

Aeneas and Dorcas

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[0:00] You can open up your Bibles to Acts chapter 9 and verse 32.!

The very first believers. Verse 32 of Acts chapter 9. As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda.

There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. Aeneas, Peter said to him, Jesus Christ heals you.

Get up and roll up your mat. Immediately Aeneas got up. All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. In Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabitha.

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

[1:18] 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 that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room, and then he got down on his knees and prayed.

Turning toward the dead woman, he said, Tabitha, get up. 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 for the believers, especially 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray and let's ask for God's help with his word this morning. Gracious God, we are so thankful for the nourishment we get from Scripture.

[2:27] We're so thankful for the privilege that we have of having your word accessible to us in a language we can read and understand. And so we pray this morning that as we study it together, that you would put it deep in our hearts, embed it in our hearts, that your Spirit would do a work in us, and that you would be conforming us to the likeness of Christ through your word.

Help us in this, we pray, for Christ's sake. Amen. So we continue in our series in the book of Acts. Acts. And in the last few chapters, as we've walked along, you would have noticed that if this was a movie, the camera seems to jump from one person, one character, to another character, to another character, and then back to another character.

So the camera was first on Philip for a while, then it jumped to Saul and his conversion that we saw last week. And now it jumps back to Peter, who we'd seen earlier on in the book of Acts.

And so there are lots of different strands that Luke is sort of weaving together here as he tells the story of the early church. We're still actually in a larger section of the book of Acts that started with the gospel going to the Samaritans.

[3:45] Basically started where we started when I came back from sabbatical, where the gospel goes to the Samaritans in chapter 8, and then it spreads outwards from Jerusalem to other people and to other areas.

We get the encounter with the Ethiopian that we saw a couple of weeks ago. And there we're getting this hint that the gospel is going to go out far and wide, far beyond our expectations, far beyond the expectations of the original disciples.

With Saul's conversion, we get sort of the key character who's going to be incredibly influential in this spreading of the gospel, going out far and wide.

And now we come to Peter, and he takes center stage for a little bit, and he's about to get some really, really important information that's really going to change his entire worldview about just who exactly the gospel is for.

But before that happens, in the next chapter, in chapter 10, where we'll hopefully be next week, we actually have a little bit of a setup narrative here that we read of Peter traveling around and performing miracles.

[4:57] And it's not just a space for this. It's just not like, well, Luke, I need to get my word count up here for my professor when I submit my manuscripts. I'm just going to write a little story here to keep the narrative flowing.

It's not a space for it. It's Luke actually reminding us of something. He's reminding us of a key principle, which might, in fact, in some ways, be the key principle of the book of Acts. And it's this, that the ministry of the church is a continuation of the ministry of Christ.

The ministry of the church is a continuation of the ministry of Christ. And so I want us to think about that together this morning. Two things I want to do in terms of kind of points. First, I want to make a case that that is what Luke is actually doing in this passage.

And then secondly, I want us to look at one big implication that comes out of this. We're going to make a case, and then we're going to look at the implication. Here's the first part. It seems by now that time is starting to move on.

If you're following the book of Acts, and so these Christian communities have started to move out to towns outside of Jerusalem, the followers of Christ have been scattered by persecution. We saw that. And so Peter's actually going around.

[6:06] He's like an itinerant minister. He's going around to check on these new communities that are forming in the different towns around Jerusalem to see how they're doing and to minister among them. And here you get two accounts of him performing miracles in these communities.

The first one, which is in verse 32 to 35, it's pretty short. It's not a lot of detail. And then the second one comes, verse 36 to 43, and there's more than double the amount of detail in that second story. So I want you to look at each one in turn here. So in your Bibles, look down at verse 32. As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda.

And there he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. Aeneas, Peter said to him, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat.

Immediately Aeneas got up. All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. So the first one takes place in a place called Lydda, which is basically halfway on the road from Jerusalem down to the coast.

[7:15] There Peter meets this man, this man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed for eight years. Or the text is actually a little tricky there. It could mean that he was paralyzed since he was eight years old, or he's been paralyzed for eight years.

Either way, he's been bedridden for a really long time. Now notice what Peter says to him in verse 34. He says, Jesus Christ heals you.

He doesn't say, I now heal you. He doesn't just say, you're healed. He says, Jesus Christ heals you. And Aeneas immediately gets up.

And it turns into quite a powerful evangelistic moment for the whole town, because people see this, and through this, they all start coming to faith, that says. But our very first clue, as to what Luke's trying to do with this whole section of text, is in those words, Jesus Christ heals you.

So what I want you to do, is I want you to hold on to that piece of information. We'll come back to it, but hold on to it, store it somewhere, and then we'll go on to the second miracle. Verse 36. In Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabitha.

[8:25] In Greek, her name is Dorcas. She 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.

So Joppa's basically at the end of that road, down from Jerusalem. It's on the coastline. I think today it's part of the greater Tel Aviv area, if you were there today. There's this wonderful Christian woman there, named Tabitha.

That's her Aramaic name, which is the language spoken in the area, or Dorcas, which is her Greek name. I suspect she preferred her Aramaic name. There's no shade on anybody if her second name is Dorcas, but I think she preferred her Aramaic name.

But Tabitha passes away, and the Christians there had presumably heard about what was happening up the road, at Joppa and Sharon, and so they're like, we've got to get Peter down here. Somebody go and fetch Peter and bring him down here. So the story continues. Verse 39, Peter went with them, and when he arrived, he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

[9:44] Peter sent them all out of the room, then he got down on his knees and he prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, Tabitha, get up. She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up.

He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. And then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

So when Peter gets there, there's a whole bunch of women who are standing around and who are crying and mourning. Peter sends them all out of the room. He prays, and then he says these words, Tabitha, get up.

She opens her eyes, she's alive again. He helps her up, and then he presents it to the people. Now again, this whole encounter serves to further promote evangelism in the area.

A whole bunch of people come to believe in the Lord because of this. They don't believe in Peter. They believe in the Lord as he goes around doing these miracles. Now, I suggested kind of tongue-in-cheek earlier that Tabitha probably preferred that name over the name Dorcas, but it's actually pretty clear from the text that she was probably more commonly known as Dorcas.

[11:03] In fact, the very fact that Luke goes on and he tells us her Aramaic name is important because those words that Peter pronounces over her are really important.

Tabitha, get up. So I want you to look at this. Now, we're going to get to that. Now, I'm hoping you're all storing little bits of information as we're going along here because there's a couple of layers we've got to go through here, but look at this.

We'll get to the name Tabitha in a second. Several commentators have looked at this passage and noticed, hang on, it looks like something is going on here. It looks as if, well, these look like the miracles of Jesus.

These look like carbon copies of the miracles of Jesus, and that's not just as a surface level. I mean, at one sense, any sort of healing miracle looks like a miracle of Jesus, but there are actually details here that point us that these are almost carbon copies of Jesus' miracles.

Remember that the book of Acts is the second volume that follows on after the Gospel of Luke. So Luke, the ancient physician and historian, he writes the Gospel of Luke and he writes the book of Acts, part one, part two.

[12:11] In Luke, we have accounts that are eerily similar to Aeneas and Dorcas. The first one comes in Luke chapter 5. Luke chapter 5, verse 17 to 26, a famous story of Jesus healing the paralytic.

You might also be more familiar with it in Mark's Gospel. Mark chapter 2 also has the same story. Some guys, four friends, take their buddy who's paralyzed. They can't get to Jesus because the crowds are all coming around Jesus, so they make a hole in the roof and they lower him down in front of Jesus and Jesus heals him.

Jesus miraculously heals him. The real parallel, though, comes in the words, get up and roll up your mat.

That's what Peter says to Aeneas in Acts 9. Here's what Jesus says to the paralytic in Luke 5. I tell you, get up, take your mat, and go home.

So there's some strong kind of linguistic parallels between these two stories. But then the parallels are even more pronounced with the second miracle. And here's where the name becomes really, really important.

[13:19] So in Luke 8, verse 41 to 56, Jesus raises a young girl from the dead, the daughter of Jairus, who is the synagogue ruler. Whole lot of parallels in that story.

So a bunch of people come and find Jesus, just like the people that had to come and find Peter. When he arrives, there are a whole bunch of mourners standing around, just like in the situation with Dorcas. And also, as in the account here with Acts, Jesus, back in Luke, tells all the people to go out the room.

He tells all the people to go out the room except, interestingly, for John and James, two of the disciples, the children's parents, and Peter.

So Peter was there in that miracle back in Luke 8. I'm mixing Acts and Luke and 8 all together there, but in Luke 8. Here is the real clincher, though, this whole thing.

When Jesus raises the little girl, he takes her by the hand, which in itself was a big thing because you don't touch dead bodies in ancient Israelite customs.

[14:29] He takes her by the hand and he says, my child, get up. Now this is a little bit technical, but remember that Luke writes in Greek.

He writes in that form of Greek that was spoken in the first century in that area. And so when he's recording what Jesus says, that he's basically giving us a fairly accurate paraphrase of what Jesus said.

Because Jesus was speaking Aramaic at the time. It's the language that Jesus spoke. But we have the account in Mark's gospel. And there, Mark actually tells us literally what Jesus said in Aramaic. here's what he said to Jairus' daughter. He took her by the hand and he said, Talita, come. Which means, little girl, get up.

Now the incredible thing is that Peter, Peter says exactly the same thing. Except instead of saying, Talita, little girl, he says, Tabita, the name of the person being raised.

[15:39] In the Aramaic, there's actually only one letter difference between the two sentences. So Jesus says, Talita, come. Peter says, Tabita, come. Now what does this all mean?

I think it's pretty clear that Acts is telling us that the ongoing ministry of the early church is one and the same with the ministry of Jesus. Jesus. It's not that Jesus came and he did some things and he taught some things and there was some sort of like primitive, more pure Christian faith that he was espousing and then after that the apostles came and the rest of the early church and they sort of branched out and diverged and they added all sorts of new dogma and new practices and new structures that branched out from the original teachings of Jesus.

That's not what happened and Acts is trying to make that painfully clear to us. Luke is trying to impress that upon his readers, particularly the guy at Theophilus that he writes the book to. He's trying to say, this is the same thing because he said that exact thing at the very beginning of his book.

Acts chapter 1, those of you who have got really good memories and can remember the very beginning of this sermon series, I mean some of our kids were in diapers when we started this series and now they're running around going to high school in that, but some of you, if you remember back to Acts chapter 1, this is what he said.

He said, in my former book, Luke, sorry, in my former book, which is Luke, Theophilus, which is the guy he's writing to, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach.

[17:18] So my last book, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach. What is the implication about this book that I'm writing now? Well, that it's going to be a continuation of what Jesus did and taught.

But guess what? Jesus disappears from the book in the ninth verse. That's a long book and he's gone after nine verses. The rest of the narrative follows the apostles and the early church continuing to do and teach all that Jesus did.

That's the same point of our passage. It's like Luke's just telling us, just remember what I said at the beginning. Parallels between Peter's miracles and Jesus' miracles show us that the ministry of the church is a continuation of the ministry of Christ.

It's not a divergence. It's not an add-on. It's not something new. Now here's the one big implication for this. There are actually probably several implications of this, but there's one that I want us to spend the rest of our time on this morning and that is that you can't love Jesus and not love his

church.

You can't love Jesus and not love his church. Luke is really at pains to communicate this throughout Acts. The ministry unfolding through the early church is the same ministry that you get through Christ and yet today I think there are so many people who are big on Jesus but who are not big on the church.

[18:48] and on ordinary church ministry. Now there's a more sort of sophisticated academic version of this and then there's a more experiential personal version of this phenomenon.

I'll start with the more sophisticated version that you'll find in some older academic literature. In the 19th century there was a wave of what we might call liberal New Testament scholarship largely coming out of Germany at the time and they pushed this idea in a lot of circles and it really won the day in academic circles at the time but they pushed this idea that there's a primitive purer form of Jesus that really existed but then the later Christians came along and particularly Paul Paul's a bad guy in a lot of this literature but the later Christians came along and they added all sorts of new teachings and complexity to the faith essentially corrupting the pure teachings of Jesus and so really what we have in the church today is a corruption of the original.

We don't get the pure Jesus. Now there have been various iterations of this kind of teaching right from the 19th century on to the present day. Earlier this week I preached the chapel sermon at the Bible Institute where I did my original theological studies and as I was sitting there getting ready to stand up and speak to these students I realized that 20 years ago I was sitting waiting to listen to some chapel speaker come and share with us and then maybe feel really old all of a sudden to think that that was that long ago that I was listening to chapel sermons but when I was actually at Bible College 20 years ago there was something and maybe if you're interested in theology and you remember back that far there was this thing called the emerging church or the emergent church and many of the leaders in that movement they basically repopularized some of that same rhetoric of the German theologians that they were writing 150 years earlier driving a wedge between Jesus and the church or between Jesus and the apostles or between Jesus and Paul you get a very similar thing today under the label progressive Christianity it's basically the emergent church that we had 20 years ago they put it in a microwave they put it on reheat and they took it out and presented it to us it's the same thing it's often being labeled as something new but it's actually quite old so you will find YouTube videos today if you your algorithm sends you down this track with headlines that are meant to grab your attention something like what Jesus really taught and how the church covered it up maybe you've seen things like that what the real Jesus said there's so much of that sort of stuff online and every time I against my better judgment take the clickbait and actually watch the video it's 19th century liberal German theology all over again just in a new package this time they've got fancy lights and a bookshelf behind them and they're talking as if they know what they're talking about so there's often been this thought out there and I think what it does is it undermines confidence it undermines people's confidence in the ministry of ordinary Bible believing churches because what people are instinctively thinking then is well maybe this church thing is a corruption maybe the thing that we're doing today this playing church thing that we're doing well that's a corruption I need to get back to the original to the sources it's really funny actually because those original German theologians positioned this whole debate as a historical quest that's what they called it this is a historical quest to retrieve the true historical Jesus and sort of tear off all the church paraphernalia but you would think that if that's what they were doing if that's what they were going to do you would think that they would then give a lot of weight to the writer in the New Testament who is clearly more concerned about historical accuracy than any other writer in the New Testament and that is our friend Luke because out of all the writers in the New Testament Luke makes the biggest deal about the fact that he was super diligent in tracking down the sources checking his work doing his absolute best to present an accurate account of the life of Jesus and the beginnings of the early church he says that that's exactly what he's doing at the beginning of Luke's gospel he says that's what he's doing at the beginning of Acts and his attention to detail is remarkable all the way through in 1970 there was

[23:49] I wasn't in Bible college back then I'm a bit younger than that but in 1970 he was a New Testament scholar great New Testament scholar he's now passed on by the name of I.

Howard Marshall and he published a book which was pretty revolutionary at the time called Luke Historian and Theologian and in that book what he did was he makes a detailed and really compelling academic case that Luke is an exquisite historian by the standards of ancient history Luke is an exquisite historian and an exceptionally trustworthy historian so here you have a guy in Luke who humanly speaking is about as trustworthy an ancient historian as you're ever going to find he's writing well within the lifetime of many of the people who knew and saw Jesus do the things that Jesus did he clearly is a close friend of some of the apostles as well he knows them personally and you know what he says over and over and over again through his writings Jesus ministry early church ministry same same same thing they're not two different things they're the same thing there is no sort of primitive purer version of Jesus that you can find by stripping away the church and her ministry and so friends don't buy the hype of the

YouTube theologians the way you access the original Jesus is through scripture and the ministry of Bible believing churches that have continued to just faithfully teach and preach the testimony of those who were with Jesus himself so that's the kind of sophisticated academic version for those of you who fell asleep when I said academic you can wake up now again there's another more popular level experiential version of people liking Jesus but not liking the church that I think is actually particularly dangerous and unhelpful partly because it's quite subtle as well this is perhaps one of the most common pastoral things I've come across in the last 15 years of ministry I have repeatedly met people who seem to have a genuine affection for Jesus they sense their own sin they sense that they need a savior they'll even read scripture they'll pray the language of faith will be on their lips when you talk to them about

Christianity but their experience of the faith will be almost entirely personalized so they don't interact with other Christians it's not even that they don't occasionally come to church with some level of regularity it's just that church with all of its what they would perceive to be its trappings is just way way way way way down on the priority list when it comes to developing their faith the things that they think they need when it comes to developing faith it's a nice addition to have going to church nice for a spiritual boost on occasion but not fundamental to the faith what's most important to these people is deep personal intimate relationship with Jesus now that sounds well isn't that what's supposed to be most important think about it this way if the ongoing ministry of faithful Bible believing gospel preaching churches is a continuation of the ministry of Jesus that it is not actually possible to truly have a deep personal intimate relationship with Jesus while being apathetic towards the church that's the implication of this passage when Peter stands over Aeneas he explicitly says Jesus Christ heals you he couldn't be more explicit in that moment of the fact that his ministry is an extension of the ministry of Christ which means that you are not going to get the full ministry of Christ that he has on offer without a vital connection to church you can't love Jesus and be indifferent to church think about last week when Jesus confronts Saul on the road to Damascus those words that we looked at the end of the sermon last week Saul Saul why do you persecute me he says Christ so closely identifies with his church that his body his own flesh he loves his church that fact will actually never leave Saul as he goes on to become the apostle Paul and do all the ministry that he does that fact will never leave him because later on he will write to the church in Ephesus he'll write the book of Ephesians and in the context there of actually discussing biblical responsibilities of husbands to their wives he will say these famous words he'll say husbands love your wives just as

[29:00] Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless you see Jesus loves his church you can't be intimate with him and not love his church you can't be intimate with him and not start to have the same affection that he has for his church imagine that you've got a best friend the dearest and closest of friends and you share your life together you've done so much stuff together you have such a deep history you don't just share activities but you share your hopes your dreams your fears and your anxieties but then imagine your friend is married and you just did not get on with his wife you're not nasty to her there's just no relationship you take no interest in her at all you're totally apathetic towards her what sort of strain does that place on the friendship there the thing

that he has such deep affection for you his best friend don't have deep affection for think of the strain that places on that friendship think about how that then sucks intimacy out of the friendship that you have with him it wrecks that intimacy it destroys that intimacy it makes that intimacy functionally impossible somehow we think in our contemporary society that we can on the one hand have relationship with Jesus while on the other hand being negative or ambivalent about his church and then still expect the quality of our relationship with

Christ to be super deep and intimate and meaningful friends I want to say that if you think that I think it's incredibly naive and foolish if you're sitting here this morning and you're wondering maybe why your relationship with Jesus is stuttering why it feels like it's limping along it might be because you have failed to give much love and attention to the things that consume his love and attention namely his church might be because you're sitting here very loosely one foot in one foot out I think I might have shared something related to this illustration a couple of years ago but I grew up going to the Drockensburg on holiday growing up in Derbun my mother worked in timeshare which means we got to go and stay in these different timeshare resorts as part of the deal and so on weekends we'd go up into the Drockensburg and there's one thing at least back then I don't know what it's like now but there's one thing you've got to do when you go to the Drockensburg and that is you go on a horse ride it's kind of custom that you get on a horse whether you ever ride horses in your life you get on a horse and you go for a ride it's a little bit hairy sometimes because you're going on mountain passes and there's a sheer drop on that side and rock faces on that side but you go against your wisdom and you just get on because that's what you do in the Drockensburg and I had a cousin who loved horse riding and so every time we did a family thing she was make sure that at least the big activity we were going to do on the Saturdays we were going to go for a three four hour horse ride and then all walk around with like funny legs on the Sunday but her husband hated horses terrified of them hated them did not trust them at all but he felt like well he had to oblige because the whole family is going on the horse ride and so he would ride these horses but he would ride in a very particular way he would ride always with one foot in one stirrup and the other foot out ready to jump at the first sign that anything is going to go wrong he's like I'm out of here I don't trust this horse one little bit I am going to jump now maybe you sit in church like that one foot in the stirrup the other one out ready to jump when life gets complicated when life gets busy when you're not feeling up to it when having to engage with other people who are different from you becomes tiresome if you got that scenario going on one foot in one foot out then please friends don't be surprised that your intimacy with Jesus is stalling you've got to put both feet in there's no other way to do it you've got to put both feet in you've got to get on board for the full ride in Luke's mind in Paul's mind there is no way that you can drive a wedge between Jesus and the ordinary ministry of the church and then somehow hope that your faith is going to thrive now I know sometimes we think it would be easier to do this Christian thing without the church I know that I know that churches sometimes do dumb stuff I do dumb stuff I know sometimes pastors elders leaders let people down I know sometimes there's conflict in churches between members there's gossiping and backbiting and it can be really hard sometimes to keep that all together I know that church is messy and highly uncomfortable at times but you need this you really need this you need this more than you know because there's a goal there's a goal to all of this there's a goal to the ministry of Christ that is carried out by his church and that goal is beauty remember what

Paul says in Ephesians 5 husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her and then comes the goal to make her holy cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless see there's a goal to what Christ is doing with his church driven by deep deep deep sacrificial love he's making her beautiful he's making us beautiful now notice the order there the order is critical he loves us to make us beautiful not because we are beautiful if Jesus looked at us and he said you know Union Chapel you guys you guys are such wonderful people look look how kind you all are look how you look after one another look how you serve each other and you serve the broader community you're a great bunch of people [35:58] I think I will set my love on you if Jesus said that if he did that well then his love wouldn't be an act of sheer grace he'd be loving

us because of something in us our qualities our abilities our character our beauty and you know what would happen as a result we would be puffed up we would be full of pride we would think we are better than everybody else Jesus loves us so we must be special look how beautiful we are and when the church forgets grace when the church forgets that order that's exactly what we become but Christ doesn't love us because we're beautiful he loves us to make us beautiful because the reality is we are wracked with ugly scarring deforming sin where do you think the pastoral failure comes from where do you think the gossip and the backbiting comes from comes from that ugly sin and we're riddled with it we're not beautiful but

Jesus wants to make us beautiful he wants to love us into beauty at the cost of his own life he wants to make us radiant! like the text says without a stain or a wrinkle or any blemish holy and blameless that's the goal that's where it's all going that's why Jesus gave himself up for the church look at the beauty in our passage Acts chapter 9 look at the beauty there look at Tabitha when Peter walks into that room he's surrounded by people he's surrounded by women and they're all grieving deeply but they're not just any woman I don't know if you noticed that the text says these are widows and they're heartbroken at the loss of Tabitha see these precious widows are the most vulnerable people in ancient society they're the outcasts of outcasts becoming a widow almost certainly meant that you were on a very steep downward trajectory towards poverty you were generally at this stage past childbearing age so nobody wanted you as far as everyone was concerned you added no value to society you were left to poverty and to social isolation nobody wanted you but

Tabitha wanted them she made clothes for them she met them in their place of poverty and desperation when Peter comes in they're all standing there they hold up the clothes to show him look what she did for us look how she cared for us nobody else would care for us but now they grieve now they're crying their eyes out because they've lost something very precious They've lost something of incredible beauty they've lost a woman who was so loved by Christ and who so loved Christ herself that she was well on her way to becoming holy and cleansed washed by the word radiant without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish holy and blameless like Paul says the gospel had made her beautiful and that beauty then had spilled over into the lives of the people around her those desperate widows so friends if you want the deep kind of intimacy with

Jesus Christ that is going to turn you into a specimen of pure beauty if you want that holiness if you want that cleansing if you want to be radiant without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish well then you need church you need both feet in the stirrups you need to be all in because this is where the ministry of Christ continues in the midst of this broken institution this imperfect institution this is where the beautifying takes place a highly individualized sort of tailor made personalized form of Christianity that's mainly just you and Jesus is never ever going to get you there it's never going to get you there because that form of Christianity actually isn't you and Jesus it's you and a truncated form of Jesus he's not the full Jesus because you've cut the body off from the head

Jesus wants to make you beautiful he wants to make you a Tabitha he wants to raise you to new life like he did with Tabitha but he does that through the ordinary and sometimes rather unspectacular work of faithful churches preaching the gospel discipling people building community and serving each other you're not going to get that intimacy anywhere else no private devotion is going to give you that and so I encourage you to have the same view as Paul as Luke as Jesus himself that the ministry of Christ and the ministry of the church are one and the same thing and let's give ourselves into this imperfect institution serving loving each other because in some sense we're carrying out that beautiful beautifying ministry of our Lord Jesus let's pray together

[41:41] Father God we we ask that you would make us beautiful it's the goal it's what you've designed for your church and so we long for that Lord we long for deep intimacy with your son we long for knowing his love and experiencing his love and then living out the implications of his love and you've designed a way for us to get that it's through the gospel word but that gospel word is a context and that context is the local church help us to keep all these things together Lord even when it's difficult even when life in the local church is not always easy not

always comfortable help us to realize that this is the place that you have designed for the beautifying!

of the saints Father I pray for any person who's sitting here maybe on the outside looking in and saying how do I become part of this community I pray that you would help them to see that they need to repent of their sin and trust in Jesus Christ that he will wash their sin away he will make them beautiful Father help us to be this church we pray!

we ask this for Christ's