

The Church of Acts 2

The Church of Acts 2

The Scriptural pattern for the Church today

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Contents

Introduction	9
The church established by Jesus	13
The church's foundation: this same Jesus.....	45
Pentecost: empowerment of the church	79
How does God add to the church?.....	109
What is the work of the church?	141
Conclusion.....	171

To my flock at Galeed Chapel, Brighton:
This book is inscribed by your unworthy pastor.
May the Lord yet bless his Word among us
richly and all the glory be his.

‘As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord,
so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and
stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught,
abounding therein with thanksgiving.’

(Colossians 2:6-7)

Introduction

The content of this book is based on a series of five sermons preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, on consecutive Lord's Day evenings in May and June 2022. The sermons as originally given have been edited for publication as a book, but substantially maintain the structure and content of those delivered.

The subject matter of these sermons had been a burden to me for some time. I had witnessed things in the churches which greatly saddened me. Some things were to do with the outward witness of the church – conformity to the world, conniving at sin, and a spirit of fatalism. But even more troubling were the inward spirit of the church and how in many cases it was far departed from the 'mind ... which was also in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 2:5). It caused me to ask: is the church I pastor a truly New Testament church? That is the burden of these sermons.

When Pope Benedict XVI attended a service at Westminster Abbey in 2010, the hymn, 'Christ is made the sure foundation' was chosen to accompany the procession. How incongruous when the Papacy denies that the rock on which the church is built is Christ, believing instead it is poor fallible Peter! But it

The Church of Acts 2

brought me to consider how easy it is to say – and to believe, although mistakenly – that Christ is the only foundation of the church of which we are members, when in fact our church may also rest itself at least partially on tradition and pragmatism, and may have become far removed from the pattern set out in the Word of God. That concern has grown over the years and caused much prayer and searching of the Scriptures.

It is not my desire to be negative or critical. It is easy to attack things which are not right in a way which only produces discouragement. What we really need is a positive statement from the Word of God as to what the apostolic church looked like, and a spirit of prayer granted that we might be given grace to seek increasing conformity to it. That is the object of this book.

The subject is large, and a full treatment would ideally take in the whole of the history and doctrine of the church as can be gleaned from the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles and The Revelation of John. Here we confine ourselves to the foundation principles for the church as given in just the first two chapters of Acts.

I would encourage readers of this book to:

Introduction

- (1) Pray that the Lord would bless your consideration of these things to your good and the good of the church of which you are a member.
- (2) Bring everything I have written back to the Word of God.
- (3) Continue to study the subject yourself throughout the rest of the New Testament.
- (4) Seek grace and wisdom to put into practice what you learn.

I want to thank Mrs Linda Wigley for kindly typing these sermons for publication; my wife Catherine for her assistance in editing them, and her loving support as a faithful pastor's wife and my best critic; and finally, my church and congregation who have supported me and my family so loyally over the past four years, and particularly during my illness. 'Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations' (Luke 22:28). May the Lord richly reward you for the love you have shown to me as your pastor.

To God be the glory!

Matthew J. Hyde

February 2023

The Church of Acts 2

The church established by Jesus

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:1-8)

The subject of 'The church in the book of The Acts of the Apostles' has been on my mind now for nearly

The Church of Acts 2

eighteen months. I have felt a great concern over the state of Zion, and especially the state of our churches. There is considerable ignorance about the doctrine of the church, despite it being one of the fundamental points of our most holy faith. I fear it is a doctrine which has been solemnly neglected amongst us. When trouble arises within the churches, we find just how sick the body is – how divided and weak – and what dishonour is brought upon the holy name of Jesus Christ. So, my prayer is that the consideration of these things might be blessed to the strengthening of the church.

Perhaps you ask, 'What relevance is the church to me?' The church is the body of Christ. The church is the glory of Christ on this earth. If we neglect the doctrine of the church, we do so not only to our own detriment and the detriment of our fellow believers (because if we get the doctrine of the church wrong, then the body will be sick), but to the detriment of the honour and glory of Christ, the great head of the church, on earth.

The *Gospel Standard Articles of Faith* remind us that, as we approach the book of The Acts of the Apostles, we must realise that we are not apostles, although we are part of the same body of Christ. But, keeping the difference between us and the Apostles in mind, it is

The church established by Jesus

necessary that we consult this book for a right understanding of the church.

Finally, as we approach these things, may we approach them prayerfully. May it be a burden and a concern to you, as it has been to me, to know that we are walking according to the Scriptures here in our own local church. We need to pray that if we err in any matter, the Lord would graciously open our eyes, and bless his Word to us. May we seek that we might be for the honour and the glory of God in the place where he has established us as part of his church.

So, with those opening remarks, let us come to our text.

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The book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. You will find the Gospel of Luke opens in a very similar manner. Now that Luke is beginning to write Acts, he refers back to his Gospel as 'the former treatise,' which he had written to someone called Theophilus, to instruct him and to teach him in the gospel. Luke had firstly written to Theophilus about the acts and the sayings of Jesus Christ while he lived on this earth, and now he comes later to record for Theophilus the acts and the sayings of Jesus Christ in his church by his Apostles.

## The Church of Acts 2

Acts begins on a most glorious note: 'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus **began** both to do and teach.' Jesus *began* – and Jesus is *still doing* – and Jesus is *still* teaching! As I stand before you in the pulpit, I am an ambassador for Christ. It is *his* work – it is not my work. And it is *his* word. If a preacher faithfully preaches the gospel, he is preaching as the 'oracles of God' (1 Peter 4:11), and that preacher's ministry is in a real sense the continuation of the words and teaching of Christ. All the works of grace that appear within the church and congregation are the works of Jesus Christ. What a beautiful thought that is! Jesus is still working! He began – but he has not finished! That is where the hope of each poor, tried child of God must be: 'Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ' (Philippians 1:6).

What a high view we will have of the church, if only we can see by faith that the church is the work of Christ, and the *ongoing* work of Christ – it is not finished! The work of the preacher in the pulpit and the work of the church, is the work of Christ. That will make us careful how we go about things. It will make us more prayerful. It will keep us humble. But it will give us a greater certainty – a blessed certainty: we are not venturing in our own work, and the work does not rely on our own



## The church established by Jesus

strength. But we venture with assurance that the work is *his!* So we can say:

... Yet must this building rise;  
'Tis thy own work, almighty God,  
And wondrous in our eyes.

(I. Watts, *Gadsby's Hymns* 141)

Consequently, while this book of the Bible is called 'The Acts of the Apostles' perhaps we may rightly say that it could equally be described as 'The Acts and the Sayings of Jesus Christ in the Church'. It is a striking thought that the church record, the church book of the church here at Galeed, and the ministry amongst the churches, continues to be 'The Acts and the Sayings of Jesus Christ in his Church'.

### **I. The establishment of the church**

We read in these first eight verses of Acts I of the establishment of the New Testament church. In the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension into glory, Jesus Christ established the church. It was in that time period that he gave the great commission to his disciples: 'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,' and

## The Church of Acts 2

confirmed them with the glorious promise: 'And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Matthew 28:19–20).

Jesus Christ establishes the church. It is not an edifice made by man. We read here how Jesus establishes it. He *gave 'commandments* unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and *speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*' – that is, the things concerning the church of Christ – 'And, being assembled together with them, *commanded them* that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.'

The point that we want to bring out here is that Jesus has established his church by his commands. The church is not an optional thing. It is established by Christ's authoritative command.

The church in all its various facets – the ordinances of the church; church discipline; how the church should rightly function – is entirely established by the commands of Christ. None of those aspects of the church are optional extras. Sadly, as churches, we do not always come back to the commands by which Christ has established his church. We resort to pragmatism.

## The church established by Jesus

We do what we *think* is right. We are willing to leave this, and willing to leave that. We cut out bits we do not like, perhaps concerning church discipline, for example. We say they no longer apply. We cut out the offices of the church. Some churches go on for years without a pastor and without any apparent concern about this, or any consideration of the role of 'elders' or 'bishops' and deacons in the church.

The alarming thing is that to act with such a level of disregard for Christ's commands is usually characteristic of those who are *outside* the church, rather than those who are *part of* the church. Because, if we are part of the body, can the body ignore what the head says? If the body begins to do contrary to the commands and signals that it receives from its head, we know how dysfunctional it will be. We see it in disorders where the brain sends out signals, but the body does not respond, it brings the whole body to weakness and confusion. So it is in the church of Christ when we ignore or turn away from what is established by the commands of Christ.

We have no right to say to Jesus, 'What doest thou?' 'Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?' (Ecclesiastes 8:4). We have no right to question what he has established. Remember that he is all-wise, and he knows the end

## The Church of Acts 2

from the beginning. He has formed the church for his own glory. So, when Jesus gave commandments to the apostles to establish the New Testament local church, we should be concerned to know what these commands are, and to be given grace to walk in accordance with his commands. We need keeping grace from Jesus so that we would not be left to lean to our own understanding, or to depart from the truth in any way, because when we depart from his commands, it always produces a sorry state in our own souls and the souls of our fellow believers. It brings a disease within the church, and it brings dishonour on the glorious head of the church, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### **2. The nature of the church**

Jesus said before Pilate, 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36). This is a cardinal point that the church needs to remember constantly. The nature of the church is *not of the earth*. The church is spiritual. It is the body of Christ. The disciples misunderstood this. They went to him, asking that they might sit on his left hand and on his right hand; they wanted a place in the kingdom. They had misunderstood that he had not come to establish a political kingdom, a kingdom on the earth. The kingdom which he had come to establish – his church – is his mystical body, his spiritual body. It is a spiritual building. It is a spiritual kingdom. This is what

## The church established by Jesus

we need to grasp concerning the church. It is not in flesh and blood, but it is in the power of the Holy Ghost.

The disciples here came and asked him, 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' Jesus had risen again from the dead, despite their fears, despite their lack of faith. They had since spent precious times with him in the upper room and in Galilee, where he even appeared to five hundred at one time. And now they thought he was going to be with them forever – he was going to *now* establish his kingdom – he was going to reign on this earth, and they were going to have position and authority. But Jesus said, 'No!' 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.'

The church is spiritual in the sense that it is formed by the Holy Spirit. It is by the work of the Holy Spirit within the souls of the Lord's people, as he regenerates us and separates us from this world, that we become part of the 'called out'. That is what the word 'church' in the original means: *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία), 'called out.' We are called out of the world. We are separated to Christ. We

## The Church of Acts 2

are a spiritual body. The church in any given place is not defined by the building we meet in. In the thinking of many people it seems that the existence of the church is inextricably linked with the building they meet in. It rests on the name of former pastors. It rests on their heritage. But these things are not the church! If the building were burnt down, the church of Christ would not be destroyed. Pastors come and go. Buildings come and go. Denominations come and go. The church in different parts of the earth comes and goes. But the one true church continues in every generation, and is called out of every kindred, tribe and tongue – a spiritual kingdom.

The church exists by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Those who are rightly members of the church are baptized with the Holy Ghost. 'No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost' (1 Corinthians 12:3). The church is not man-made. It is made by the Holy Spirit.

The church is formed by invincible grace: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts' (Zechariah 4:6). That is the force that has formed the church. That is the force that has taken sinners out of the kingdom of this world and into the kingdom of Christ. If you are a sinner saved by grace, you will know something of the power that has taken

## The church established by Jesus

you as a beggar from the dunghill and set you among princes (1 Samuel 2:8). O that we would dwell more and more on that power, that we would have more and more of the realisation that such were some of us. We were sinners in this world, but we have been called, washed, regenerated, gathered in, put among the children, numbered among the election of grace, made living stones in the church of Christ – by the power of God! Have you grasped that? Have you been taught that by the Holy Spirit? The church is not in outward things, but in spiritual. It is not in eating and drinking – but it is in being made partakers of Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

This is something the church frequently forgets. Down through the ages the church has kept slipping back into this slough. It fails to remember that God's kingdom is not of this world. We want to see the kingdom established here. We want to see the church of Christ built again numerically. We want to see our buildings full. But would we be happy if that was all? If the chapel was packed, could we be happy if there were only a few real believers among them? Of course we long to see new chapels built. Of course we want to see the church again favoured by the state in our land. If the Lord revives his cause, these things may rightly happen. They are not small things, nor to be taken lightly. But

## The Church of Acts 2

they are outward things, and alone these outward things are nothing – they are nothing if there is no work of the Holy Spirit in souls.

When we have a right view of this spiritual building, we will realise that its strength rests in the fact that it is spiritual, not natural. How often, like David, we number the people, because the numbers are what we imagine the strength is in. We look for the kingdom on this earth. But the kingdom is spiritual. So, the far more important question is: where is the work of grace in the souls of sinners? Are we spiritually strong? Is the Spirit working within us? Is he keeping alive your soul? Are you a *living* stone in Zion? Are you praying for Zion? The hymn writer said:

My soul shall pray for Zion still,  
While life or breath remains;  
There my best friends, my kindred dwell;  
There God my Saviour reigns.

(I. Watts, *Gadsby's Hymns* 361)

It is when there are living souls who can sing that hymn that the church is strong, although they may be few in number. There may be only eleven in an upper room, as we read in this chapter, but if they are continuing 'with one accord in prayer and supplication' (verse 14) then the church is strong! The church is strong when



## The church established by Jesus

the Spirit is working actively among them, when the Spirit gives them prayer, when the Spirit blesses the preaching, when the Spirit brings forth praise in their souls. That is because the church is of the Spirit – it is, as we might put it, '*Spirit-ual*!' 'Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.' 'John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.'

If we view the church as being merely of this earth, we have a low view of it. If in our thinking the church rests on personalities, or if the church is all about the plot of ground and the walls and roof that stand on it, these are indicators that we have a low view of the church.

### **3. The work of the church**

What purpose does the church exist for? What is its function? Jesus Christ tells us, 'Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.'

The church is the living witness to the existence and power of a living Saviour. The church is the witness to the fact that Jesus still lives, and that he ever makes intercession for us. The church is the witness to the powerful operations of the Holy Spirit. What a glorious thought that is! You may feel you are a poor wretch,

## The Church of Acts 2

but if you have the spirit of prayer, if you weep over your sins, if you even with a lisping tongue try to sing his praise, if you put the crown on the head of Jesus – then you are fulfilling the function of the church, and the function of a true member of that church – being a witness to the power of grace.

You who were sometimes darkness, but are now light – you who were at one time of the world, taken up with the world, but now delivered from it – you who at one time loved sin, but have now been brought to hate it – you who were once at enmity with God and hated the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, but are now brought to *love* him and to say by grace, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee' (Psalm 73:25) – you are a witness to the power of God! When these changes take place in sinners it is a witness to the grace of God. It is a witness to the mercy of God. It is a witness to the love of God. And although you may not be able to see it just now, it is a witness to the wisdom of God, who chooses the foolish and the weak and the contemptible things of this earth, to bring to nothing the things that are strong and the things that are wise (1 Corinthians 1:27). He brings to nothing *man's* wisdom, and *man's* glory ('that no flesh should glory in his presence;' 1 Corinthe-

## The church established by Jesus

ans 1:29), so that he will have *all* the glory in his church. 'Ye are my witnesses' (Isaiah 43:10).

Jesus Christ's church has existed from the first promise of the gospel given in Eden after the fall. Although in the Old Testament the church was somewhat concealed within the state of Israel, and thus not seen in all its glory, the saints have always been saved by the same power. Israel was gathered by the same power. 'For the LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye' (Deuteronomy 32:9). That is the testimony to the work of God in the Old Testament church – the way in which he gathered his people. He gathered Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees and the Israelites out of Egypt. When he gathered them, he kept them, and he said to the church in Isaiah's time, as he says to us today, 'Ye are my witnesses' (Isaiah 43:10).

The church of the New Testament is the same church – we are saved by the same power, the same grace, the same blood. But now the law of ordinances has been taken away by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. The glory of the New Testament church is greater, if we may put it this way, as we give open witness to the once crucified, now risen, ascended and glorified

## The Church of Acts 2

Saviour, who is coming again. The church is no longer confined to one nation or principally to one building – the Temple in Jerusalem. The New Testament local church is being established by the Holy Spirit throughout the world. It comes and goes in specific places, but it continues in the world as maintained by the Holy Spirit.

So the work of the church is not to witness to ourselves. It is not to witness to the name of *The Gospel Standard* – not to witness to the fact that we are Strict and Particular Baptists – not to witness to the history of our own local church in a particular place – but to witness to *Jesus Christ!* Anything short of this is to some extent or another a man-centred religion. We must continually go back to the centre and the source and the foundation of the church – Jesus Christ and him crucified.

It is a searching question: Is the church here a witness to Jesus Christ? You may say, 'That begins in the pulpit, pastor!' And it does in one sense. Have you been led to elect a pastor who preaches Jesus Christ, who desires to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified? Is that the ministry you desire? Is that the ministry you pray that I would be led to bring into the pulpit? A ministry that does not promote the minister; a ministry that does not major on the things that are

## The church established by Jesus

going on in this world; but a ministry that is centred in the apostolic doctrine, 'we preach Christ crucified' (I Corinthians 1:23).

But friends, I must turn it back to you in the pew. It comes down to every exercised soul in this place. Some of you are not church members. I long for you all to be church members. I long for you all to be brought by grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit to become witnesses to Jesus Christ in the way that he has appointed. But it is a solemn truth that not all the Lord's people will be baptized – some of the Lord's people fail to witness to him at that most fundamental level of all. Others of you in the pew have already put on Christ by open profession. Yet it is another solemn truth that although they are church members, not all who have been baptized are living a life which truly witnesses to Jesus Christ. It is a searching matter: Am I *really* made a witness to Jesus Christ? What does my life speak in the world? What does my life say about Jesus Christ to the watching world? If we are part of the church of Christ, one of the souls he has gathered out of the world, we must be his witnesses.

And this is an essential function of the church. The church is not just about preaching. The church is not just about gathering on the Lord's Day and during the week to hear me preach, or to attend the prayer

## The Church of Acts 2

meeting, or to hold the ordinances of the church. Friends, the church comes to expression in how we live. It should affect every moment of our lives, and every interaction we have with the world.

Jesus Christ calls us to be witnesses to him so that the church would grow. It is so that the gospel of Jesus Christ will be preached, 'both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.' This description is almost the 'contents page for the Book of Acts,' as someone has called it. The first seven chapters of Acts describe the church in Jerusalem. In chapters eight to eleven the church spreads into Judaea and Samaria. Then from chapter eleven onwards to the end of the book the gospel keeps spreading towards 'the uttermost part of the earth.' Since the end of The Acts of the Apostles, the church has continued to grow as the Lord has separated sinners saved by grace, called them out of the world and appointed them to be witnesses to him to the uttermost part of the earth. What a tremendous thought that is! The local church we belong to today exists, under the sovereignty of God and the work of his Spirit, through this work of the church over two thousand years.

Can you trace how your soul's salvation, in one perspective, has come about from how Christ's church has grown? As he has prospered his church, he has had

## The church established by Jesus

witnesses down through every generation and throughout the world. Witnesses such as Augustine of Hippo, John Wycliffe, Thomas Cranmer, John Owen, George Whitfield, William Gadsby, J K Popham and so the list goes on. Can you mark out in your soul's experience who some of those witnesses to you have been? Perhaps some of the Lord's servants have been raised up to preach the gospel to you? Or perhaps one here, and one there, not the Lord's servants, not ministers of the gospel but godly church members – or perhaps not even church members, but those who are gracious, who have been witnesses to you in their conversation and in their life, of Jesus Christ? And through that means the church continues to grow to the uttermost part of the earth.

We can see also that the gospel spreads through three concentric circles. Initially it spread through Jerusalem, from the actual gathering where the church was in the upper room. Then it spread to Judea and Samaria, the area round about the church. Then ultimately it spreads throughout the world.

We should seek to maintain this order in the ministry of our local church. Some are very busy trying to spread the gospel to the four corners of the earth, yet when it comes to their own church, and the ministry in the local congregation, and their administration of church

## The Church of Acts 2

discipline, things are sorely lacking. They do not have the order of the three circles right. The Word was to be preached in Jerusalem first. Our own house must be set in order first. How can we rightly be a witness to the Lord Jesus Christ to the uttermost part of the earth if our own house is not in order?

Yet we ought to have a concern that this order would be seen. We should not just be focused on our own local church and the preaching here, but we should have the same concern as the church has always had in every age for the city round about and the wider locality, and then as far afield as we can reach. What good is it if the light is hidden under the bushel? What a grievous thing if the church does not have this far-reaching desire to be a witness to Jesus Christ.

### **4. The manner of the work**

How is this work of being witnesses to be carried out? How are we to teach all nations, as Jesus tells the disciples in Matthew 28:19? It is by word and deed. Here at the beginning of Acts Jesus is said both *to do* and *to teach*. We have to pay attention to both his *acts* and his *sayings*. All that he did *and* all that he preached, was *the gospel*. The gospel is not just what he preached – it is also what he did. The gospel is not just what he did – it is also what he said.



## The church established by Jesus

When you read on in The Acts of the Apostles, you will find that it sets out both what the Apostles did, and what they preached. These are the two aspects of the way in which the church is to be a witness to Jesus Christ. As we have already said, the witness is fundamentally in the preaching, the publishing and sending forth of the Word of God, but it is also in the lived example. The church is very weak when what is preached is not backed up with the lived experience. We may seem to be good hearers of the Word, but perhaps we fail in our doing of the Word. The church is then left open to the criticism, 'They say they believe this, but they don't act like it!' Are we failing in our witness because we say one thing, but we do not do it?

Others have a religion which is all about doing, but when it comes to the preaching, the doctrines of the gospel are not proclaimed clearly or fully. We must have *both!*

As we move on in Acts, we read of the things that Jesus did – 'he shewed himself ... by many infallible proofs,' for example – and what he spoke too, concerning 'the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.' As the church witnesses to Jesus's doings and sayings, the means the church must use are correspondingly both the preaching of the gospel and the walking out of that gospel in our lives.

## The Church of Acts 2

It is of course too simplistic to say, 'Well, the teaching part of the church is all about ministers and preaching.' Certainly, in the Acts of the Apostles, many acts done by the apostles are mentioned, that is, the twelve apostles, and Paul, the thirteenth. But even in this chapter we also find acts done by the women in the church. The apostles 'all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, *with the women*' (verse 14). There were young people too, such as Eutychus, who sat up late listening to the preaching of the Apostle Paul (Acts 20:8-12). The Acts of the Apostles speaks of the acts of the entire church as a body.

'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28). We must not despise one another. 'Let no man despise thy youth ...' (1 Timothy 4:12). You are, therefore, not to cut yourself off, saying, 'This does not apply to me.' Friend, by your word and by your walk, you are to be a witness to Jesus, 'both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.'

You are not to say, 'But I am totally unfit for this! How can I ever say anything which will be to the glory of Jesus Christ? How can I ever live as a witness? I keep stumbling! I come so far short! I am afraid I am only going to bring reproach upon the church of Christ. I

## The church established by Jesus

am only going to bring shame upon the person and the name of Jesus Christ!' Of ourselves we will, but remember what Bunyan says:

He that is down needs fear no fall,  
He that is low, no pride;  
He that is humble ever shall  
Have God to be his guide.

It is a mercy if we feel our weakness, our utter inability, and something of the enormity of what it is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. 'Who is sufficient for these things?' (2 Corinthians 2:16). If you think you are sufficient, it is a great mark against the reality of your discipleship.

But where does the feeling of insufficiency bring us? Those who are unfit and inadequate must lean harder on the Saviour who, knowing their insufficiency, nevertheless calls them to be his witnesses. 'Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?' (Song of Solomon 8:5). Our beloved says, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness' (2 Corinthians 12:9). At the very beginning of the church the promise is given: 'Ye shall receive power.' The Apostle Paul had to confess that he could do nothing of himself. But what could he say? 'I

## The Church of Acts 2

can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me' (Philippians 4:13).

If the church tries to do things on its own – if you try to be a witness to Jesus Christ in your own strength, you will get nowhere. You will bring nothing but shame and confusion on yourself, and even worse, we may even bring reproach on the church of Christ. But if we receive that power, the poorest and weakest lamb in Jesus' fold shall be to his honour and glory, and shall bring forth much fruit. We are, therefore, to seek that power and grace alone from the great head of the church: 'I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing' (John 15:5).

### **5. The need of patience in the church**

The church often becomes despondent and dispirited. How many years, sometimes, the Lord's servants seem to plough the same field, and sow the same seed, yet nothing comes of it. The church may seem to be brought down, rather than built up. The church may wonder where the scene will end. They may fear that everything is coming to an end. However, this fear is needless, because the work of building the church cannot come to an end. The church of Christ will be

## The church established by Jesus

completed. 'He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it' (Zechariah 4:7). But the times belong to God.

So the disciples had to learn patience. Jesus gave them a somewhat oblique answer when they wanted to know about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel. They wanted the kingdom to be established visibly, but Jesus said to them, 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.' We need much care in making this kind of request. These things are ultimately in God's hands. We must not expect to understand all his dealings with the church beyond what he has revealed. Instead we can rest on the fact that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The church's head has not died, and therefore the body still lives: '... because I live, ye shall live also' (John 14:19).

Jesus told the disciples to tarry at Jerusalem, and wait until they were endued with the Spirit from on high (Luke 24:49). He 'commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.' Then after he had said these things, he ascended into heaven. He was taken up from them and departed out of their sight. After watching him go, they came again to Jerusalem and to the upper room. They had to still wait.

## The Church of Acts 2

‘And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where they abode ...’ (v13). They lived together, and they ‘continued with one accord in prayer and supplication’. So we can see what kind of waiting the Holy Ghost is describing here: continuing with *prayer and supplication*. This waiting was not idleness and half-hearted prayers. It included calling on the Lord in prayer – for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on them, and for the promised power to be actually given. Friends, are we a praying church? Are we really seeking that the Lord will revive us? Are we earnestly praying that he will again send forth his gracious influence among us? Are we seriously praying that there would be frequent baptisms, so that the church would be built up? Are we wholeheartedly praying that souls would be brought in? Or are we half-hearted about these things? We need to learn how to wait rightly, with *prayer and supplication*. When was the last time you prayed with prayer and supplication for the reviving of the church? When was the last time you prayed with prayer and supplication for the influence of the Holy Spirit to again be poured out, and for the wilderness to be made a fruitful field?

The disciples also *continued* in prayer. It wasn’t just for the duration of a prayer meeting. It wasn’t just a passing thought now and again. They *continued* in

## The church established by Jesus

prayer for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. This is how the church must wait – *continuing in prayer and supplication* for the power of the Holy Ghost.

When we feel our weakness and see how low the church has been brought, what we have to do is continue to wait in prayer and in supplication. We are to wait patiently for the Lord to open doors, to bless, to appear.

At the same time, the disciples watched. Jesus had earlier commanded them, 'Watch and pray.' I planted some seeds yesterday morning, and on the packet of seeds it says, 'Germination 7-14 days.' But yesterday evening, I couldn't resist looking at them! It was very unlikely that there was going to be any green shoots – it would have been a miracle if there had been a green shoot in less than twelve hours! But I looked because of how interested I was to see them develop. When will they start to appear? What will they look like when they come? Perhaps if we were growing a food crop to keep us through the winter it would be a huge concern to see if they were healthy and how good the yield was going to be. Friends, are you looking out for the church? We preach the Word, like scattering seed. Do we pray over it? Do we look for growth from it? Are you looking for the signs of growth in yourself and in others? Are you looking for signs of revival? Are you

## The Church of Acts 2

looking for signs of the Lord's work? As the church has to patiently wait, joined with prayer and supplication, we need to watch expectantly.

### **6. The foundation of the church**

The golden thread running throughout this passage, although sometimes on the hidden side of the tapestry canvas, is that this is all the work of Jesus.

It is Jesus Christ who builds his church. It does not rest on our shoulders. This is a comforting thought to me, when I fail so much in teaching you, in preaching, in pastoring you. Sometimes I wonder that you don't all leave, and the church doesn't come crashing down. Why is it? It is nothing in me. It is because the work rests on the shoulders of Jesus Christ. He began it when he was here on this earth, and he is still working. He will not give up working in his church until he has gathered all his people – until the gospel has been sent to every soul for whom it was designed – until he has gathered all in one. Until that day comes, Jesus Christ is working in the church.

He is an active, living Saviour. I would speak reverently, but a dead man cannot continue doing and teaching. But Jesus Christ is alive. He is a living Saviour: '... He ever liveth to make intercession for them'. 'Wherefore he is



## The church established by Jesus

able also to save them to the uttermost ...' (Hebrews 7:25).

He is still able now to pluck a sinner from the seafront at Brighton, and bring them into Galeed next Lord's Day, and make them, in one service, a sinner saved by grace. We sometimes get swept along with the idea that all who are saved spend many years in a seeking state. But the Apostle Paul didn't – he was called in a moment on the Damascus road. Neither did the eunuch – in one afternoon he went from asking the question, 'I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?' (Acts 8:34), to being baptized. Really, we should expect similar things, because it is not the work of man. If it rested on my ministry, then it would never happen. But it rests on the work of Jesus Christ. Is anything too hard with the Lord? Is anything impossible with him? Perhaps you feel you are many years away from the kingdom of God, but it is possible for the Lord to work in your soul in such a way that before another Lord's Day comes, you have to be on the phone to your pastor to say, 'I need to make a profession of faith.' Do not limit the Lord! It is his work! It is the work of Jesus Christ. He is working now, and we are not to limit him.

O that I had a stronger faith,  
To look within the veil;

## The Church of Acts 2

To credit what my Saviour saith,  
Whose words can never fail.

(J. Ryland, *Gadsby's Hymns* 247)

The work is his, and he is God. He is 'able to save unto the uttermost'. He is able to build his church. The work rests on his shoulders still. Blessed be God that it does! There is our hope. You see, he reigns as King Jesus in this kingdom. He is working his will in the kingdom. And he reigns in this world for his kingdom. Everything that comes to pass on this earth is 'falling out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel' (Philippians 1:12). Everything that is coming to pass, the present war in Ukraine, the economic crisis, the Covid pandemic, every detail of every circumstance that occurs on this earth is ultimately for the furtherance of the gospel, and for the honour and glory of the great head of the church, King Jesus. Jesus performs his work by the Holy Spirit: 'After that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.' Jesus gathers, he keeps, he unites in love, by the power of the Holy Ghost. The church is 'kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time' (1 Peter 1:5).

The history of the church over two thousand years is testimony to the power of Jesus. Think of all the persecution that has been thrown at the church, such as the fires of the martyrs in the English Reformation –

## The church established by Jesus

and think of all the errors and heresies that have tried to seduce the church; the spirit of Arminianism which infected the Church of England during the reign of Charles I, or the unitarianism<sup>1</sup> and deism<sup>2</sup> which virtually swallowed the successors of the Puritans – and remember how the church sank, and fell, before the great revival under the ministry of George Whitefield. Then you consider us, a few souls gathered together in an almost empty chapel. What has maintained the church in existence through history? What is it that keeps us gathering in our times? What is it that keeps the Lord's work alive amongst us? It is nothing less than the power of Jesus Christ!

'Many waters cannot quench love' (Song of Solomon 8:7). The love of Jesus Christ towards his people continues. That is the secret of the church. Do you want to see the power of King Jesus? Do you want to see the love of Jesus Christ? Look at the history of the church. All two thousand years of it! And admire the

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<sup>1</sup> Denial of the doctrine of the Trinity and the belief that God is one unit.

<sup>2</sup> The view that while there is a divine creator, that creator does not intervene in creation and has not revealed himself directly, but is seen in nature.

## The Church of Acts 2

power of the one who began both to do and teach, and has continued to do and teach down through those two thousand years.

### **Conclusion**

Now, friends, I trust we are a New Testament church, established by Jesus. But we must ask ourselves how careful we are to walk according to the pattern he has set out for his church. We confess that our only hope is the power of Jesus, but how clearly does this manifest itself in how we live as a church? Are we united together in love for Christ and do we keep on going in prayer and supplication? Is our primary desire to be to the honour and glory of Jesus Christ, as a witness to him? Are we earnestly seeking to know the work of the Holy Spirit within us – making us a member of Jesus's church, keeping us in Jesus's church, and fitting us and working in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure?