

Gospel: The Foundation of the Church

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning everyone. Excellent. What an encouraging and exciting morning. John and I, our summer project for this year was Delve and we are so excited about it. Regardless of whether there was a PowerPoint or not, John had fireworks and stuff coming up. I saw it earlier. He was gutted he didn't get that PowerPoint.

Delve, get involved. It is excellent. Fantastic to get reading Mark's Gospel together. Get involved. Pick up your copy before you go this morning. Continuing on with the excitement, we are starting a new series this morning that's going to take us the next three Sunday mornings.

Looking at this thing that we call church. One of you have ever asked yourself that question, why do we do this thing on a Sunday morning?

What does it mean to be part of a church? With that in mind, why don't you turn to Acts, the book of Acts chapters 1 and chapters 2.

And let's pray. And let's ask that God would help us this morning as we turn to his words. Let's pray together. Father God, we love you.

[1 : 0 6] And we thank you for our time together this morning. And we ask now that as we turn to your words, the Bible, as we think about this thing called church, that you would teach us by your spirit.

Would you give us ears to hear? Would you give us minds to learn? Would you give us hearts to absorb and to love you more?

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So you've been quiet this morning. Why don't you turn to your neighbor just before we kick this off for 30 seconds. What brought you to church this morning? 30 seconds. Go for it. Okay, excellent. Going to rattle on this morning. I would love to know what you said.

Maybe you're a student here this morning. I do look around and I see students. Normally they're over here, but I see them branching out over this way. It's great. Did you come for the free lunch? Maybe. Maybe you came because you love the singing.

[2 : 0 9] The band were great this morning. I loved it. Maybe you came because you like the teaching. Maybe you came because you like the sense of community. Your friends are here. Or maybe this is just something, church, that you've always done.

What is this thing called church? And as we turn to Acts chapter 1 and 2, so this is the story of the early church. That's the question we're going to ask these people that we meet.

What is this thing called church? What does it mean to them to do church? Here's the thing for us this morning. You speak to these early Christians.

They're not talking about coffee or cake. Right at its core. The reason that they meet together is to celebrate the fact that there was a man who lived and a man who died and a man who rose again. Certified dead on the third day. Smashed death to smithereens. And that changes everything. Everything. Life as they know it, flipped upside down.

[3 : 1 7] Jesus is the reason. Not that they go to church. It's not something that you go to. Jesus is the reason that they are church. And here's the big idea for us this morning.

The gospel. So there's good news about Jesus that we'll come on to see what it is. The gospel births the church. Church isn't a social club.

It's not a time for a get together for a jolly sing song on a Sunday. Church is about Jesus. You see, the elders of this church, we didn't wake up one morning and have an inclination to meet together publicly.

No, not a chance. The church is a people that God has birthed through the gospel. Here's what we're going to do this morning. We're going to go on a whistle-stop tour of Acts chapter 1 and 2.

And I want us to see this. And I want us to love this. So this is going to require us to have eyes wide open. Fingers at the ready. A bit of a paper chase. But here's what's going on in Acts chapter 1 and chapter 2.

[4 : 20] The book of Acts, written by Dr. Luke. The sequel to his gospel. And it's really the story of all that Jesus continued to do after his resurrection.

It's the story of the unstoppable gospel as it reaches and it grips the world. Here's what happens from verse 1. Look with me. Verse 1. In my former book.

So there's the sequel thing, right? In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

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

So who is this book of Acts about? It's about Jesus. Jesus, who suffered, says Luke. Did you notice that? He suffered. He was certified dead.

[5 : 34] But he presented himself alive. And convincingly so. He is not dead. He's alive. And it wasn't a magic trick.

It wasn't a delusion. It was convincing. This is what Luke is saying to this man, Theophilus, who he's investigating all this stuff for, that he's looked into this. That he's asked people.

And it wasn't a one-off appearance. Jesus appeared. Many proofs over 40 days. Theophilus, we're not dealing in the realm of ideas here.

We are dealing in the realm of fact. Here's the thing. Jesus is still dead. If you can go to Jerusalem somewhere and you can find his skeleton, then church as we know it, Christianity stops here.

Stone dead. Killed. But Jesus is alive. And that changes everything. Let me ask you this morning. What do you make of that?

[6 : 39] Jesus is alive. I remember when I was a teenager. When I was thinking through all of these things. This is what it rested on for me. Thought through it. If Jesus, regardless of what he did, if he claimed to be the son of God, and if he said he was going to defeat death and he didn't, then he isn't a wise teacher.

He's an absolute fraud. He's not worth following on Twitter, let alone with my life. But, but if he did rise from the dead, then I concluded two things.

Firstly, it's got to be worth my time to look into it and investigate it. Consider the evidence.

Secondly, if that is true, if he did rise from the dead, my life can't remain the same.

It just can't. How could my life remain the same? If Jesus holds the keys of death and life in his hands, then I need to hang all of my life on every word that he said.

Friends, where are you with this this morning? Do you see, regardless of what you think, that you cannot remain neutral to this news? Here's what Tim Keller writes.

[7 : 55] Guy I love to read, a Christian author. He says this. If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said. If he didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said?

The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching, but whether or not he rose from the dead. So do you see what Luke is saying here?

Theophilus, Jesus is alive. And Jesus talked to his disciples. What does Jesus tell them to do? We'll look at verse 8. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

So Jesus says to these men who have seen and heard, go and tell. Now remember who Jesus is talking to here. He's talking to the disciples, which would be the 11 of them at this point.

And see the thing is, as you read through the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, these are not men with spine, right? As you read it through, looking at Peter for example, in terms of his standing up for Jesus, the slightest interrogation of a little girl, and he falls to pieces, doesn't he?

[9 : 18] See, if I was to pick my dream team for world domination, this would not be my starting 11. They just wouldn't. Now as a boy, I remember I used to play top trumps.

Someone else used to play top trumps as a kid? Come on, show me your hands. We're not embarrassed here. Excellent. So this is what used to happen with top trumps. Your card, your character on the card, had certain attributes out of 10, and you had to beat your opposition with your, you had to trump them, you get the idea.

I like to think of the disciples like top trumps. They would have the lowest stats possible. You'd be gutted when you flipped that over. Think about it, right? Bravery, 1 out of 10. Faith, 2 out of 10. Anticipation, 0.5 out of 10. I mean, you're losing all the time with these guys. So when Jesus says, go, knowing what I know about them, I'm not that optimistic for them. But what does Jesus say to them? Look at this carefully. This bunch of unspectacular men. Where's the power going to come from? It's not going to come from them. It's going to come from him. [10:24] Jesus will send his spirit. The spirit will give them power. And the spirit will enable them, give them boldness to speak. And they will be his witnesses.

Now working in the legal profession for a few years, I love the term witness. I know what it means. We all know what it means, doesn't it? It means to tell what you've seen. It's basically what it is. Tell what you know.

And that's what Jesus is saying to his disciples here. Go and witness. Go and make me known. And notice where they are to do this. Jerusalem.

And in all Judea and Samaria. And to the ends of the earth. In other words, where they are, the regions round about them, and as far as they can possibly go.

This thing is going global. The news that Jesus is alive is for everyone. What happens next in the narrative? Jesus ascends.

[11:23] And Jesus sends his spirit. And we get that scene at Pentecost. Halfway through chapter 2, God's spirit falls on them. And speaking in different languages, they declare the mighty works of God to the watching world.

And Peter stands and addresses the confused and mocking crowd. And he delivers what I guess is the first distinctly Christian sermon. Look at it from verse 22.

Remember this guy who fell to jelly? He's now addressing a crowd. What a difference. Here's what he says. Fellow Israelites, listen to this.

That's brave, isn't it? Listen to this. Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge. And you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

[12:33] I mean, he's pulling no punches there, isn't he? No punches. This guy who turned to jelly is now accusing the crowd of crucifying Jesus. Jesus, this man that you saw, you saw him do miracles.

You've heard about him. You killed him. And hang on a second, Peter. Put yourself in the crowd at this point.

Hands up if you would have objected to what Peter said there. I would have objected massively. And do you know why? Because I wasn't in the crowd. I didn't kill Jesus. Did everyone who was in that crowd physically kill Jesus? Did they all physically drive the nails into his hands and his feet? Some of them weren't even on town probably on that day. And yet what does Peter say? You crucified him. Now how does that work? How does that work?

[13:34] Well, the Bible would say that you and I are sinners. That you and I are guilty of falling short of God's glory. By our very nature, we are in rebellion against him.

We don't want anything to do with him. We don't want anything to do with him. We want everything to do with ourselves. Now I wonder if you know that's true in your life. I was reminded of it this week. Here's how this worked out in my life. I study two mornings a week. Many of you won't know this. I study two mornings a week at Edinburgh Theological Seminary. The artist formerly known as the Free Church College. Two mornings a week I do that.

And BBC Alba, so the Gaelic TV channel. How's your Gaelic this morning? Mine's not very good. BBC Alba did a documentary on our class last year.

And they did a documentary specifically focusing on the free church candidates that were going through the system. BBC Alba produced this documentary. It went out a couple of weeks ago. There's four of them.

[14:34] Four half an hour episodes. They got that much out of our year. Four half an hour episodes. And on these episodes, when I watched it, my classmates, as they're being interviewed, are pouring out their lives in front of the camera.

Really interesting. My family have suffered because I've decided to do this. Financially, I've suffered because I've chosen to take a step out of work and pursue God's calling.

I mean, this was really emotional stuff on this camera. But here's my question for you. As they followed us around the classroom, these boys around the classroom, who do you think I was looking for the whole time?

Go on. Me. Right? I love me. My back of my head made two appearances in those four episodes. And here's the thing.

Each time I was watching it on my laptop, I paused it and I shouted through to Alex, Alex, I'm on the telly. Every time, back of my head. I don't even speak Gaelic.

[15:36] Chloe told her, our little seven-month-old daughter, wasn't that fussed. But do we not know that to be true in our lives? Think about your own life. Think about the orbit of your own life.

Who does it revolve around? Are you like me? We're all like me. Aren't we all the same? Does our lives not orbit around ourselves? Are we not infatuated with ourselves?

We love us. We do not love God. We are sinners. And that sin has separated us from God. And that is serious. And if it wasn't true, friends, this morning, then Jesus wouldn't have had to come to earth and to die.

It was our sin that put him there. Now many of you will remember, maybe, Mel Gibson had a film out a few years ago, I think it was maybe ten years ago now, called The Passion of the Christ.

I wonder if you've watched it. I remember going to the cinema and it's one of only two films I can remember in my life where it stopped and nobody's moved at the end of the film. Passion of the Christ. Mel Gibson directed it.

[16:44] He wasn't in one single, he wasn't in many scenes, but he was in one scene. He, it was his hand that drove the nail into Jesus' hands in the film.

And he wanted to make a statement as if to say he had some responsibility for what happened at Calvary. Friends, it was our sin that put him there.

And the cross, it finds us out. And I find that truth to be so liberating and here's why. I remember when I was saving up for an engagement ring.

Alex had been going out with her for a year and she's far too good for me. I was punching a well above my weight. I decided this is a deal that I want to seal. And I looked at an engagement ring and I looked at the price of an engagement ring.

And not long after coming out of uni, I decided that I was going to have to make some cost-cutting measures in my life. And one of the ways that I was going to save money was that I was going to cut my own hair.

[17:47] Has anyone tried that before? Cutting their own, not get someone else to cut your hair, cutting your own hair. Genius, I know. And here is what happened. I lived my life at work.

I lived my life with my friends and nobody ever commented on it. But secretly, I gasped. It was a state. Now I wonder if you've ever had an experience like that.

You've tried to apply mascara at about six in the morning and just forgot about it. Big streams down your eyes. Maybe this is what happens to me all the time. With a little girl, I find breakfast, her breakfast, randomly on me.

This is what happens. Now what do you need if you know what that's like? What do you need in that situation? You need somebody to lovingly point it out.

Don't you? Somebody to lovingly point it out. Here's what happened to me when this happened. I turned up to meet Alex after I cut my own hair a few times and she looks at it. One look.

[18:46] It's all she needed. One look. That looks ridiculous. If this is going to work, that's going to change. She didn't put it like that. But do we not know that to be true?

We need somebody to tell us the truth. I need the truth. I don't need sugar coating. I've got a sweet tooth enough as it is. I need somebody to tell me exactly how it is.

I cannot work with a lie. But the truth, regardless of how soul destroying it is and how much your pride is affected, the truth, you can work with the truth.

truth. And that's why I love the Bible. It's why I love God's Word because God's Word gives us the ultimate reality check.

We've used that phrase, don't we, all the time in our culture if somebody gets a reality check. If you're English here this morning, you'll know that your rugby team got one a few weeks ago. And speaking as a Scot, you'll know that Australia are about to get one this afternoon.

[19:47] A reality check. That's what God's Word gives us as we come to it. That I am not an accident. I am not the product of an impersonal universe.

I, you and I, are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are valued. Why? Because we were made in God's image. We are loved.

I am more loved than I am ever capable of grasping. But here's the thing. At the same time, I am more broken than I ever think I'll realize. My sin has separated me from God.

That sin needs dealt with and that's a massive reality check. I am beautifully made but I am broken. And God, in His grace, offers the solution.

Do you not know that to be true in your own life? I know that to be true. I found this so liberating at the time. I know my tendency to selfishness. I know my thoughts.

[20 : 50] I know my hearts. And as I come to God's word, God's word puts all the cards on the table. It says, I am beautiful and yet I am broken. And I found that the most liberating truth.

That God knows what's going on inside of me. He knows the numbers of hairs on my head. He knows the depths of my heart. And He loves me enough to point it out.

my sin put Jesus there. How does that make you feel this morning? Isn't it not massively interesting when we compare what God's word says to what our culture says?

We hear this stuff all the time that you and I, we can define ourselves. We can just live how we want. We can be who we want to be and it's okay that we deserve the best, that nobody should stand in the way of our personal happiness.

And friends, my question to you this morning is which voice are you going to listen to? The flattering one or the honest one? God's word tells us what it's like.

[21 : 59] It gives us the ultimate reality check. It gives us the diagnosis. But praise God, He also gives us the prescription. Back into Acts, look at verse 24 of chapter 2.

This is still Peter going at it here. What does he say? But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

What's this book about? Who is this book about? Jesus, the risen champion. How does that make you feel? Given everything that we've seen before, how does it make you feel?

Well, let's look at the crowd's reaction. How did they feel when they hear this message? Verse 37.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, brothers, what shall we do?

Peter replied, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[23 : 10] The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call. How did they feel cut to the heart? And do you see how they do not remain neutral to what Peter has been saying?

They do not sit on the fence. They repent. What it means is just in their life, they did a 180. They acknowledged their failings before God. They stopped walking their way and they started walking His way.

And Peter uses two words here that I think are so wonderful. Two words. First word, forgiven. That is what God is offering, that is what God was offering that morning and that is what God is offering this morning.

Forgiveness. This isn't cheap forgiveness. This is extremely costly forgiveness through the blood of Jesus. forgiveness. Now friends, we need to see what is driving the cross, the great love of God for us.

Because He could have quite justifiably left us on our own. We rejected Him. He could have chosen to have nothing to do with us. And yet, He sent His Son who went to the cross paying the penalty that you and I deserve to pay for our sin.

[24 : 27] Jesus gave it all for us. second word that Peter uses, gift. This is not about us earning God's love.

This is all about God's grace. God giving us something that we do not deserve. The gift of the Spirit. This is what happens as men and women come to put their faith in Jesus.

That God sends His Spirit, His real presence to live in their lives. so that we no longer remain detached and separated from God. We become His.

No longer orphans but adopted as His children. Reconciled. Put right with God. The God who created us. Friends, you were not made by accident.

You were made for a relationship with the God who created you. How do you get there? Through the gospel. The offer of the gospel is God Himself.

[25 : 25] That is the sermon that Peter preaches. And look at what Luke tells us at verse 41. How did this message go down?

Well, those who accepted His message were baptized and about 3,000 were added to their number that day. So the ESV, if you've got an ESV with you, it uses that word souls.

And I'll admit I love that word. Because these are real people. These are real confessions. These are real baptisms. And 3,000, that's a real number. 3,000 people respond to what Peter has been saying and put their faith in Jesus.

They trust in what Jesus did, that He paid their debt and His victory has become their victory. His perfect obedience, His righteousness has become their righteousness and Jesus has reconciled them to God and the resurrection proves that it's all true.

It's the gospel. It's the new life that you and I have because God has given us it in Jesus Christ.

Now here's the thing. Do you see this message, this gospel message, it births the church.

[26 : 41] It births the church. This isn't our doing. This is all God's doing. God saves a people through the gospel. He redeems men and women and creates a people for Himself.

This message is glorious. It's glorious. No other message works. No other message could work and that's why we as a church, we stand on this message because it's the power of God unto salvation. It's the centerpiece around everything that goes on here. The gospel is glorious. And look what happens naturally as a result of that.

Look what the gospel creates, verse 42. This is what Luke tells us about this group of people, this group of Christians. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common.

[27 : 50] They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had needs. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

So they repent and they believe the good news as individuals. But do you see how quickly Luke begins to talk of them as a collective group? Now if you just look at those verses there, how often he uses the words together.

Together. That's not an accident. That is emphasis. These people were together. This new community, this community of Jesus' living people had been brought together through their common faith in Jesus.

And that common faith, the gospel, shaped their community. And I think there are two really quick marks of this community that Luke draws their attention to. First mark, devotion.

Did you notice that word as we went through? Devoted to what? Well three things. Devoted to the words. That is the apostles teaching, what they heard from the apostles about this man Jesus. Devoted to fellowship.

[29 : 00] Do you see that? That they're looking out for one another. They're meeting needs that arise in their community. They're eating together. They are together in their homes. They've got everything in common. And they are devoted to, can anyone guess it?

Prayer. Devoted to prayer, to seeking God, to humbling themselves and asking for his help and power. As they seek in their community to impact it with the good news of Jesus.

Here's my question for us this morning. As a church, as individuals, are we devoting ourselves to these things? That's where our three things come from in our transformation statement.

I'm pointing at the wall because it's over there. Okay, I've not lost it. It's over there. Prayer, word, fellowship. These are the things that we devote ourselves to. And we've not just got that out of thin air.

This is where we've got it from. Are we devoting ourselves to God's words? Are we committed to one another because we are connected in Christ?

[30 : 00] Are we, as a family of God's people, are we devoting ourselves to prayer? They are a devoted community. Second mark of this community, praise.

Do you see that? That they attend the temple together. Look at the description of these people. Praising God with glad and sincere hearts, giving thanks to him for what he's done for them in the gospel.

Do you see that there's a distinct sense of joy as we read about them here? This joy inspired, given by the Holy Spirit. And notice that phrase at verse 47. Back in the text, what does it say? We're almost done. Verse 47, they enjoyed favor with all the people. So what is going on here? The outside world is looking at what's going on in this community, this transformed community, and they are dumbfounded.

The way that these people act, the way that they speak, the way that they live their lives, the way that they witness for Jesus, clearly caused the watching world to see something different.

[31 : 03] What a challenge is that is for us this morning. Think about the circles that you move in. Think about the people that are in and out of your lives every day. The office, the classroom, the lecture hall, the sports team.

Do people see something different in us? Are our neighborhoods here at Brunsville, are they thankful that we are here? Do we enjoy their favor?

Why? Because they know that we are people who deeply, deeply care. See, this news about Jesus, it has transformed and it has created a people individually, but it has created a people corporately. This is the church, God's people who has transformed, this community of cross-shaped people. They are not a perfect people. Do not fall into the trap of romanticizing this.

You just look at Acts chapter 5, okay, a few more on. Look at the book of 1 Corinthians. This early church, they do not have it sorted. But there are two marks that I think we should be seeing in our community as we look at this.

[32 : 08] A people marked by devotion and a people marked by praise. The gospel births the church. And just as we close, look at the end of verse 47.

We'll just look right. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. The gospel message went forth.

It continued to transform lives. God continued to give his spirit, his power, so that this thing would go global and it would hit Jerusalem.

It would hit Asia. It would hit Europe. This thing went global. And 2,000 years later, it continues to transform lives today.

Here's some stats as we close that I read on the Bible Society's website this week. Here's what's going on in our world today. This gospel is still transforming lives. In China, thousands are turning to Christ every single day with 500,000 baptisms every year.

[33 : 16] Get your head around that. 500,000 baptisms. That's bigger than our population of this city. In Nepal, the church in Nepal has grown from zero to over 2 million in 65 years.

In Cuba, people are now free to attend church services where they hear the gospel, they hear God's words, and churches are flourishing and more and more people daily are coming to faith. In Cambodia, 1970s, Christianity almost wiped out. Now, the church is expanding at an extraordinary rate. Here is a quote from a young woman in Cambodia.

She's receiving her first Bible through the Bible Society. Here's what she says. I've been waiting for the Bible for a year ever since I became a Christian. We have no money, just enough for food and sometimes not even enough for that.

I am so happy about getting a Bible. I am so excited. Do you see it? That the gospel, this message, 2,000 years ago, transformed this community.

[34 : 21] Life's God won them through the gospel. He saved a people and it still transforms lives today. Friends, we are here because the gospel works.

We are here because God chose to save us through this message. The gospel forms the church. Now, here's what we're going to do just before we pray.

I want you to turn back to that neighbor that you talked to two seconds, about 30 minutes ago. It wasn't two seconds, was it? Turn back to that neighbor and in light of what we've seen in Acts chapter 1 and 2, why did you come to church this morning?

And then we'll close in prayer. Why don't you talk to your neighbor and then we'll close. Okay, let's pray. Father, we are so thankful for our time together this morning and we thank you for the church. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for the gospel message. We thank you for the wonderful news that he is not dead, that he is alive and reigning in heaven.

[35 : 26] Father, I pray that you would help us to know that this week. Help us to live as people whose lives are marked by love for people and for him in everything that we do.

And this is our prayer in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.