

Don't Waste Your Time of Peace

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[0 : 0 0] Acts chapter 9, verse 26. When he, that's Saul of Tarsus, came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.

But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.

And when the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.

It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda.

[1 : 0 5] There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. Aeneas, Peter said to him, Jesus Christ heals you.

Get up and take care of your mat. Immediately, Aeneas got up and all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. In Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabitha, which when translated is Dorcas, who was always doing good and helping the poor.

About that time, she became sick 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.

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 the Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

Peter sent them all out of the room. Then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, Tabitha, get up.

[2 : 2 6] She opened her eyes and seeing Peter, she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive.

This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon. Let's hear the preaching of God's Word.

Life is made up of alternating storms and calms.

Troubles and rest. And the precise mixture of each is something that's determined by our all-wise and loving Lord Jesus. Just how much calm, how much storm, and where, and when.

And that's not only true of people, the believer individually. It's also true of his church collectively. Right down through church history, we observe times of great persecution and times of relative peace.

[3 : 41] And it's been this way from the start, as we are seeing in the book of Acts. We've been watching the Lord Jesus building his church and doing so right in the midst of the hottest persecution of the church.

And what we have found is that though all hell fights against this building project of Christ, the Lord uses the very persecution against his church to spread his gospel and to grow the church.

So as the believers were scattered by persecution outside of Jerusalem, we read that wherever they went, they took with them the saving gospel of Christ.

And they told it to a far wider audience than what they had back home in Jerusalem. And the Lord Jesus went with them and poured out his spirit upon them and blessed their gospel endeavors.

So that the number of disciples was greatly multiplied. Not just in Jerusalem, as we've seen, but now throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria.

[4 : 50] All of Palestine is now increasing in number of disciples. And when Satan wielded his fiercest instrument of persecution, namely Saul of Tarsus, the Lord Jesus bested Satan by snatching Saul from his hand there on the road to Damascus, converting him, changing him, and then using him as his own chosen instrument to destroy the kingdom of darkness and to advance the kingdom of light, to turn people from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God, so that the man who formerly persecuted Christians was now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.

And it's this Saul, above all the other believers, who would make the deepest inroads with the gospel among the Gentiles, the non-Jews, and would so bring them into this ever-expanding, ever-growing, ever-advancing church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So many of us have lived to see much the same thing happen in our day. Satan's persecution, but not being able to withstand the growth of the church.

When Mao Zedong and the communist army took control of China in 1949, it marked the end of religious freedom for the church of Jesus Christ in China.

There was a planned, well-organized program put in place to obliterate religion from the country. Missionaries were driven out.

[6 : 35] Church leaders and Christians were arrested, tortured, their property confiscated, sent to labor camps or even executed. Estimates are as high as a quarter of a million Christians were martyred for the faith.

Why? Just because they believe in the Lord Jesus. Not because they believe anything different than what we do. Just because they did what you wanted to do, come together with God's people and worship the Savior and sing his praises.

And so they lost their lives. A quarter of a million. And so the greater part of the church of Christ in China was driven underground. And for decades, at least two and a half decades, they were underground.

The greater part of them under communistic atheism. And little information during this 25 years was coming out of China to even know how the church was getting on.

But during the 1970s, news slowly leaked out concerning this underground church. And what we found was that the gospel was doing just fine.

[7 : 49] And was bearing fruit beyond the wildest of our imaginations. The one million Protestant believers in 1949 had swelled to as many as 40 million just 40 years later.

And revivals were sweeping the land in a way that defies human explanation. And it continued to grow. So that today, estimates are as high as 100 million Protestant believers in China and growing.

You see, the gates of hell were all opposing the growth of Christ's church. But they could not prevail against it. They could not keep Christ from building his church in times of the hottest persecution.

But now I want to ask this question. What about times of peace? Not just times of persecution. But what about peacetime for the church?

For times of peace have their own peculiar temptations to the church of Christ. When the world is friendly to the church, it's all too easy for the church just to assimilate into the world.

[9 : 12] To become like it. To be conformed to its ways. To imbibe its values and priorities. Its goals and morals. And to live for the things of earth.

In times of peace, we can easily slip into a worldly spirit. A spirit of easy Christianity. Which is so prevalent in the West today.

Marked by spiritual laziness and flabbiness. Marked by little denial of self or cross bearing. Do you know that the believer is to take up his cross daily?

He is to die to himself daily. Whether he is living in the hottest persecution in China or the greatest freedom in America. There is a cross to be picked up today.

There is a cross to die on. Dear Christian. And it meets us in peacetime as well as in persecution.

[10 : 09] Indeed, rather than the church growing in peacetime, too often she backslides and declines in true religion. Indeed, we might say that persecution is slaying its thousands.

But peacetime is slaying its tens of thousands. And so with Saul's conversion and removal away to Tarsus, we read in verse 31.

Then, then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, the whole of Palestine, enjoyed a time of peace.

Now it lasted some six years, but it was a time of peace. And this text, verse 31, is of special interest to us who are in the western segment of Christ's church.

Because we have enjoyed a time of peace for over 200 years in our land. Freedom from religious persecution as our brother prayed.

[11 : 13] We didn't face opposition in getting to church today. We didn't have to go off into the woods, into a barn, into some secret place to gather.

But the question is, are we stronger for it or softer because of this time of peace? Here, in verse 31 of our text, we read of Jesus Christ building his church in the time of peace.

That thrills me. Because it tells me there is grace in Jesus Christ, the head of his church. Not only for the church to survive and thrive in the hottest persecution.

But for his church to not only survive, but to thrive in peacetime. With all of its temptations to ensnare us and to drag us in.

Well, there are growing storm clouds that point in the direction that our unusual time of peace for the church may be coming to a close. Religious liberties are not only being threatened, but are being taken away by many court decisions today.

[12 : 22] And some here may live to see the day when it will be our privilege to glorify God in a time of great persecution. But that's not where we're at today.

So let's seek together to serve the Lord in our present generation. In our present situation that God has determined. That Christ has determined for us, his church, living here in Indiana.

And ask, how can we glorify our Lord in this present time of peace? Well, we can learn from the early church how not to waste our time of peace.

But how to lay hold of the great opportunities that are ours to grow the church. Our text points the way, you notice verse 31. Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.

It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit. It grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. So let's consider the four things stated here that were happening in the church in Palestine during the time of peace.

[13 : 32] I'm going to deal with them in the order that they're found in the Greek. And so the first is, it was strengthened. This is what was happening in this period of peace. It was strengthened.

It's the word for built up, edified. It's a word that comes from the building trades. You've been past a building site, and first there's the foundation, and then the foundation walls, the footers, then the foundation wall, then the deck, and then some walls, and then the roof.

And there's progress to a building. And that's inherent in this word here, that it's built up. It's built up.

That's the word used. And here it's used of the church's spiritual edification. It's being built up spiritually. Not just in one or two areas, but their entire spiritual life and activity as a church was strengthened and built up.

Listen to the way Colossians 2, 6, and 7 uses this word. So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thanksgiving.

[14 : 48] So we've seen conversion. What a glorious thing is conversion. We've seen that in Saul, and many of us have seen it in our own lives, and we're a mystery to ourselves. He's changed us. We're not what we once were.

That's glorious. We've received Christ as Lord. But don't stop there. The scriptures are saying, go on now. Just as you've received him as Lord, now continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith.

There's further progress, you see, in the building of your Christian life and in the church. Well, how does this building up and strengthening happen?

Well, it happens through the word of God. Paul was spending some time with the Ephesian elders, and it's now time to leave them and to move on. And this is what he says to them in Acts 20, 32.

Now I commit you to God and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up. The word of God's grace. That's the Bible. It's able to build you up.

[15 : 54] There's our word. It's able to edify and to strengthen you. To develop you in your spiritual lives. So strong believers are those whose Bibles are well-worn.

Because that's how they're built up and strengthened. The word of God dwells richly in them. It's at work in them. It's doing something. It's renewing their minds. It's changing the way they think and live.

So that their lives start looking a whole lot like this book. A whole lot like the living word. Jesus Christ himself. Who is the embodiment of God's word.

And is the word. That's what it means to be strengthened, edified, built up in Christ. It's through his word that we begin to look more and more like him.

Strengthened in our faith and life in Christ. And during this time of peace throughout Palestine, the believers gave themselves to the intake of God's word.

[17 : 01] Perhaps they were not as able to gather together during times of persecution like we have today. Perhaps they couldn't meet as often. And so they did not have the word of God brought to them as often.

But oh, here's a time of peace. And they were strengthened. They were built up. How so? By the intake of the word of God being preached to them. So they didn't use their newfound peace just to exhale.

Just to catch their breath. Just to kick back and relax with a self-absorbed life. But rather, they laid hold of the new opportunities they had to be strengthened.

And so they were strengthened. Rooted and built up in Christ. Strengthened in the faith as they were taught. Now, we all know that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

And when we think about the church being strong, we need to remember that. That the whole body is to grow and build itself up in love.

[18 : 09] It is important that each believer in the church is growing and building, growing and being built up in Christ. That the church together might be built up as each part does its work.

So I'm asking you, in your time of peace, dear Christian, are you taking advantage of the precious freedom that we have to gather and hear the word of God preached?

Is that time of the church gathering circled and guarded on your calendar? And is the word that you're hearing changing your life?

Strengthening what is weak? Is there progress? Are you doing more now than you did in the beginning as Jesus presents to the church in Revelation 3?

Is there progress in your building? Are you any stronger than you were a year ago?

[19 : 14] They were strengthened during this time of peace. Are you any stronger in resisting temptation right now than what you were a year ago? You're putting your heel on some evil desires and finding help from God.

You're strengthened in the Lord. You've made use of this time of peace to grow and be built up. Are you any stronger at overlooking an insult?

When somebody does something offensive, are you getting any stronger at just letting it fall off your back like a duck does water? That's strength to overlook an insult.

Are you any stronger in loving your God and loving your neighbor and putting the others above yourself? Are you any stronger in bearing witness for Christ?

Any stronger in the faith? Just taking God at his word. Just resting on his promises. Let's all be hungering and thirsting and availing ourselves of the ministry of the word, which is able to build you up and to strengthen you.

[20 : 25] That's what they did during their peacetime. Not given to us to coast, but to be edified and strengthened, to be growing in the faith.

Well, the second thing that's mentioned is that they were living in the fear of the Lord. The commentator Lenski comments, This means that the church dreaded doing anything that might displease and offend the Lord.

They were afraid. They so loved their Savior, they were afraid of doing anything to displease them. That's the fear. That's one of the aspects of the fear of the Lord.

There's not a lot of fear of the Lord in the peaceful Western Christianity of today. There are few who tremble at his word. And I think part of it, it just happens so easily.

We want a comfortable view of God that matches our comfortable lifestyle. We're not just, we're not looking at death every day like the persecuted church was.

[21 : 36] But it's an easier life. And thank God for it. It's a blessing. It's what he's ordered up for us. We don't burn it. We count it as blessings. But it's very easy in an easier life to have an easier view of God.

Where we can have a view of God that we can manage and feel very comfortable about our sin. Even with this God. Well, this text should wake us up to the fact that something's desperately wrong.

When the church loses a sense of awe and reverence at the greatness of our Lord. He's not to be taken lightly. He's not to be dismissed as an equal, trivialized.

He's awesome in glory. And even his forgiveness is granted to us in order that we may fear him. Psalm 130 and verse 4.

Living in the fear of the Lord is a mark of spiritual vitality and health. It was during times of peace that this church was growing. Living in the fear of the Lord.

[22 : 43] That was a mark of their growth and strengthening. It's a mark of the sinfulness of the wicked that there is no fear of God before their eyes.

Psalm 36.1. So, are you growing in the fear of the Lord? The reverence and awe for him. That counts him. As our pastor said.

The most important person in your universe. And pleasing him is the most important business of life. And displeasing him? It's the greatest dread that we could ever have.

Now, I said that it's the Lord Jesus that parcels out times of peace and times of persecution. 1 Timothy chapter 2 tells us that we're right to pray for times of peace.

We're never told to pray for persecution. We don't have to be gluttons for punishment. We don't have to say, Lord, send a persecution. I don't find that anywhere in the Bible.

[23 : 48] But I do find in 1 Timothy, if you turn to it, 1 Timothy chapter 2, a command to pray for peace. For peaceful times, just as we're talking about.

Here, Paul tells Timothy, I urge then, 1 Timothy 2, 1 and 2. I urge then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for everyone.

For kings and all those in authority. And what is the aim of the specific prayers that he's talking about? That we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

This is good and pleases God our Savior. So what is the stated purpose behind our prayer? That we might have peaceful and quiet times in which we live. That our government would so order us with law and order that there would be peace and quiet in our streets.

To what end? Lord, keep things peaceful so that my self-indulgent life won't be interrupted. Is that it? No, it isn't, is it?

[25 : 00] So that I can live in luxury and sloth unhampered by persecution. No, rather pray so that you may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

That's what God is after in our times of peace. Is that what you're after? In your time of peace? Is that what I'm after? Is that what Grace Fellowship is after? As we live in this great period of peace from persecution.

Are we after godliness and holiness? That is godlikeness. Being holy as he is holy.

How easy it is to use the peace just to pursue self-interest. Rather than asking, how can I use this peace to pursue greater godliness, greater holiness in my life?

Sadly, this concern often falls by the wayside. As other things crowd in and crowd out the pursuit of godliness and the pursuit of holiness. Let's remember Christ's purpose for times of peace.

[26 : 06] It is that we may grow in godliness and holiness. Now, when that is my purpose and my focus in peacetime, then I understand how the fear of the Lord is so critical.

Because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It's the beginning. It's the first step to wise living. Living as God wants us to live. And the fear of the Lord is the very heart of godliness.

The fear of the Lord is the very soul of holiness. As someone has defined it, it is that awareness that I live before this awesome Lord. And nothing is more important than pleasing Him.

It's more important that I please. If I have seen Him as He is, the awesome Lord that He is, then there's nothing more important than pleasing Him. And pleasing Him is more important than pleasing me.

I need to think about that when I live in a self-indulgent, peacetime society. And pleasing Him is what happens when I fear Him.

[27 : 19] When I hold Him in reverence and awe. It's when I belittle Him. When I forget Him. When He's crowded out that I start pleasing me above pleasing Him.

Now notice, it doesn't just say they worshipped in the fear of the Lord. Yes, we are to worship in the fear of the Lord. But that's not what it says. It says they were living in the fear of the Lord. And that simply means that the fear of the Lord in their hearts affected everything that they did in life.

So, wherever I am, I want this pressing realization that the Lord is here. This awesome Lord Jesus is with me. He's right there.

I've set Him at my right hand. I see Him there by faith. He is with me. He promised to be. And I want to live with Him. And to live before His eye in a godly manner.

In a holy way. As He is holy. And when that's true, it affects everything that I'm doing. So, as I go to school. As I go into work.

[28 : 24] As I go to church. I set my awesome Lord before me. And I live accordingly. As He wants. And as I turn on my phone.

And my computer. And my television. As I live with my family. My church family. My neighbors. The most important person is always my ever-present Lord. He's with me.

I want to live with Him. And for Him. That's the fear of the Lord. And it is the very soul of godliness and holiness. And that's what this church.

The whole church throughout Palestine was growing in. A greater fear of the Lord. Who had given them this time of peace. Is pleasing Him the most important thing?

On your things to do. As you wake up each day. That's the evidence of the fear of the Lord. They were strengthened. They were living in the fear of the Lord.

[29 : 26] And thirdly. They were encouraged by the Holy Spirit. Ah. They were encouraged by the Holy Spirit. Now here's the stated source of this kind of life.

This life. It's the Holy Spirit. It's the indwelling gift of God's presence. The Holy Spirit is Christ's agent. And the Father's agent.

In the believer on earth. He's the one representing the Godhead. Who comes and sets up His home in our hearts. And there comes to encourage godliness.

And holiness. He's the secret to all strengthening in the church. The supernatural power source. Of the indwelling Spirit of God.

So that Isaiah 11 too says that. He is the spirit of wisdom and understanding. The spirit of counsel and of power. The spirit of knowledge.

[30 : 23] And the spirit of the fear of the Lord. Which means there is no fear of the Lord apart from the Holy Spirit's encouragement in our lives.

It's He who inspires us to fear the Lord. So that we will never turn away from Him.
Jeremiah 32. 40. Every fruit of the Spirit is just that.

It's the result of the Spirit. Coming alongside of us. He is the promised paraclete. That Jesus says, I'm going to send you another encourager.

Another comforter. The one to come alongside you and help. And to comfort and encourage. To motivate you. One man says he does what the coach does at halftime.

He comes and he seeks to encourage his team. They may be losing. They may be down. They may be depressed. And the coach comes to encourage and to motivate. To lift them up.

[31 : 21] And that's what our Holy Spirit does in our hearts. He's there to encourage us. In what way? In the way everlasting. In the way that is narrow. In the midst of everyone taking the easy broad road.

He's there to encourage us to take the hard right. And to live holy and godly in Christ Jesus. And to live with the fruit of the Spirit.

All love and joy and peace in my life comes from him. All patience, kindness and goodness comes from him. All gentleness, faithfulness, self-control comes from him.

He's the one who is working in us. Both to will and to do the things that please God.

Enabling us to put sin to death in our lives. It's through the Spirit that we do that. He's the one that is empowering us to be witnesses to Christ. You will receive the Spirit.

[32 : 17] That he might help you to bear witness. It's he who carries on the life of God in the soul. Of men and women, boys and girls in the church. And that's why we simply cannot afford to grieve the Holy Spirit.

We are 100% dependent upon the Spirit producing his life in us. If we are to have the fear of the Lord. If we are to be strengthened. Here's the source.

Without him we can do nothing. So use the peace time folks. Use the peace time. To cultivate close acquaintance with the Holy Spirit. In the book that he is inspired.

His help is always mediated through his word. It's the word and spirit. The word and spirit. And so it's through his word that he encourages the saints.

In a time of peace. To not live for themselves. But for him who died and was raised to life. So the church. How they use their time of peace. Well they used it to be strengthened.

[33 : 18] And build up in the Lord. They used it to live in the fear of the Lord. And in all that they did. To have the Lord first. And then they did all of that and more.

As they were encouraged by the Holy Spirit. And lastly we're told it grew in numbers. And are we surprised now? Are we surprised to find that the number of believers was swelling in Palestine?

Any more than folks were surprised to see the church in China growing? Spurgeon says the beauty of a holy life is the most powerful influence in the world next to the power of the Spirit of God.

Now that's saying a lot. It was by the power of the Spirit that Christ was raised from the dead. But the beauty of a holy life is the most powerful influence in the world next to the power of the Spirit of God.

In other words the holy people shine with what? With the beauty of Christ. With likeness to Jesus. They're like him. And so they adorn the teachings of God our Savior.

[34 : 37] The gospel claims that Jesus Christ saves from sin. And these believers were walking billboards. Demonstrating the sin cleansing power of Jesus blood. To all who knew them.

Living lives that made the gospel attractive. And sweetly commended Jesus to others. It wasn't you mean that's what a Christian is?

I don't want to have anything to do with their Savior. No it wasn't that. It was the opposite. Do you mean that's what Jesus does to a wife? A husband? A child?

A parent? A neighbor? A fellow worker? Jesus does that? I'd like to know something more about him. You see a holy life makes the gospel attractive.

And so it grew in numbers. It grew in numbers. Why? Because they were strengthened in the Lord.

[35 : 34] And they were living in the fear of the Lord. And they were being encouraged by the Holy Spirit. And that holy life, Christ-like life of loving God and loving their neighbor as themselves.

That made the gospel attractive. And God blew upon those lives and increased the number who would listen to the gospel, the saving message, and be converted themselves.

Even as Saul of Tarsus was converted. So it grew in numbers. Now I fear that perhaps some of us in the Reformed Baptist world may have a wrong idea about growing in numbers.

And I think we have something to learn from this text. To be sure, the church growth movement has missed the mark. Largely failing by making the numbers the end goal.

We just want to get more people into the church. Martin Lloyd-Jones says, if you want more people, just put an advertisement up that says, I'll preach next week in my swimming suit.

[36 : 37] And we'll get them in. No, that's not the goal. It's not the end goal. No, we want to see more worshipers of Jesus. We want to see more disciples of Jesus.

We want to see more conversions to Jesus. So that can't be our goal. It will lead us sadly astray from Christ and faithfulness to his word.

We'll start paring down the message just to get people in the doors. That cannot be the right way. But having said that, we cannot be indifferent to growing in numbers.

We can't. Because each number is an immortal person who will live forever, ever, either in heaven or in hell. And if you look at numbers that way, and you see the crowd that way, and you realize that every single person in this crowd is going to live somewhere forever.

It will change the way you view numbers in church. It's only right that we should be concerned with growing in numbers.

[37 : 50] That we should seek and pray for the number of true disciples and worshipers of Christ to increase and multiply in this place. We sing that hymn. We long to see thy churches full.

That breathes the spirit of the gospel. We want others to taste and see that the Lord is good. And for them to be added to the church. Paul says, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

That more numbers might be brought to the saving Lord Jesus Christ. So why should Satan have all the numbers? There's to be a countless throng before the throne singing the praises of Jesus from every tribe, language, and nation.

Let's seek to bring them to the Savior. To see as many as we can rescued from the kingdom of darkness and from eternal torments. And brought into the freedom and joy and peace that comes from believing in the Lord Jesus.

Peaceful times. With freedom of speech. We have it in our Bill of Rights, don't we? That we have the freedom to go out and to talk to a man. To talk to a woman.

[38 : 58] To talk to a boy or a girl. About the Savior. To say, I have some good news for you. Could I tell you some good news? It's not against the law like it is in many places.

Are we using a time of peace to see the church growing in numbers? Are we taking advantage of the open doors for evangelism? The opportunities to send the gospel out from this peacetime land and church into the ends of the earth.

Well, what have we seen this morning? We've seen that the Lord Jesus knows how to grow his church. Not just in persecution. That might be easier. As we've seen in China.

But he even knows how to make his church flourish in peacetime America. And that gives hope to me. For Grace Fellowship Church.

For my heart. Not to decline in peace. But actually to be built up and grow. Well, the rest of chapter 9 gives us a couple examples of how the church was growing in this time of peace.

[40 : 12] We've been studying the life of Saul. Just getting introduced to him. And then the account turns back its focus upon Peter. Where it was before. Talking about Peter and the apostles. And now the spotlight will be following Peter for the next three chapters.

And so behind all of this, we must not miss that it's the Lord Jesus building his church. And he's doing so through the likes of a Peter. One of his apostles. And Peter's visiting the saints in different places.

Seeking to encourage them. And he travels west of Jerusalem. Right over to the Mediterranean Sea. And he's going up this coastline along the Mediterranean Sea. That's the region where Philip had preached the gospel.

After he disappeared from the Ethiopian eunuch on the road from Jerusalem. And Peter's now following up with those conversions. And seeking to encourage these new congregations of believers.

First in Lydda and then in Joppa. And at Lydda he finds a man named Aeneas. And he had been bedridden and paralyzed for eight years. Kids, you ever been so sick that you had to stay in bed all day?

[41 : 16] About eight days. About eight years. And Peter comes and he says, Jesus Christ heals you.

You see, this is nothing that I'm doing, Aeneas. I don't have... I could just as easily create a son as to heal you. But Jesus, who did create sons, heals you.

Get up and take care of your men. And he got up. He was immediately healed. And we read that all those living in Lydda and the 30-mile plain of Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

The miracle confirmed the gospel witness that they heard from Peter's mouth. And they turned to the Lord. Before this, they were turned toward themselves and toward hell.

And now they were turned to the Lord. This is Jesus growing his church in peacetime. Through the life and ministry of his apostle Peter.

[42 : 15] And then a similar thing happens 10 miles down the coast at Joppa. Present-day Joppa. Only here it was not a paralyzed man, but a dead woman named Dorcas.

And the Lord Jesus supernaturally brings this dead woman back to life with the effect that it became known all over Joppa. And many people believed in the Lord. In both those cases, we have both elements of true conversion.

There is a turning to the Lord and a believing in the Lord. There is repentance and faith. One is stated in one case. The other is stated in the other.

But wherever you have the one, you always find the other. They turned to the Lord and trusted in him. Believed in the Lord. And that's how Jesus was building his church.

Through the work of the apostle Peter. And the miraculous gifts that he was given to work.

[43 : 17] But then the church also grew through the ministry of this woman named Dorcas. She's a disciple of Jesus. She had put her trust in him. She had turned to the Lord. And the one-liner description of her life is that she was always doing good and helping the poor.

You know, that's one of the descriptions of Jesus. We'll see it later on in the book of Acts. Peter, next chapter, will say that he went about doing good. Isn't that something?

She was always doing good and helping the poor. She's just like her master. Amazing that a disciple should be like her master. What will be the one-liner that will describe your life when you die?

He was a disciple who, what? She's just an ordinary rank and file member of Christ's church.

She's no apostle. She's not holding office in the church. But who can measure her influence for Christ? Christ. In the whole city of Joppa. Who heard of her death and being raised back to life.

[44 : 29] Because everywhere she went, she left behind not gossip and destruction, but a trail of good deeds. And encouraged people. She did not moan about what she could not do.

But she found out what she could do. She couldn't preach like Peter. She couldn't raise people from the dead or heal like Peter. But she could make the gospel of Jesus attractive by going about doing good and helping the poor.

So that's what she did. I can sew. Here's some people. They're poor. They're so poor they don't have proper clothing. I can sew. I've got enough money here to buy a little more material.

And so she gave her money, her time, her talent, and her heart to do good to others. And as she did, she did it as unto the Lord.

Because whatever you do for others. He says, when you do this to the least of my brothers, you do it as unto me. And so she's sewing for the Lord Jesus, who taught her that it's more blessed to give than to receive.

[45 : 39] And she's living this way to enrich others in need. And in so doing, she's reflecting her master. The grace that's found in the Son of God, who had all the glory and riches of heaven.

And he did not hang on to it. But he came and became nothing. He became a servant. He became a man, a human being. And he went even lower and humbled himself to the point of dying on the cross to serve men.

He became a man and became sin for us and became a curse for us and bore the wrath of God. That's the spirit that brought Jesus Christ out of heaven to earth.

And it's seen in this woman. She's not living for her son. She is living for others. And it's saying, she's like her Lord.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. She became poor. And you see, that's the problem with doing good to others.

[46 : 48] You've got to be willing to become poor in time, in money, talent. But she had so tasted of her Lord that it flowed that same grace to others.

And she showed the power of Jesus to take self-absorbed people like Dorcas had been and to turn her outside with love to others.

So Dorcas got sick and died. And here they came, all the widows wearing their clothes that she had made for them, crying and grieving her death.

Mark Twain was no theologian, but he wrote, Well, here's a whole group of women who are sad and grieving.

When this little unknown woman, Dorcas, a nobody in the world, when she died, because she had been busy with the life God gave her, doing good to others.

[47 : 59] What a powerful testimony she left for the Lord Jesus. And folks from Joppa saw what Jesus does. How he beautifies them with his own spirit and grace and love.

So Peter, being nearby, ten miles away, is sent to come. Perhaps they thought that maybe he can do something, even though she's dead.

And he goes down to his knees and he's assuming the posture of absolute helplessness. You ever pray on your knees? It's a healthy thing to do. Just to remind yourself, Lord, I come as a beggar.

I don't have any claim on you. And Peter says, I don't have any claim to do anything for this woman. Lord, raise her. He's down on his face.

He's down on his knees. And then he does what the Lord did to that little girl, calling her by name and telling her to get up. And again, the Lord Jesus is the one that gave life where there had been death.

[49 : 04] And this became known all over Joppa. And many people believed in Dorcas' Lord Jesus. Well, here's a lady who not only adorned the poor and needy by her charity, but adorned the gospel by always doing some good.

Let's not underestimate the power of Christ through people like her. Yes, you can't do as Peter, but you can do as Dorcas.

So we've been seeing the Lord Jesus building his church in peace times. Dangerous times, tempting times, but Jesus can build them even there.

That's our call, Grace Fellowship, to demonstrate that there is grace in Jesus to strengthen us and to make us grow in the fear of God in the midst of a world that's dismissing God.

To make us treasure his word so that we're being built up in it and being encouraged in the Holy Spirit and to actually make us to grow in numbers because of the power of the Spirit working through lives that are commending the Savior.

[50 : 17] Church history has not had its last chapter written. Acts 28 is not the end of church history. It's being written today. Grace Fellowship Church, what will be written about how we did in the time of peace that we are enjoying?

Let's learn from the church in Acts 9. We don't know how long the peace will last, but we know this, to whom much is given, much will be required. Let's learn from this church how to draw from Christ's grace to glorify him in our world, in our peacetime nation, and bring glory to him.

Let's pray. Thank you, Father, for this inspired account of church history back in the early church and how you kept them in times of greatest persecution and actually grew your church.

Thank you that you're doing that even in our day, in many places around the world. Be with our persecuted brethren. Teach them to treasure your smile and your spirit.

Keep them faithful even unto death, knowing that you have promised them the crown of life. We bow and recognize that you've not called us here and now to glorify you in great persecution, but you've rather ordered up for us a period of peace.

[51 : 39] And we would confess, Lord, we have not made use of it as we ought. We have wasted our freedoms. Forgive us and come and teach us and make us to be a praise to our Savior's name.

Amen. That there is one who holds our heart and has captured our love, that nothing in this world in peacetime can even hold a candle to. Give us help to show with Christ-like graces that what our Savior has done for us and what he will do for others.

Help us to be more bold in speaking the saving message of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so grow your church under persecution and under peacetime to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in whom we pray.

Amen.