

Christ Building His Church

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[0 : 00] I'm going to ask you to turn to Acts chapter 1. We're going to read the first verses of Acts, and then we're going to read the last verses of that book.

So we're going to read Acts chapter 1, 1 through 8. In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command, Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So when they met together, they asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

[1 : 10] He said to them, It is not for you to know the times or dates the father has set by his own authority, 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.

Now turn to Acts chapter 28. Acts chapter 28. We're going to read verses 30 and 31. For two whole years, Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.

Boldly and without hindrance, he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's hear the preaching of God's word. But what happened to the Apostle Paul? We've been following him and his arrest in Jerusalem, his imprisonment for two years in Caesarea, all the court trials, and then his appeal to have his case heard by the highest court in the whole Roman Empire, Caesar's court in Rome.

And then we followed him in those many dangers and threats upon his life that made it seem like he would never live to see Rome. But you remember the Lord had made a promise, hadn't he?

[2 : 40] That as you have testified about me here in Jerusalem, Paul, so you must testify about me in Rome also. And so Paul finally did make it to Rome where he does indeed testify about the Lord Jesus as he awaits trial under house arrest.

So for two whole years, Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance, he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those are the last words of the book. But what happened to Paul? What about him? How did his trial go?

This was the question on the lips of one child last week and perhaps on the minds of many more. And if you've wondered about it, you're not alone.

Many commentators and scholars have scratched their heads about this same question. Some have found this conclusion here at the end of the book to be too abrupt.

[3 : 46] It leaves too many loose ends. It doesn't bring it all together. We're just left hanging, not knowing what happened to Paul.

Some have actually speculated that the true ending of this book has been lost. That there was more to it than just verse 31. It went on, but it's been lost.

Others say that something interrupted Luke and kept him from finishing. Others that Luke was perhaps planning a third volume just as Acts was the continuation of his Gospel of Luke.

Maybe he was preparing a third volume to take up where this one ended. But you see, none of these guesses are necessary. For verses 30 and 31 comprise a most fitting conclusion to the book.

Now, it's true that we're not told all that we might like to know about the Apostle Paul. But that in itself should be a signal to us that this book is not, after all, about the Apostle Paul.

[4 : 54] That's not the focus of the book. That's not Luke's purpose. It is not to give a biographical account of the life and ministry and the death of the Apostle.

Luke's supreme interest is rather to record the triumphant spread of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember how he began his book.

With the risen Lord Jesus laying out his agenda for the church, we had it read, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and then in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Now, that verse, Acts 1-8, functions almost like a table of contents for the whole book. Luke starts then with the witness to Christ in Jerusalem, mainly through Peter.

And then he follows it on out into Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth, chiefly as he follows Paul on his three missionary journeys.

[6 : 02] And then his last journey that he speaks of in this letter that ends with the Apostle bearing witness as far away as Rome. And with that, Luke has accomplished his purpose and puts down his pen.

Yes. This Gospel has gone from Jerusalem, the capital city of the Jews where Jesus was crucified and has gone right through the whole of Judea and Samaria and to the very capital of the world empire, the Roman empire, with the Gospel triumphing and being preached.

And so our attention is taken off of Paul and it's focused on the Lord Jesus and what he's doing and on his Gospel that is triumphing from Jerusalem to Rome.

And the book is supremely then about Christ, whose Gospel is not bound even when the messenger is. And it's about the exalted King himself who is building his church even when his servant Paul disappears from view.

So if the ending seems to leave a lot of loose ends, this too is probably intentional. This too is meant to alert us to something because though chapter 28 is the end of the book, it reminds us that this is not the last chapter of Christ building his church, is it?

[7 : 33] That isn't the end of Christ building his church. No, this work goes on and on. It's continuing today. Peter and Paul and the first generation Christians have now stepped off the stage of church history.

But there's been nearly 2,000 years of church building history that have followed. And brothers and sisters, let's remember that Jesus is still building his worldwide church.

And that this is our time, yours and my time, on the stage of church history. And another chapter is being written.

In this generation. And so the question comes, what part are you playing in this grand drama of Christ building his church among the nations?

Are you even in the game? Are you even in the war? Are you even in the church? Are you witnessing for Jesus? Are you supporting the spread of his gospel near and far by your prayers and financing?

[8 : 46] By raising your children for the kingdom of Christ? By strengthening this local church and its outreach in the world? You see, it is the grand agenda of Christ.

And we must ask ourselves at the end of this book, what place does that agenda have in my life? Is it the dominant influence? Is it giving shape to my life?

How is it affecting my life at home, in the church, in the neighborhood, on my knees? Oh, church, arise. Hear the call of Christ, your captain.

And we hear it here at the beginning of the book of Acts as he gives his agenda to the church. And we hear it, don't we, at the end as we recognize the work's not done.

He's still building his church. It's the grandest thing going in the world today. And when the very last of God's chosen sinners has been saved and converted, added to the church, he will come.

[9 : 49] Jesus will come again, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to all who are waiting for him. And then he will forever be with his church. But until then, there is this unfinished business, this grand business of Christ building his church.

So it's a call to get to work. Now we've seen in the last six chapters of Acts how Christ's promise determines history. As you've testified about me in Jerusalem, you must testify in Rome.

And that promise determines the whole next six chapters. Paul's going to make it to Rome. Why? Because a promise was given. Well, there's another promise that acts as a governing principle that determines the whole history of the book of Acts.

and it's the promise that Jesus made in Matthew 16, 18 when he said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

That promise acts as the whole overarching theme of the book of Acts. It determines history, the history of this present age until Christ comes.

[11 : 03] And so those words of Jesus give us the broad outline of the book of Acts. Jesus is building his church. And I want to just, again, I gave you this at the beginning of our series.

I want us now to look at it from the hindsight of having come through the book to look at what Jesus was saying when he gave that promise and then to see how that promise determined what we have studied in the book of Acts.

Three things we ought to be looking for in the book of Acts based on what Jesus promised in Matthew 16, 18. The first is that Jesus Christ is determined to build his church.

Notice it's something that Jesus himself will do. He said, I will build my church. So what we've been studying for the last 28 chapters is Jesus building his church.

It's the acts, the actions of Jesus Christ building his church through Holy Spirit filled followers of Jesus Christ.

[12 : 08] We've been seeing Jesus building his church. He is the unseen builder, but he's the one building. And he does it through his instruments, through his church empowered by the Spirit.

But he does it. I will build my church. He does not subcontract the work out. To others and then sit back and do nothing. Jesus is actively involved and we've seen that, haven't we, throughout our study.

In fact, none are added to the church ever in the book of Acts or ever apart from Jesus saving work. So he's been very active saving people building his church.

So this is what we've been seeing for 28 chapters. Jesus building, Jesus helping, Jesus intervening, Jesus working, Jesus protecting, Jesus saving, adding to his church.

And Grace Fellowship Church, this is our great encouragement. Pastors, Sunday school teachers, Wednesday night teachers, moms and dads, witnesses, givers, prayers, prayer warriors, brothers and sisters, we're not working alone in this task of building Christ's church.

[13 : 23] Jesus is with us. Behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. In what? In building my church and making disciples and baptizing and teaching them right on out to the end of the age.

His presence with us. So, in the encouragement of that, church, arise and be after the unfinished work of Christ. So Jesus is determined.

I will build my church. If you've come through our Sunday school class, you can hear some resolve in that, can't you? The resolution. I will build my church. But can he pull it off?

Is he able? Because the promise is stated in such a way that anticipates much opposition and obstacles in the way of Jesus.

When he says that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. That means that the gates of hell are raging against this building project. And that's our second point.

[14 : 21] Gates of hell are raging against this building project of the church. Satan and his hellish crew are just as determined to keep Christ's church from being built as he is to build it.

And it's no wonder why. Because Christ's church will be built upon the rubble of his kingdom. Every stone added to the church is taken from Satan's kingdom of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear son.

Every Christian was once a slave of Satan. Once living under the tyranny of sin. So Christ is preparing his disciples.

Yes, I will build my church, but it will not be without opposition. There will be persecution. There will be warfare. There will be bloodshed. There will be struggle of a supernatural kind in this building project.

And that's because Christ is not building his church in heaven, but rather in this world that is under the control of the evil one. First John chapter five.

[15 : 32] And it's here in this world under the control of the evil one that we therefore find hostility against Christ and his church. church. And Jesus is reminding us even as he promises to build his church that there's an unseen enemy.

Just as he's the unseen builder, there's an unseen enemy that would keep him from building. As Paul says in Ephesians six, that the church has to deal with the devil's schemes, his stratagems.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. And so what do we see in the book of Acts? Well, we see the high court of the Jews, the Sanhedrin opposing the church.

We see scribes and Pharisees and chief priests. We see troublesome church members. We see soldiers and sailors and individuals fighting against the church of Jesus Christ.

But what we don't see is the unseen enemy conducting it all behind the scene. He's the conductor of all this hostility and rage against Christ's church.

[16 : 45] And this is why the church must always remember that we are no match for the enemy we are fighting against. In building the church of Christ, we're facing an enemy that is too strong for us.

Therefore, we must be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. We must put on the full armor of God in this great conflict. And in dealing with a supernatural enemy, we need more than human plans, more than human ingenuity, more than human power.

We need weapons that are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds of hell. Where do you find prayer? We need to make much use of the weapon of all prayer.

power. To lay hold of a power that's greater than man's and a power that is greater than he that is in the world.

So what do we find in the book of Acts? We find the church at prayer. The church at prayer. Fighting on her knees, meeting each challenge, looking to the Lord and his almighty strength and bringing into the field of battle, powers of God.

[18 : 01] That's what meets the challenge of the gates of hell. As heaven answers by shaking the earth, by giving boldness, sending angels on jail-breaking missions, giving success to the gospel mission.

So yes, the gates of hell are raging against this building project, but thirdly, Jesus' promise means thirdly, that Christ will be victorious, his church will be built.

Though the gates of hell rage against this building project, they will not prevail, they will not be able to withstand the onslaught of the gospel coming at them.

So the church will advance right into the kingdom of darkness and will take captives captive, will take captives of Satan captive and bring them and make them children of the living God.

God. Again, this is the encouraging theme of the book of Acts, that Christ triumphs over Satan in the building of his church. He takes what Satan means for the destruction of the church and he actually uses it to further the building of Christ's church.

[19 : 15] We see it over and over. So let all hell be let loose against the church. It will be built. It cannot be stopped. Jesus himself will see to it and when the last chosen sinner is converted, then he'll come for her.

The church cannot be stopped because Jesus is the one who is building and he's promised that nothing would stop him. So church arise to the battle, to the fight in the assurance of promise victory.

There will be a church completed without spot or wrinkle or any such thing that he himself will present in that final day. So that promise then of Jesus in Matthew 16, 18, I will build my church, the gates of hell will not be able to prevail against it.

How does that work out in the book of Acts? What did we see? Let's just do a quick running look over the book. What do we see in the book of Acts?

Jesus building his church, Satan trying to destroy it. Christ nevertheless triumphing. All right? Tensions will mount along the way.

[20 : 31] It's not always pretty. It even gets bloody at times, but in the face of stiff opposition, the church and gospel of Christ is victorious. So where does it begin? By all human standards, the whole building project was doomed to fizzle, crash, and die from the very start.

Because as Acts opens up, what do we find? It's just a little band of 120 or so people gathered. And where are they gathered? Oh, they're gathered in headquartered in the unpromising city of Jerusalem where just seven weeks earlier, their master, their founder, had been rejected, condemned, and crucified, hated.

And these 11 leaders are nothing special. They're just converted fishermen, tax collector, a few others. By human standards, it should have fizzled and died.

But human standards do not figure in supernatural power, do they? And that's precisely what happened. On the day of Pentecost, nothing less than God, the Holy Spirit, the eternal Spirit of God, was poured out upon His church to empower them to witness for Christ.

And so Peter stands up. Peter, the one who just denied Jesus three times just a couple months ago, now empowered by the Spirit, stands up and preaches Jesus as an exalted Savior and Lord that you all crucified.

[22 : 01] And their hearts are cut by the Spirit of God and they cry, what must we do? And 3,000 believed on the Lord Jesus and were saved in a day, baptized, added to the church.

The ascended, reigning Christ is building His church from heaven through His servants and He's confirming their message by giving them the powers to work miracles. Listen to these men, He's saying.

Look, they're doing what no other men can do, raising the lame, healing the blind, and so on. He's drawing attention to His gospel spokesmen.

And they enjoy the favor of the people who flock to hear their message there at the temple precincts. And every day the Lord was saving and adding people to His church.

The building project is up and going. It's being built. Just in a few chapters we find that there were 5,000 men alone, let alone wives and children from 120.

[23 : 12] Now this good start to Christ's church did not fly under the radar of hell. And indeed, we did not expect it to if we listened to Jesus' promise. The gates of hell will be against it.

And so, that's what we find. Satan has many schemes and it's the assumption that we, the church of Christ should not be ignorant of His schemes.

Well, the first scheme was to stir up persecution from the Jewish religious leaders. So, that's the first thing Satan does in the gates of hell opposing the church. The same high court that condemned Jesus Christ to the cross to be killed for blasphemy, handed over to the Romans to be crucified.

That same high court of the Sanhedrin now arrest His disciples, Peter and John. And they bring them to trial. But they've got the problem that the people like them.

The people are enjoying the ministry of healing and the preaching of the gospel. And they can't, the Sanhedrin can't deny that true miracles and an outstanding miracle had been done.

[24 : 29] So, what can we do? Our hands are tied. They resort to threats. And they threaten them never to speak again in the name of Jesus. Now, these aren't empty threats.

Remember what this court did just seven weeks earlier. They put a man on a cross. So, will that stop the building project?

Will this silence the witness of the infant church and bring it all to a screeching halt? No, Satan's plan backfires. What does a church do when they're met with persecution from other religions?

They have a prayer meeting. And they call on the sovereign Lord who rules over the nations and rules over the raging enemies of Christ and his gospel to give them boldness to continue to preach it.

And the place where they were meeting was shaken and they all spoke the word of God boldly. Well, when the high court of the Sanhedrin found them ignoring their threats and instead filling Jerusalem with their doctrine, they were furious and jealous.

[25 : 42] They wanted to put them to death, but instead they settled with flogging them. Flogging. And again, ordering them not to speak in the name of Jesus. So Satan has up the ante.

He's now playing with his well-used card of physical torture. But again, to no avail because what do the apostles do? They go out bleeding, beaten, but rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name, the name of him who died for them and was risen.

And they never stopped preaching. It didn't halt them for a day, day and night, house to house. They never stopped preaching the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

Persecution just keeps mounting. Threats. Torture. Death. Now there's Stephen. And he's preaching a message under the power of the Spirit that they could not resist.

And so they shut his mouth with stones and they stoned him to death. Threats.

[26 : 53] Torture. Death. He's upping the persecution coming from the religious Jews. And that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, spearheaded by a zealous Christian killer.

Satan had groomed in Judaism, none other than Saul of Tarsus. And so as godly men buried Stephen, Saul began to destroy the church. Those are the words the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write.

Saul began to destroy the church. If something doesn't happen, the church is done. Her destruction has begun.

Going from house to house, dragging off men and women to prison. This was Saul's one controlling obsession. Is this the one who will succeed at finishing off the church?

The great persecution meant to destroy the church is rather overruled by Christ. To scatter his witnesses outside of Jerusalem.

[28 : 07] So here comes the persecution, hot and heavy. And it just causes the Christians to run throughout all of Judea and Samaria.

And wherever they went, they gossiped the message about Jesus. You see what happened? Again, Satan's malice is overruled and Christ triumphs by the very thing he's doing.

What happens, kids, when you know what a milkweed plant is? You know the little pods late in the fall? They start to crack and open and you can see some white in the side. What happens when you step on one of those pods?

The seeds just fly and they scatter to the wind. What happens when you try to stomp out the church of Jesus Christ? Saul tried it. Well, the witnesses just scattered.

And everywhere they went, the seed of the gospel went and many more were being saved and added to the church of Jesus Christ. Even an Ethiopian eunuch. Showing that Jesus Christ is determined to build his church, even though the gates of hell oppose it.

[29 : 18] But Saul just digs in deeper, doesn't he? Still breathing out murderous threats against the church. He says, if they've scattered to the winds, I'm going to scatter to the winds.

I'm going to track them down wherever they've gone. And he got letters of authority to track them down all the way to Syria, Damascus, Syria. And he's going there to find these followers of Jesus and to persecute them.

Well, this is Satan's henchmen. We're to remember there's an unseen enemy that's empowering this man. And he is no match at all for the Lord of his church who meets him face to face on the road to Damascus and with a flash of his glory puts him on the ground, converts him by his marvelous power and turns him from being the greatest destroyer of the church into one of the greatest builders that the church has ever known.

I will build my church. And if Saul's in the way, why then I'll save him and bring him over to our side. Such is the power, the wisdom, the grace of the head of the church.

Well, the last half of the book then is taken up with Christ building this church on out, beyond Judea and Samaria, on out to the ends of the age. And mainly Luke is following this choice instrument, the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul.

[30 : 50] And Satan greatly opposes him. He's a traitor to the cause. He hates him with special hatred. And over and over it's Satan who stirs up the Jews to persecute him, to try to kill him, stoned him once, left him for dead.

But over and over, like a cat with nine lives, the Lord Jesus protects him and saves him and delivers him and keeps on building up his church through him. Just as he promised.

So Satan is defeated, but not done. Religious persecution is not the only card in his hand. And unable to slow the growth of Christ's church from without with persecution, Satan now turns inward and he seeks to stir up her destruction from within.

And the next four tactics and strategies are these schemes from within the church. So number two, Satan's scheme is to infiltrate the young church with hypocrites, with hypocrites.

Remember Ananias and Sapphira. They wanted to appear more godly, more generous than what they really were. And so they sold a field and they took the money that they got from the field and they took some of it for themselves and they brought the rest of it.

[32 : 09] Having agreed to lie together, they came and Ananias brings it and gives it to the apostles to be used to feed the poor in the church. And he says, this is all that I got from the sale of my property.

Satan remembers how the progress of Israel came to a screeching halt. Remember, they cross the Jordan, they go in the first cities, Jericho. Everything in Jericho is devoted to the Lord.

Nobody's to take anything. One man. Achan saw some gold, silver and a Babylonian garment and he took it and he dug a hole in his tent and he buried it.

And they go out to battle to the next city, a little place, Ai. And Israel suffers a humiliating defeat. There's a hypocrite in the camp and God says, my power and my victory will not be with you until he is dealt with.

You remember how the Lord calls him out and he is judged and cleansed from the church. And then the power of heaven once again goes out with the armies.

[33 : 31] Hypocrisy must be dealt with. Sin in the camp must be purged before the Lord will fight again for Israel. Well, here's the church of Jesus Christ. She's just up and going and the Lord is blessing.

And what is this church? Well, it's a congregation of converted men and women followers of Jesus Christ, who who is himself the way the truth.

Oh, he's the truth. He himself is truth. And he requires that his followers love the truth and live the truth and walk in the truth and do the truth.

And right in the midst of this congregation are two liars who've agreed with each other to lie following the father of lies, Satan himself.

And such sin in the camp threatens the whole church. A little yeast leavens the whole lump. So get rid of the yeast that we might be a clean lump to the Lord.

[34 : 41] Well, would this be what brings down the church of Christ? What happens when hypocrisy runs rampant in a church? It's it's Ichabod. The Lord, the glory has departed.

Will this do it? Well, it could have. But Jesus fought for his church and he reveals the lie to the apostle Peter. Hidden hypocrisy treats the Holy Spirit with dishonor.

What is hypocrisy? It acts like the only eyes I have to be careful about are the peoples and I want them all to think well of me. It forgets one critical thing.

The fear of God. That he's always seen. The Holy Spirit is in the midst of these people. That's the most important audience.

Ananias and Sapphira didn't live before that audience. They're dead to that audience. They're alive to the earthly eyes. And that cannot be.

[35 : 44] And so the Holy Spirit reveals to Paul what what would happen to a church without the fear of the Lord, without an eye to the unseen Savior of his church. And so the Lord fights for his church, revealing the truth to Peter, who says to the generous donor Ananias, who no doubt was expecting praise for his gift.

Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart? Did you hear that? Satan. Yes, it's the gates of hell working behind the scene. How is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you've lied to the Holy Spirit, have kept back for yourself some of the money you received for the land was not all of the money yours when you said could you not have kept it?

Why have you done such a thing? You have not lied to men, but to God. And Ananias falls over dead on the spot.

And then Sapphira, his wife, comes and tells the same lie and she falls down dead on the spot. It was the Lord Jesus acting. Peter has no such powers just to look at someone and speak and they go down.

The Lord Jesus was purifying his people. He's building his church. Judgment must begin at the house of the Lord.

[37 : 04] And what's the result? Listen to it. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about it. Jesus is fighting to have a God fearing church.

A church that's alive to to the unseen God in the midst of his people, not those who are only concerned with men's eyes.

And so he fights to keep and maintain a God fearing church where men do not play games with God. And more and more men and women were added to their numbers because Jesus is building his church.

The third attempt to destroy the church. This again from within is the sowing of dissension. You see it in Acts chapter six. It was in those days when the number of disciples was increasing.

It was right when the building project was flourishing that the Grecian Jewish Christians among them complained to the Hebraic Jewish Christians that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

[38 : 06] Your widows are getting preferential treatment. You don't care as much about our widows as you do about your own. This attack on their unity arose so naturally that we might miss Satan's activity behind it.

That is if we didn't remember that he hates the unity of the body of Christ. James reminds us that all disorder is a hallmark of devilish wisdom. Disorder.

Disunity. Dissension. And he is the ultimate disturber of the peace in marriages, families, job places, schools, neighborhoods.

And yes, among and in nations, but especially the church of Christ. And why especially there? Because the unity and peace of Christ church.

is a slam on his kingdom that's full of hating and being hated. And it's attractive. And he hates anything attractive in Christ's kingdom.

[39 : 12] And so he attacks this unity, stirring up these folks along what we might call racial lines, the Grecian and Hebraic lines.

And so seeking to destroy the unity. What happens when a church starts focusing on inward problems of unity among them?

Well, they forget the big, big assignment the Lord gave them. And a church preoccupied with internal divisions will often be diverted from the great outward focus mission of making disciples from every nation.

And if this did not scatter the church, at least it might bog down the apostles so that they can no longer preach and pray as they ought, but have to now make sure that all the widows are being served.

But again, though Satan seeks to sow dissension, Jesus fights back and gives wisdom to their leaders. And to have the church, you all select seven men and we'll give this ministry to them.

[40 : 16] And that way we will give ourselves to the word, the ministry of the word and to prayer and the whole and the same please the whole group. And they chose seven men.

And so the word of God spread and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. Do you see what's happening? Jesus is building lots of new believers going up in this church.

Satan's attack on their unity. unity. Christ triumphs more and more people being added to the church and Grace Fellowship Church. If I were the devil, I would attack your unity in Christ.

If I wanted to slow down the witness of this church, I would attack what has been such a precious mark of Christ's presence among us. And we better never quit watching and praying and doing everything to maintain this unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

It is a bullseye for Satan when he sees a church of Jesus Christ getting on with the mission, working together, praying together, witnessing together to stop the business of Christ's church being built.

[41 : 33] May the Lord help us. We can't help but see Satan involved in it. And we can't even help but smell Satan's hand in the disagreement then between Paul and Barnabas.

Again, the disunity. And what happens out of that situation? We end up with two great missionary teams instead of one. Christ constantly meeting Satan's attempts to destroy what he's building.

Well, the fourth scheme of Satan is to distort the saving gospel itself. How is Satan going to stop the building of Christ's church? Well, let's just tinker a little bit with the message of the gospel.

We won't take Christ out of it. We'll just add something to it. So it's Christ plus circumcision. And so some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers, unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.

That not only threatened to destroy the unity between the church in Antioch and the church in Jerusalem, it threatened to destroy the saving gospel. Of Christ's church and without a gospel, what is the church?

[42 : 43] It's nothing. It's nothing. So subtle is Satan's lie. He's not taking Christ out of it. He's just adding something to it. But when you add something to Christ for justification to make you right with God, you are subtracting the saving power of the gospel.

Its whole power to save is because of what Jesus does for undeserving, unable sinners. And when you start adding something that man can do, oh, I can be circumcised.

So it's Christ plus circumcision. Well, you've just robbed the gospel. You've stolen the power of the gospel. No. No. And so what what happens? Well, Jesus, again, fights for the truth.

The very gospel was at stake. Salvation is at stake. The very church was at stake. But Jesus fights against the devil's lie. And the council is held in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 15.

And they are taught by the spirit and by the scriptures. And the true gospel is maintained and continues to be preached. And the result, the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

[43 : 55] Christ is building his church. Well, those are some of the inward attacks. But Satan. Well, there was also the fifth one prejudice against the Gentiles.

I don't have time to develop it. But you remember that even Peter had trouble believing that he could enter the house of a Gentile, Cornelius. The Lord goes to great strengths again, great lengths to teach him.

Think of it. The nations left in darkness for for so long. Well, God was working mainly in Israel. And now he's saying, take the gospel to every nation, to every person and call them to the obedience of repentance and faith in Christ.

And suddenly Satan's kingdom of darkness is being threatened where it hadn't. And so he seeks to stir up prejudice among the Jews. Against the Gentiles.

And you see it. It gains footing. And then Jesus teaches them that the ground at the cross is level. And we all come as sinners.

[44 : 57] And we all receive from Jesus Christ grace upon grace. We all enter the kingdom the same way by repentance and faith. Gentile, Jew, whoever you are, whatever you've done.

And Christ preserved his church against the prejudice that Satan would have stirred up within. And I want to consider one more scheme and we're done. And that's the political persecution from pagan governments.

At first, the persecution against the church arose from the religious people in the Jews of the Jewish religion. But eventually the pagan Roman government would become the fiercest persecutor of Christians.

Christians. And we even see the beginnings of it in the book of Acts. But even then, it seemed like it was done in order to please the Jews over whom they were ruling.

So the Roman government is ruling over the Jews. And we see this wanting to please those that they're ruling over and win their favor. And one of the ways is to have the government, the Roman government, persecute Christians.

[46 : 00] So in Acts 12, King Herod is ruling for the Romans. And we're told that he arrested some who belonged to the church intending to persecute them. He had the Apostle James put to death with a sword.

Folks, that means he was beheaded. The Apostle James was beheaded by a pagan Roman king, Herod. And when he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeds to arrest Peter, too, and was holding him for public trial.

He's going after the leaders of Christianity. But again, Satan's malice against the church backfires, doesn't it? Because what does it do? It sends the church to prayer.

And the church is praying all night long for Peter. And the Lord answers from heaven and sending a jailbreaking angel to bring him out and to send him on out further to keep preaching, keep building up the church.

Again, the political persecution is met with prayer. Rome, the capital of this vast world empire, the Roman Empire.

- [47 : 08] Rome, it was also the center of emperor worship. Where the emperor lived and where he was worshipped as God.
- And so people would need to say Caesar is Lord. Caesar is Lord. Of course, that's a head on challenge to the Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom.
- And eventually many a Christian would be martyred for not saying Caesar is Lord. And so it's not without interest that.
- Acts ends with Paul where? In Rome. The place where Caesar is worshipped as Lord. Nero. Though his.
- Killing times had not yet begun. And here the book comes to this triumphant conclusion. Having shown the church of Christ being built from 120 in Jerusalem. Scattering throughout the whole of Palestine and on out.
- [48 : 13] Now as far. As Rome. The capital. And center. Of emperor worship. And here. Where Caesar is worshipped as Lord.
- We find the greatest Christian missionary. Preaching a different Lord. And a different kingdom. And for two whole years. That message is going forth boldly.
- And without hindrance. Can you see the victory? The triumph of that? Boy, that's a time to put an exclamation mark. A clang of the symbols. And put your pen down and say.
- Worship. Jesus. Is building his church. And he's taken his gospel to that place. Where Satan's. Seat. Is.
- Rome. It's. It's. It's. Now you don't see it in our English translation. But in the original Greek. The last word of the book. Is. Unhindered. Lee.
- [49 : 10] Unhindered. Lee. So Christ is building his church. What's Satan doing? Trying to hinder it. Trying to stop it. Trying to destroy what Christ is building.
- And how does the book end? The gospel triumphing. In Rome. Unhinderedly. Unhinderedly. There's a lesson for us here.
- As we have moved. Perhaps into a post-Christian environment. I'm not saying that our nation was ever. A truly Christian nation. We were never a theocracy. But for many years.
- It was extremely friendly toward Christianity. And the Judeo-Christian ethic and worldview has prevailed and been honored in our land. And that friendliness is increasingly being turned into hostility.
- And the Judeo-Christian ethic is being increasingly attacked in our land. And even if this trend should continue. And the church should be persecuted in this nation.
- [50 : 15] Let's learn from the book of Acts. That the church of Jesus Christ has flourished in far worse times. King Jesus is well able to build his church.
- Under the Roman Empire. Under Christ hating Jewish religion at Jerusalem. He's able. It has done it.
- We need not enter into the future with fear. Yes, there's much today to distract and discourage us. And to sap our zeal for building the church of Christ. There is the religious persecution.
- Other religions persecuting Christians. And yes, there's growing political persecution around the world. And we're seeing something of it in our own land beginning.
- And yes, the devil is making great inroads inside churches. With hypocrisy. Just man pleasers. No fear of God. In the church anymore.
- [51 : 19] He's making inroads with the destruction of the unity of the church. God are all focused on all sorts of things. Arguing about this and that. And the great unfinished business is grinding to a slower halt.

We see the gospel being compromised. Being added to. Subtracted from. Updated. Changed. Prejudice is yes. Even within the church. We see all of this happening.

We shouldn't be shocked. We've read it all before here in Acts. And Jesus told us it would happen. And yes, we're not ignorant of Satan's devices. The world cannot.

And hell combined cannot stop Jesus from building his church. And so as the book comes to an end and Paul steps off the stage. Jesus remains the same.

Yesterday, today, and forever. And he continues to build his church. And it's your time to rise and shine. It's your time, oh church. This is your chapter.

[52 : 20] What's being written about your life. This great commission that Christ has given us. The greatest work on the earth today. And do you know what?

The world doesn't have a clue about it. I checked. I checked this morning. My news feed. I did not see one word about this grand operation of the church of Jesus Christ being built in every nation.

I read and just saw all kinds of headlines and news. Nobody's covering this. And it just shows how out of step the world is with the most important thing in the world.

The building of Christ's church. How out of step the world is with the most important person in the universe. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we should expect that.

It's a world under the power of the evil one. But don't let it influence you, brothers and sisters. Don't let your life become so absorbed and diverted with a host of other things that may in and of themselves be good.

[53 : 26] But that are pulling you away. Pulling us away as a church. From completing this unfinished business that Jesus has put in our laps. Of by the Holy Spirit.

Bearing witness and making disciples of the nations. Oh church arise. Sing it with me. Take your grace hymns. Number nine in our grace hymns. And stand and sing it with me.

And let's sing it to one another. And recommit ourselves to this grand business that is so laid out in the book of Acts for our encouragement.

Stand and sing it with me. Stand and sing it with me.