

Series: The Relentless Gospel
“Gospel Confirmation and Kingdom Expansion”
Acts 9:31-43 / Ryan Patty / 4.18.21

Good morning Christ Community Church! Thankful to be here and be gathered with you. Before we jump into the book of Acts I want to make a quick and exciting announcement, we have some new members to recognize!
New members!

Kurt, Lee, & Ben Thomas. Todd & Bryony Kiker (for those interested in learning about what membership at CCC looks like we have a two week class next month in May so be sure to watch for an announcement for that)

Alright now back to Acts. Acts chapter 9 if you will go ahead and turn there.

The great theologian and philosopher Johnny Cash once said, "I have tried drugs and a little of everything else, and there is nothing in the world more soul-satisfying than having the kingdom of God building inside you and growing."

Now, theological precision aside, what Johnny is getting at is that there is something intrinsically different, intrinsically soul-satisfying, intrinsically life altering when a man or woman becomes a born again child of God. When he or she is transferred, as it says in Colossians one, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light there is a miraculous change that takes place. As Christ inaugurated His kingdom here on earth, and as it progresses throughout the world and reverses the effects of the fall, there is change taking place. A change that is founded upon the power of God. It is as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4 that the kingdom of God is of power. And this, friends, is what we have seen time and time again throughout our study of Acts as the Kingdom has been ushered in and now it is spreading throughout these cities and villages and its turning things upside down. It's astounding people left and right, and not only astounding them but *saving them*. The Kingdom of God is growing in this passage, it's been growing the past 2,000 years and it is growing today. And that is truly “soul-satisfying” as Johnny Cash says.

So today we are looking at a section of Acts 9 in which The Gospel is going forward and being confirmed, God's kingdom is expanding and Christ's church is being built up. And may our soul's be satisfied at that.

So allow me to read the entire passage for us: Acts 9:31-43.

31 So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

32 As Peter was traveling from place to place, he also came down to the saints who lived in Lydda. 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. 34 Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed," and immediately he got up. 35 So all who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which is translated Dorcas). She was always doing good works and acts of charity. 37 About that time she became sick and died. After washing her, they placed her in a room upstairs. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples heard that Peter was there and sent two men to him who urged him, "Don't delay in coming with us." 39 Peter got up and went with them. When he arrived, they led him to the room upstairs. And all the widows approached him, weeping and showing him the robes and clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them. 40 Peter sent them all out of the room. He knelt down, prayed, and turning toward the body said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. 41 He gave her his hand and helped her stand up. He called the saints and widows and presented her alive. 42 This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 Peter stayed for some time in Joppa with Simon, a leather tanner.

Let's ask God to bless our study of His Word.

Our text broadly outlines into three sections this morning and we will follow that outline as well. I'd like to give it to you up front and it's really looking at the relationship between the kingdom and 3 different themes..

1. The Kingdom and the Saints
2. The Kingdom and Sorrow
3. The Kingdom and The Savior

1. The Kingdom and the Saints

31 So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

There are seven summary statements found throughout the book of Acts that Luke provides us both to summarize the progress and state of the church during this time and to use as a transition statement between various sections of his narrative. After taking a brief break following the ministry of Peter we are now returning to him. The church here in v. 31 is speaking of the universal church and it is saying, in part, now that Saul isn't persecuting us like crazy, there is peace. The church is being strengthened. Yes we know from later in Acts that persecution is coming back, but for now there is peace. But what we need to see is the relationship between the Kingdom and its people. Between the Kingdom of God and the saints. How does the universal church manifest the Kingdom of God today? Through the local church. The universal is manifested through the local.

God's Kingdom is spreading today town by town and city by city and state by state and country by country through the planting of churches and the preaching of the Gospel. Our local churches are really outposts for the kingdom of God as we see what Kingdom life should look like with our fellow saints. This is where we practice the one another's of Scripture, this is where we often exercise the gifts that Christ has given us, this is where we grow together in our love for God and His Word and His people. Jesus Christ ushered in the kingdom and then he established his church to further that Kingdom. They go hand-in-hand, not to be pitted against one another. Yes, someone can do good in a parachurch ministry or some other non-profit ministry, but I get very nervous when people talk about furthering the kingdom of God but think they can do that apart from the local church. The emphasis throughout the entire book of Acts, and really the entire NT, is furthering the Kingdom of God *through* the establishment and planting of local churches. We cannot miss that.

But it's the second half of the verse that I want us to think on as our responsibility as the saints of God. How should kingdom-minded people behave? What should the saints of God be characterized by? This verse provides us with an answer and I can't think of a better way to characterize a church than by saying they "lived in the fear of the Lord and were encouraged by the Holy Spirit." So what are those two things?

A. The Fear of the Lord

- a. What does it mean to fear God? If we are his people why should we fear him? Isn't God love? Doesn't perfect love cast out all fear? If you have been a Christian for some time you have probably heard some of this line of reasoning. Why should we fear God? He loves us. And for sure he does, and He is love. But the Bible does talk about a healthy and reverent fear of God and while I don't have time to do a deep study on it, a few scriptures are helpful to guide our thinking.
- i. Psalm 111:10 - "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his instructions have good insight. His praise endures forever."
 - ii. Proverbs 14:27 - "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, turning people away from the snares of death."
 - iii. Matthew 10:28 - "Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."
 - iv. Philippians 2:12-13 - "12 Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. 13 For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose."
 - v. 2 Corinthians 7:1 - "So then, dear friends, since we have these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God."
- b. And friends there are so many more than this. But it is clear throughout the Scriptures that fearing the Lord is a good thing. So what is a definition we can work with?
- i. The fear of the Lord is the sense of awe, wonder, and reverence that God is infinitely holy and infinitely powerful and that He is not to be thought lightly of. Properly fearing the Lord leads us to love and revere Him more.
- c. That's kind of a mouthful but there is a lot that goes in it. As Tozer said, "what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." He is not just the big man upstairs, he is not our genie in a bottle that we can use however we want, and ultimately He is not a God to be trifled with. I think the early church here definitely had a fear of God because what has just happened a few chapters prior, the Lord took the lives of Ananias and Sapphira. That will spark some fear. So he is not to be trifled with. His love is perfect, his wrath is perfect, his justice is perfect, and his will is perfect. So if

you have been thinking of God lightly, even sparingly, if you think of God only when you come in here, if you don't really dwell and meditate on what God did for you in Christ and why He had to send his own son to deal with sin, if you don't often think on these things and remind yourself that the Lord Jesus stood condemned in your place, in my place, then maybe you aren't properly fearing the Lord and maybe you should pray that God would give you a grander vision of Himself and he would kindle a healthy fear of Him in your heart. The Scriptures are filled with references in what it means to fear the Lord, may we like the early church resolve to Fear Him well.

B. Secondly, **The Encouragement of the Holy Spirit**

- a. Not only did they live in the fear of the Lord but they were encouraged by the Holy Spirit. As a church collectively, and I'm assuming for many individually, they were encouraged at what the Lord was doing through them. This makes me ask, Are you often encouraged by the Holy Spirit? Are we as a church encouraged by the Holy Spirit?
 - i. Now I don't want to paint a Bob Ross happy tree picture for all of us here. I realize that with every season of life for every saint in here there are times of plenty and times of lacking, there are times of joy and times of immense suffering. So I don't want to just say, "hey! Be encouraged by the Holy Spirit!" But I do think that the Holy Spirit is often more at work than we realize; and I do think that this encouragement for the church was, in part, them recognizing what he had been doing in their midst. Just last week we saw 15 people get baptized! Friends, it's amazing when one does it let alone fifteen. There are things that God is accomplishing through this church and through our individual lives that we can be encouraged by. But at times we will, again and again, have to drag our eyes off of ourselves and our circumstances and step back and see the big picture of God's kingdom advancing. Because when we do that, when we fight to do it, then collectively it is very hard for us not to be encouraged by the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - ii. So the beautiful thing we see in Acts is that in the midst of this fallen world the kingdom of God has broken in and begun working a reversal of sorts. And as this reversal progresses, we live in this tension, this time between two worlds, the already-not yet as we await Christ's coming, as we work hard to advance the kingdom, but as we also deal with the reality of a fallen world: a world of sin, suffering, and sorrow. So this brings us to our second consideration

2. The Kingdom and Sorrow

Here we have two stories, two scenes laid out before us that point to the Kingdom of God advancing. First we have Aeneas, a man who is paralyzed and has been bedridden for eight years. He is a man who during this time was hopeless. And one could argue there was maybe even a greater degree of hopelessness for someone who once could walk but then became paralyzed for eight years. But here the Saints in Lydda were aware of him and possibly tried to help take care of him. We have no idea if he was a believer or not, but he was paralyzed, unable to walk. So he lays in a bed day after day after day, aware of his condition, aware of his misery, and aware of his neediness. But then Peter travels to visit the saints in this town and comes upon Aeneas.

And then skipping to the second story we have the story of Tabitha, or Dorcas. She is a lovely woman. A disciple, actually the only woman in the NT specifically called the word disciple, even though there were obviously others. V. 36 tells us that she was always doing good works and acts of charity. This was a woman who lived out her faith, who was overwhelmed by the love of Christ and sought to care for others, to do what she could for them. She didn't have much, but she had a consecrated needle to do work for the Lord and so she did. There is a lesson for us there, is there not? She did what she could with what she had. She had made robes and clothes for the widows, and she had become sick and died. And so the saints send for Peter, most likely expecting him to just comfort the widows.

You see friends, I said earlier that these two stories point to the Kingdom of God advancing, but it doesn't *feel* like it at first. The miracles of Jesus, the miracles of the apostles, they often center around un-doing the effects of the fall. Undoing the effects of sin that bring about sickness and suffering and even death. I said earlier that we live in the midst of two ages and it is true. While the Kingdom has come, and it is advancing, it has not yet been fully consummated. There is still another kingdom at play for now, the kingdom of the world. So while we await that, there is sin, and war, and suffering, and strife, and sorrow, and death. Because while Aeneas was healed how many others haven't been? While Tabitha was brought back to life how many other saints throughout history haven't been? We exist in a world with sorrow and suffering and that reality points us to a greater reality: *this is not how it was supposed to be.*

This is not how we were intended to live. What took place in Genesis 3 affects every single part of our lives now and so we can't forget to look forward with hope when one day all will be made right. And we can't forget that this is not how it was supposed to be. Friends, If this is our best life now then God help us all. You see the in-breaking of the kingdom is reversing what took place in the garden, reversing these effects that we see day after day; but the reality for us is that we still live in this world with all of its brokenness waiting until it is once more completely healed.

Practically, this means many of us suffer. Christianity doesn't exempt us from that. This means that we in the church daily deal with the effects of sin from struggling family relationships (such as a parent to a child or spouses to one another) to the difficulties of diseases that we battle. We age, we get wrinkles, we contract cancer, and we too die. We exist in this fallen world. We are not spared from it as much as we want to be.

And so church, how should we as saints live in the midst of two worlds, how should we think about the kingdom and the sorrow that we experience? A few thoughts might be helpful.

A. Acknowledge the reality of suffering and sorrow

- a. We have to understand how these two kingdoms are currently existing in the world for us to have a proper view of suffering in this world. If we don't, we end up erroring too far one way or another. One side has us downplay the reality of sorrow so much that we almost make it seem like the Christian life is full of rainbows and butterflies and that by simply coming to Jesus all of your problems will be fixed. The other side errors in that it only focuses on the suffering and heartache evident in the world and therefore becomes calloused to this world - "it's going to hell in a hand-basket, what's the point of even trying?" Both sides error too far one way or another. We have to land in the healthy middle ground of acknowledging it and working towards alleviating it. The Christian life isn't all rainbows and butterflies. Jesus told us to follow Him and how do we do that? By the cruciform life. By day by day taking up our cross to follow him. The way of Jesus doesn't promise an easy life; it promises eternal life. A life of joy and faith and hope that isn't devoid of suffering but looks forward to the day when suffering is no more. And as well, we are not to be calloused to this world. We have been given a commission to make disciples and we need to be hard at work accomplishing our Lord's work. There will be a judgment for us as well. And as 1 Thess. 4 says - "we as believers do not grieve as those with no hope." Things might seem hopeless to the world, but for the Christian they never are. We must live in the middle ground now.

B. Weep with those who weep

- a. In the midst of a world that still has suffering and sorrow, it is all the more imperative that we, as the body of Christ, be His hands and his feet. Our Lord wept at the effects of sin and death in John 11. He was, as **Isaiah 53:3** tells us, **“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn’t value him.”** Time and time again Jesus pursues the outcasts, those who suffer. He comforts those who mourn, he wipes the tears of the sorrowful. He left perfection to enter into our broken world, learning obedience as Phil. 2 tells us, and he was marked by compassion for the lost. Is this true of us? Do we care for the broken-hearted amongst us? Or are we too busy to notice them? And when we do seek to be there, we need to remember that in the midst of suffering the most comforting answers can simply be our presence, our help, our tears, and even our silence with them. Helping them around the house or making someone dinner may be far more of a spiritual exercise than explaining Romans 8:28 to them. And the temptation for those who are suffering in here, who are filled with sorrow, is to isolate yourself. Don’t do that. Pain and suffering can often bring about a profound sense of loneliness. We think we are cut off from everyone and that no one could ever understand. The truth is that talking things over with other Christians is often the most helpful thing. In thinking about the kingdom and suffering, we must genuinely seek to love and care for one another by mourning with those who mourn.

C. Look to the Savior

- a. In the midst of sin, sorrow, and suffering, we must look to the author and perfecter of our faith. We must look to the community that Christ has given to us, His church, to help us in our time of need. We can’t isolate ourselves and lean on our own understanding and our own power to make it. That’s a sure way to sin. Vulnerability, a desire for accountability, a need for prayer, might make you feel like a weak or needy person, but guess what? You are. We all are in different ways. It’s why we need saving. It’s why salvation had to come from God. We can’t do it in and of ourselves. But time and time again we will have to hold one another accountable in continuing to cast our cares and our eyes on Jesus. In the midst of a sorrowful world, Kingdom minded people are focused on the King.

This brings us to our last point to consider from this passage.

3. The Kingdom and the Savior

Notice verses 34-35 and 40-42.

34-35 - 'Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed," and immediately he got up.

35 So all who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.'

40-42 - "40 Peter sent them all out of the room. He knelt down, prayed, and turning toward the body said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up. 41 He gave her his hand and helped her stand up. He called the saints and widows and presented her alive. 42 This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."

It might not be apparent to us at first, but the focus here is on Jesus Christ doing the healing. Peter as an apostle recognizes that he has no power in and of himself. While Jesus told the little girl in Mark chapter 5 to get up, here Peter invokes the name of Jesus Christ. Any healing, any miraculous work that is accomplished through him is solely because of Jesus. The same is true in the second account. Peter has to come into Tabitha's room and he prays. He is not like Jesus standing at the tomb of Lazarus and calling him forth, no he has to pray to God for Him to work. In both cases, it is clear that the one doing the work is the Lord Jesus.

I really don't want us to gloss over this truth here. All Kingdom work should ultimately be pointing to the Savior. All that we do in the church should be done as worship unto the savior. From those who greet, to those who teach, to those who cook, to those who sew, to those who serve at homes, to those who are seeking to be hospitable, all that we do is to be done to glorify our Lord Jesus. We don't preach Christ to magnify ourselves, we don't feed the needy and clothe the poor to make ourselves look better, we don't minister to widows and orphans and go on missions trips or do any other kingdom-minded work in order to elevate our own status or our own worth within the kingdom. **There is one King and one Savior and all that we do we do for him and as worship unto him.** Peter and the apostles understood their neediness, understood their place in the kingdom, and we must as well. For our church to be pointing people to the Savior, we all must understand our need for a Savior. For our church to understand it's work as kingdom work we all must understand our calling before the King.

So before we get to the application, we must wrestle with this: What these two stories clearly confront us with is the reality that we cannot save ourselves. Like paralyzed Aeneas we need Christ to heal us. And like dead Tabitha, we need to be given new life. And the only way this occurs is through the power of the Word of God. If you have not trusted in Christ, then you are more like Aeneas and Tabitha than you realize. You have no ability to save yourself, you can't take a step toward God and you can't bring new life to your heart. Someone must come to you, and what we acknowledge here is that someone did. His name is Jesus Christ and He is our Savior. He came to those who were helpless, who were dead, who despised and rejected him, and he died for them. It is as Romans 5 says, that while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. Until you see the helplessness of your state, until you acknowledge that you can't do anything in your own power, then you won't see your need for a Savior and you won't be a part of the Kingdom of God. May God open blind eyes and unstop deaf ears this morning to behold His wondrous works through the glory of His Son.

Our application this morning comes from the three words we have focused on: Saints, Sorrow, and Savior.

Application:

1. Saints

a. Let us be purposeful in the work of our King

b. We have been given a commission to make disciples, and it is clear that not all of us are given the same gifts. And that's a good thing. Like Tabitha may we use what we have been given to the glory of God. Don't sit on the sidelines, don't expect to be served. A life of service expressed through the local church is how God's people today further the Kingdom. Let us be found busy doing the work of our Lord.

2. Sorrow

a. Let us be purposeful with the heart of our King

b. Recognize that we live in a world still plagued by sin and suffering and death. Recognize though that Christ has inaugurated His Kingdom and so for those of us indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, may we seek to be present in the midst of others sorrows. At least 13 times throughout the NT we are commanded to love one another, and we see the example of love most manifest in the actions of Christ, who loved us enough to die in our place. May we model well the heart of our King to a world filled with sorrow.

3. Savior

a. Let us be purposeful in proclaiming our King

b. Notice once more in the text the effect of these miracles. V. 35 says that those who lived in the towns turned to the Lord. V. 42 says that many came to believe throughout Joppa. The message of Christ was at work then and it is at work today. Do you believe that? We need that reminder often because we are a people prone to wandering, prone to forgetting, prone to relying on our own strength, and thinking that salvation is up to us. We are tasked to proclaim the good news of our Savior and King and the Spirit is willing to use you to proclaim to family, neighbors, coworkers, and friends. So take comfort and be encouraged, this morning, that our King and Savior is responsible for doing all the saving, he asks you to be faithful in proclaiming. Let us rise to this calling. Would you pray with me?