

Acts

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8 ESV)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 ESV)

And They Turned To The Lord

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Acts 9:32-43

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Acts 9.

Have you ever found yourself wondering if you're where you're supposed to be in life? Should I be pursuing this degree? Should I be looking to change jobs? Is this really where God wants me?

Those are big questions, and unfortunately, I'm not about to tell you that we find an answer to those questions in this passage. We don't. But here's what we WILL see in the text this morning: We will see that Jesus Christ knows how to position and prepare his people for what's next, even when they don't know what that next thing is.

In chapter 10, Jesus is going to swing the doors of the church open to Gentiles and he is going to use Peter to make that happen. Peter doesn't know that he's about to be at the centre of an event that is going to flip the church upside down. How can he prepare for something that he doesn't know is coming? The beauty of this story is that Peter doesn't need to know what's next.

Jesus knows. And Jesus knows how to prepare and position his people for what's next. That's the big idea in this passage, but there are also some wonderful little lessons that we will learn along the way. Look with me now to Acts 9. We will be reading verses 32-43. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

³² Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. ³⁴ And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And immediately he rose. ³⁵ And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

³⁶ Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. ³⁷ In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, “Please come to us without delay.” ³⁹ So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. ⁴⁰ But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴² And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³ And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner. (Acts 9:32-43 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Now, I realize that anytime we read a passage like this – a passage filled with signs and wonders – our minds naturally gravitate toward a particular question: Why don’t we see more miracles like this in the church today?

I devoted a sermon to this question on November 6, 2022, entitled “Many Signs and Wonders”¹, and you can go back and listen to that on our website if you’d like. I won’t preach that same sermon again, but I do want to quickly remind you of some key principles that we should keep in mind as we study incredible passages like this. First:

Signs and wonders served to validate the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles

There is a reason why these early days in the church were FILLED with wonders. They were like **fireworks** signifying that a monumental change was underway! That same principle is on display in this passage – the gospel is about to jump across a seemingly insurmountable barrier to include

¹ <https://redeemercity.org/sermons/many-signs-and-wonders/>

the Gentiles in the kingdom of God! So, we should not be surprised that God is accompanying Peter's ministry with fireworks that effectively say: "Eyes up! Pay attention!"

Second, we need to remember that:

Signs and wonders were never an end unto themselves

As you approach the Grand Canyon, for example, you will be met with a sign. You will, no doubt, be excited to see that sign! You might even stop to take a picture! But you would be foolish to pull the car over, set your tent up next to the sign, and spend your whole trip staring at it. Because the sign is not the point! The sign serves to signal that something AMAZING is ahead!

So it is with miracles! They serve as signs to inform us that something amazing is ahead! The Kingdom of Heaven is breaking into the world! The chains of sin and death have been broken by the cross of Christ! Everlasting life is now offered to us in and through Jesus! THAT is the story! That is the news that deserves our focus! The signs are pointing to THAT!

And yet, that does NOT mean that we should resent or ignore the sign. Even though we can sometimes over fixate on them, signs serve a purpose. Therefore:

Signs and wonders are gifts from God, and we are invited to ask for them

Will we see the kinds of things that are here described in the age of the Apostles? Sometimes, but not nearly as often. Because God was doing something different at that time than he is today. He gave them what *they* needed, and He will give us what *we* need. No more, and no less.

James 5 tells us to go to our elders for prayer when we are sick, and we will do that, believing that God still heals today. 1 Corinthians 12 tells us that God has given gifts to the church – gifts that include miracles and healing and, since we are not in the business of erasing verses from the Bible that make us uncomfortable, we will open our hands so as to receive whatever gifts God might see fit to give to us. In fact, our prayer group was encouraged this week with a story of a man in our church who had been keeled over on the bathroom floor in agonizing pain. Before they called the ambulance, his wife prayed for him. He immediately stood up and was healed. That still happens!

So, let's not adopt a posture of unbelief or scepticism. Let's ask God to do the things that only He can do! But then, let's resolve to accept with gratitude that God is not a genie, and His plan is not always the same as ours. I like what G. Campbell Morgan says here:

Let us take the gifts He gives, and use them, and not sigh for other gifts that are withheld in wisdom.²

Amen? Amen. Now, with those principles in mind, let's ask:

What Is This Story About?

First, this is a story about:

1. A disciple in motion

Look again at verse 32:

Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. (Acts 9:32 ESV)

If you look back at verse 31, Luke has just informed us that the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria is thriving. As a result, Peter is being pulled out of Jerusalem to tend to the flock of God who are now scattered abroad. The text tells us that he was going here and there among them all.

Peter didn't know that this paralyzed man would be here in Lydda. But he knew that God was calling him to move. He could have hunkered down in Jerusalem, made a home base, and contented himself with what was comfortable. But that wasn't the command that he was given. And, by the way, it isn't the command that *we* have been given. Jesus said:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ **Go therefore** and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the

² G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts Of The Apostles* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 259.

Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18b-20 ESV)

Go. We are not called to hide, or to hoard, or to hibernate. We are to be disciples in motion.

Peter heard that. Peter lived that. He was a disciple in motion. Next, we find:

2. A man in need

Look with me at verse 33:

There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. (Luke 9:33 ESV)

As I studied and reflected this week, I was reminded that – as followers of Jesus – we must not become desensitized to the needs and the hurts all around us.

It’s easy to become desensitized. We have so many first responders in this congregation. We have so many working in mental health and counselling. We have so many working at the Lighthouse. So many of us are exposed to heart-breaking, seemingly bottomless tragedy. And one of the ways that you survive in a context like that is by developing a callous on your heart. We become numb.

But, as painful as it is, I want to challenge you today to invite God to soften your heart once again.

Jesus refused to turn a blind eye to the brokenness – and praise God for that, because WE were the broken ones! Jesus drew near. Jesus wept. Jesus ministered. Jesus healed.

And here, Peter comes across a man who has experienced some sort of tragedy that has left him paralyzed and bed-ridden for eight years. The man had a name. Aeneas. He presumably had a family that grieved over his condition. He wasn’t just a character in a story. He was a man in need.

So, Peter drew near:

And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And immediately he rose. (Acts 9:34 ESV)

To be clear, I’m not suggesting here that God is going to immediately heal every paralyzed person that we pray for. I’m not suggesting that we should take a field trip to the hospital after the service. I don’t think that’s our takeaway from this passage.

But I do believe that we need to grow. We need to grow in our faith. We need to grow in our willingness to come alongside needy people. We need to grow in prayer, and we need to start asking Jesus to minister in ways that only he can.

Jesus Christ healed this man in need, and that led directly to the next thing that we see in the text:

3. A city transformed.

Look with me at verse 35:

And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, **and they turned to the Lord.** (Acts 9:35 ESV)

Can I tell you something? THIS is the greatest miracle that happened in Lydda! God met Aeneas in his need, and He healed him. But let’s make sure that we don’t forget that eventually Aeneas became an old man, and his body wore down, and he died. The healed legs were incredible, but they were temporary. That was the SIGN. But it was the healing of this city that was truly miraculous!

Lost men and women turned to the Lord! A city was transformed! And then, that same cycle repeated in a new city. As we continue reading, we see once again:

4. A woman in need

Look with me at verses 36-38:

Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity.³⁷ In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, “Please come to us without delay.” (Acts 9:36-38 ESV)

Tabitha was a disciple – a follower of Jesus – who showed her love for Christ by loving his people. She used her time and resources to make clothing to bless those who were in need around her.

Let’s pause here for a moment. As we thank God for the gifts of signs and wonders, let’s be sure not to neglect the gifts of good works and charity. There was a need in her city, and Tabitha – by the grace of God – was doing something about it. O that God would raise up more and more Tabithas in his church!

But she became ill, and she succumbed to her illness. Hearing that the Apostle Peter was ministering in Lydda, the church sent messengers to bring Peter to help. And that brings us to the next familiar detail in our story:

5. A disciple in motion

I suspect that you’re beginning to recognize a pattern here. Look with me at verse 39. The messengers found Peter in Lydda and pleaded with him to follow them back to Joppa. We read:

So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. (Acts 9:39 ESV)

From Lydda to Joppa is 8 miles, and it brought Peter 40 miles away from Jerusalem. As this story progresses, Peter is being pulled further and further from the centre. Peter doesn’t realize it, but Jesus is moving Peter to exactly where he needs to be. We’re going to come back to that detail.

The scene that unfolds next is the one that grabs our attention whenever we read this story. Look again at verses 40-41:

But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. (Acts 9:40-41 ESV)

Notice that Peter puts the crowd outside. That’s interesting. Unlike so much of the showmanship that we see in the televised faith healers of our day and age, Peter wasn’t looking to draw attention to himself. He put them outside, he knelt down in prayer, and then he said: “Tabitha, arise.”

There was no shouting. No incantation. No special ceremony or dance.

He spoke, and she rose.

And, as you might expect, when Tabitha walked out of that room, it made quite an impression. In fact, once again it led to:

6. A city transformed

Transformed lives often lead to transformed cities. I pray that we would see more and more transformed men and women here in the city of Orillia. Look with me at verse 42:

And it became known throughout all Joppa, **and many believed in the Lord.** (Acts 9:42 ESV)

Once again, THAT is the greatest, most consequential miracle of this story. The resurrection of Tabitha was amazing, but let’s pull back and think about this from her perspective for a moment.

Tabitha was a Christian. She had placed her trust in Jesus as her Lord and Saviour. And then, after suffering through a difficult illness, she passed through the frightening experience of death. Here’s a question: where did she go after that?

Her body stayed in that old house – waiting for the final resurrection – but her Spirit went home to be with the Lord. Tabitha was in glory with Jesus!

And then she was sent back. This might rub you the wrong way, but I believe it to be true – I think that Tabitha got the worst end of this deal! Imagine being with Jesus, but then having to go BACK! That’s a tough pill to swallow! And then, she eventually had to die again!

Now, I suspect that when we see her one day and we ask her about this, she will tell us that she would gladly do it again. But not because she got to squeeze another ten or so years out of her earthly life. No, I believe she would gladly do it again because God used that SIGN to work a greater MIRACLE!

many believed in the Lord. (Acts 9:42b ESV)

Many who were dead in their sins were brought to newness of life!

Many who were on the road to an everlasting torment in hell received an inheritance of glory in and through Christ!

Many dry bones suddenly rattled to life in the city of Joppa!

And THAT is the miracle that eternally matters!

My grandmother was a woman very much like Tabitha. I miss her, and so do a lot of people. But I’m not itching to raise her back from the dead! No sir! She’s with Jesus right now. And if I could choose between having her come back from the dead or seeing one of you surrender your life to Christ, I would choose that salvation ten out of ten times!

Listen: History has proven that the church goes sideways in a hurry when we read stories like this and fixate on the wrong miracles. This passage is filled with miracles, and the greatest of them all – the miracles that we should be most eager to see in our midst – those miracles of lost men and women turning to Christ – are the miracles that we are tempted to rush past as we read this story.

I believe God heals, and I believe we should ask, but I don’t care if I never see another healing again in my life! That won’t change my disposition one bit.

But if I never see another conversion... Well, that would absolutely devastate me. I'm open to whatever signs or wonders God might use to bring it about, but THAT is the miracle I want!

As we conclude, I want to zoom way back and ask one final, big-rock question:

Why Is This Story Here?

Did we need another story about Peter's miracles? Luke only had a limited amount of space on his parchment, and he's already recounted stories of how a lame man was healed by Peter and how people were lining up to fall under the reach of his shadow. We've heard those stories! So, is this simply a case of repetition?

As we look at the larger story of Acts, we come to see that the real emphasis here – the PURPOSE of this story – is not to leave us wondering about signs and wonders. No, this is a story of *movement* and *expansion*. This story is here:

1. To demonstrate that Jesus is still building his church

Consider this: If I were to read this story to you without telling you what passage it was from, and if I were to omit Peter's name, you would probably think that I was reading to you from one of the Gospels. Because these stories resemble – almost to a T – stories of miracles that *Jesus* performed in his earthly ministry. When Peter says to the paralyzed man:

“Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; **rise and make your bed.**” And immediately he rose. (Acts 9:34 ESV)

Does that remind you of anything? Does that remind you of the time that a paralyzed man was brought to Jesus and he declared:

“I say to you, **rise, pick up your bed,** and go home.”¹² And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!” (Mark 2:11-12 ESV)

And when Peter says to a dead woman:

“Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up. (Acts 9:40b-41a ESV)

Does *that* remind you of anything? Does it remind you of the time when Jesus came to a dead girl and:

Taking her by the hand he said to her, **“Talitha cumi,”** which means, “Little girl, I say to you, **arise.**”⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began walking (Mark 5:41-42a ESV)

These stories – these healings – are like *echoes* of Jesus earthly ministry! And all of this should remind us of the very first verse in the book of Acts where we read:

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus **began** to do and teach (Acts 1:1 ESV)

The first book – the Gospel of Luke – was simply the *beginning* of Jesus’ ministry. When Jesus died, rose again and ascended to heaven, he didn’t stop doing and teaching! He is still doing! He is still teaching! He is still working! Only, now, he is doing and teaching and working *through his church*. Which is why the Apostle Paul reminds us:

Now **you are the body of Christ** and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12:27 ESV)

Luke included this story because we need to be reminded that Jesus is still building his church.

He gives us all that we need for our assignment, and he positions us right where we need to be.

I told you at the beginning that Peter is on the brink of a paradigm-altering change. Next week, God is going to swing the door wide open for the Gentiles, and it is going to flip the church upside down! Unbeknownst to him, Peter is going to be the one to lead that movement.

And in preparation for that event, Jesus is positioning his disciple. To Lydda. To Joppa. Farther from the centre. Farther from what he knows. At the end of this story, we read:

And he stayed in Joppa for many days **with one Simon, a tanner.** (Acts 9:43 ESV)

The fact that Peter was staying with a tanner illustrates that God was preparing Peter's heart for the overhaul that was supposed to take place. Good Jews don't go into the tanner's house! The tanner works with dead animals! The tanner is unclean! As G. Campbell Morgan notes here:

The trade of the tanner was held in such supreme contempt that if a girl was betrothed to a tanner without knowing that he followed that calling, the betrothal was void. A tanner had to build his house fifty cubits outside the city.³

And yet, here we find Peter, led by Jesus into new and uncharted waters.

Because Jesus is building his church.

And his kingdom exists to expand! In the coming weeks, there are going to be characters who try to stop the expansion. There are going to be men and women who are so attached to "how things always were" that they won't be willing to move through the doors that God is opening.

But Peter will be ready. Because Jesus has made him ready. Peter is a man who has been trained to follow wherever the Lord leads. I pray that we would be men and women of the same posture.

I don't know what the Lord has in store for us, but this passage reminds me that I don't need to know. He will prepare us. He will lead us. He will minister through us. Because Jesus is still building his church. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

³ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts Of The Apostles* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1924), 268.