower of Jesus Christ. And you don't need a religious background or an upbringing in order to be acceptable to God.

Because Jesus' plan is big enough, it is inclusive enough, and it is gracious enough to include anyone. Because Jesus loves all people.

[9 : 14] And through faith in Jesus, we find a welcome into his family, into his church, no matter what a race or class or background or lifestyle. Because Jesus welcomes us despite what we are, so that he can change us into what he wants us to be.

So Jesus is for all people. That's the message of Acts. Jesus sends his people out into the world to tell the world about him. So the people will come to him.

When Jesus says his plan is for his people to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, it's obvious that Jesus wants everybody the world over to hear the good news about him.

And so that obviously includes you and me. And those people in your family who don't believe in him. And also those people in your workplace who don't believe in him. And your neighbors. And perhaps it includes you as well.

Maybe you need to hear this today. Because you're thinking God would never welcome me. Jesus would never accept me. You don't know what I've done.

[10 : 25] How could a loving God and forgiving God forgive my life, my mistakes? But it's a gracious invitation of Jesus.

The plan of the risen Lord Jesus is to welcome people to himself. To turn from their sin, their old lifestyle, and to turn to Jesus in repentance and faith.

Okay, that's our first point. The plan of the risen Lord Jesus. Secondly, the power of the risen Lord Jesus. And we see the power of Jesus in these two miracles. It's Jesus who heals the paralyzed man.

And it's Jesus who raises the dead woman. Now, both of these incidents, you'll notice, are desperate situations. And they're hopeless in human terms.

These are really poor people. But the point is that it is the power of Jesus that can heal and that can raise from death.

[11 : 27] In fact, it's interesting because the miracles recorded here in Acts by Luke are recorded in such a way that they're reminiscent of the very miracles that Jesus did himself during his earthly ministry.

So, first of all, there's this man, Aeneas, verse 33 and 34. There he found a man named Aeneas who was paralyzed and who had been bedridden for eight years.

Aeneas, Peter said to him, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat. Immediately, Aeneas got up. All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

Now, this miracle is reminiscent of Jesus healing another paralyzed man. I think you know the story. It's in Luke chapter 5 and it's also in Mark chapter 2.

Remember the man with his friends who comes down through the roof of a house. And what did Jesus say to him? He said, get up, take your mat and go home.

[12 : 28] And hear what does Peter say. He says to Aeneas, get up and roll up your mat. And so he's healed. He's no longer paralyzed and he can walk again.

And then there's Tabitha, secondly, or Dorcas, as she's called. We read about her in verse 36 to 38. In Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabitha.

In Greek, her name is Dorcas. She was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time, she became ill and died and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.

Lydda was near Joppa. So when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, please come at once. Okay, so the Aramaic name Tabitha and the Greek name Dorcas both mean gazelle.

It's an interesting fact. But see what happens to her. In verse 39, Peter went with them and when he arrived, he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

[13 : 38] Okay, so this miracle is reminiscent of Jesus raising a dead girl to life again. And I think you know that story too. It's in Luke chapter 8 and also in Mark chapter 5.

The story of a man called Jairus and his 12-year-old daughter had died. And Jesus raises her to life again. And in that miracle, the miracle of Jesus, what did Jesus do?

Well, he sent people out of the room, didn't he? And then here, Peter does exactly the same. In the miracle of Jesus, Jesus took the little girl by the hand.

And here, Peter does the same thing. Even the words spoken to the dead person in Jesus' miracle and in this miracle are almost identical.

So Jesus said, Talitha kum, which means little girl, get up. And then the commentators point out that if Peter spoke Aramaic on this occasion, only a single letter would be different, with Peter saying, Tabitha kum, which was her name.

[14 : 47] And the point is, basically, that in each case, the miracle of Jesus, the miracle of Peter here, the words spoken to the dead person are virtually the same.

And it's highlighting to us this close relationship between the miracles of Jesus in the Gospels and the miracles of the apostles in Acts.

And it's telling us that both of these miracles, whether Jesus on earth or the risen Jesus in heaven, both these miracles are dependent on the power of Jesus.

And so we're meant to see that the power at work in Acts continues to be the power of the risen Lord Jesus. And that's why Peter says there in verse 34, Jesus Christ heals you.

He's not saying this is my doing, but he's saying this is Jesus who's doing this. And then when Tabitha, verse 40, with her, Peter gets down on his knees and he prays.

[15 : 43] Because Peter had no power to heal the sick or raise the dead, but Jesus did. And so Jesus is continuing to do his work through his apostles, like Peter, on earth, whilst he directs it from heaven.

And that's why it's so easy. Because if Jesus is the author of human life, then recreating a pair of legs is easy for him. If Jesus is the author of human life, then raising a dead body is easy for him.

Notice that Aeneas' healing was instantaneous and complete. He didn't need any physio to strengthen his leg muscles. I know some of you go to physio for various issues.

Imagine he never needed it. Well, for Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, and then his legs are fully functioning. And then there's Tabitha, who died, and she's instantly raised to life again.

So both of these were effortless miracles. They happened as if Jesus was right there. Because, of course, Jesus was right there.

[16 : 56] The risen and ascended Lord Jesus continues to do his saving work through the apostles. And so I guess the question for us is, well, what do we make of miracles today?

Is this what we should be expecting to happen on a regular basis within the church? Should we head off to the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital over in Govan through the Clyde Tunnel and go around the wards and say to people, Jesus Christ heals you.

Get up out of your bed. Take your bed and go home. Or maybe even go to the mortuary and take dead people by the hand and say to them, come on, get up.

I guess we could, but we'd be even more sick than the people that we were trying to help, wouldn't we? Of course we shouldn't do that. The point here is not simply about the miracles.

Two one-off miracles. Because miracles, like paralyzed people walking and dead people being raised to life, aren't normal. And we shouldn't expect them to be.

[18 : 07] Just think, Peter didn't heal everybody, did he? Jesus in his ministry didn't heal everybody. And that's why we shouldn't expect this kind of thing to be normal.

We should remember that Peter was an apostle. And Jesus was powerfully working through his apostles using his power so that they could perform miracles.

Jesus was doing it through them. And he was doing it through them because these miracles were authenticating the message of Jesus. The message that Jesus is Savior and Lord and he saves.

The miracles are backing up the message of Jesus. And that's why when you read through Acts, what are miracles often called? They're called signs and wonders or wonders and signs.

Again and again, signs and wonders, wonders and signs. And they're signs because they're pointing to the salvation that Jesus Christ gives. That's their purpose.

[19 : 14] And of course, we're not saying that Jesus doesn't do miracles today. Of course he does. Jesus is Lord. Jesus can do anything he wants to do.

Jesus has got effortless power to do anything. When he wants, to who he wants, whatever he wants.

And so Jesus is at work here not simply to make one man walk again, as amazing as that is, not simply to raise one woman from the dead, as amazing as that is, but to reveal his great salvation, to reveal his plan for the world.

So he's working here to restore individual lives, like these two people, but he's also working because he's restoring the whole cosmos, the whole of creation, the whole world.

And that takes us to our third and final point, the purpose of the risen Lord Jesus. So we've seen the plan, we've seen the power. What about the purpose of the risen Lord Jesus?

[20 : 21] The purpose is essentially salvation. The salvation of individual people, but also the restoration of all things.

And that's what these miracles are signs of. Because they point to something far more significant, far bigger, far greater than a paralyzed man being able to walk or a dead woman being raised to life again.

Because despite the healing of Aeneas and the raising of Tabitha, they would still die. They did still die. That's why the miracles aren't an end in themselves.

They're previews of something far greater. They're previews of what Jesus has started to do and they point to what is yet to come.

And that is the full restoration of the world by Jesus. And we can pick this up from the language that's being used here. And just note this.

[21 : 23] Just look at how Peter addresses the paralyzed man first of all and then how he addresses the dead woman. He uses the exact same word of command. It's there in verse 34.

And it's there again in verse 40. The very same word is translated for us as get up. It can also be translated as arise or rise up. The point is it's a resurrection word.

Because when it's used elsewhere in the New Testament it is used to refer to the resurrection of Jesus. of God raising Jesus from the dead.

And so it's hardly an accident that Peter uses this word here. And it helps us grasp that there's something more to these two miracles.

There's signs pointing to the plan and the power and the purpose of the risen Lord Jesus. They're pointing to the reality that the resurrection of Jesus gives salvation and the promise of resurrection life.

[22 : 29] To the reality that his resurrection gives salvation. But also promises not just individual salvation for us but promises salvation for the world.

For a new world that is free of suffering and sickness and death. And that's why Anais and Tabitha are really like just brilliant picture portraits of the salvation that Jesus brings.

Because the good news of Jesus is that when we are united to him by faith we share in his life. So we share in his resurrection life.

Just think about this. Anais and Tabitha were hopeless and helpless. He was not moving one inch on his own. And she was not going to come alive again.

But we too are just exactly like them. We're in their state paralyzed and dead without Jesus Christ.

[23 : 39] And whether we realize this or not the reality is that our sin against God completely disables us. Paul says in Ephesians that we are dead in our transgressions and sins.

We're not doing anything for ourselves to save ourselves. We're not giving ourselves any hope by anything that we do. Jesus needs to do it for us. There is nothing we can do about our desperate human condition.

That's why we need Jesus to heal us, to give us new life, to restore us to God. In fact, the realization that we're paralyzed and dead before God is the first sign of hope for us.

Because only then will we seek help. I mean, who of us goes to the doctor when there's nothing wrong with us? But the sign that we're working or getting closer to being cured or healed or helped is that we recognize there's a problem.

there is something wrong with us. We're sick, so we need help. And so the restoration here can only happen to us when we acknowledge our sin.

[24 : 51] And the good news is that the death of Jesus on the cross means our sins can be forgiven. And then the resurrection of Jesus from the dead means that we can have everlasting life.

And so Jesus invites us into a restored relationship with God right now as individuals while we wait for Jesus to restore all things in the future for this world.

And the risen Lord Jesus will bring about a new creation, a new heaven, and a new earth where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

It will be all gone forever. And isn't this the world that we all long for? Of course it is. Listen to Steve Jobs, the co-founder and former CEO of Apple.

He died of cancer aged 56. And his biographer, a man called Walter Isaacson, had a conversation with him before his death and he says this, I remember sitting in his backyard in his garden one day and he started talking about God.

[26 : 04] He, as Steve Jobs, said sometimes I believe in God, sometimes I don't. I think it's 50-50, maybe. But ever since I've had cancer, I've been thinking about it more.

And I find myself believing a bit more. Maybe it's because I want to believe in an afterlife, that when you die, it doesn't just all disappear.

Steve Jobs, I think his words probably describe the longing that the majority of human beings have. The longing that, and we want to believe this, that it all just doesn't disappear when we die.

That life's got to be worth something. And that there is actually such a thing as an afterlife. And there isn't nothing. Well, the good news of Jesus assures us that there is better still to come.

But unlike every other belief, every other philosophy, every other worldview, we can be sure that the best is yet to come. But why?

[27 : 17] How? Because of the resurrection of Jesus. It proves to us that the best is yet to come. And it is coming, just not yet.

But we do get a glimpse of what is yet to come here in Acts chapter 9. It's like a small preview watching on your phone while you wait for the movie to come out in the cinema in glorious 4K ultra HD.

They're the best kind of films, aren't they? What the Bible is saying to us is, what you've got now is not the world as it's meant to be. But here's a glimpse in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and his power at work in this world to show that this world will one day be restored.

There is hope for the future. There is a glorious future to look forward to because of what Jesus has accomplished in the past. So, the message of Christianity is such good news.

It's the best news for our world. You don't get this news anywhere else. You get selfish, sinful people trying to fix things and make things better, but after world history, we realize that's not working, is it?

[28 : 43] But with the Christian gospel, we get hope. Hope for our lives that are broken and need restoration, but hope for our world that is broken and needs restored.

But it's good news that we've got to respond to. And that's what happened in our text. I wonder if you noticed that. The miracles at the time resulted in people responding to Jesus.

So, verse 35, in Lydda, we read, they turned to the Lord. Lord. In verse 42, in Joppa, we read, they believed in the Lord. That's how the people responded to Jesus.

They turned away from their sin and they believed in the Lord Jesus. Now, there is nothing more important than for you and me to have our sins forgiven.

And we can have them forgiven now. As we await a perfect body in a perfect world in a perfect future. And so, the reality of this awesome truth, the truth of the Bible, the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, should define our lives and should shape our lives as we look to the day when this world will be rid of sickness and rid of death for good.

[30 : 04] And until then, the risen Lord Jesus is still at work. He's moving forward His perfect plan. He's doing it with His mighty power.

And He is achieving His great purpose. And so, if you want to be part of what Jesus is doing, turn to Jesus.

Believe in Him. Because Jesus will restore our world to be the world we all long for. Not now, but it is coming in the future and it will certainly happen.

But along with that, Jesus can change your individual life right now. He can change its course. He can change its future. And He'll give eternal life that will see you through death and into this perfect world that He will bring.

And the way that you can be part of that is by believing right now. Believing because of what He has done in the past, right now for what He's going to do in the future.

[31 : 16] somewhere. Yeah.