

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #23

Acts 9:32-43

Just before Jesus Christ ascended up into heaven, he gave his eleven apostles a commission. They were to go and preach the Gospel of God's Grace to the whole world and they were told by Jesus Christ that certain apostolic signs would follow them; one of which was they would "lay hands on the sick and they will recover" (Mark 16:18). Jesus then ascended back into heaven and the apostles started proclaiming the Gospel. Mark says "And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and **confirmed the Word by the signs that followed**" (Mark 16:20). **In other words, the apostolic sign miracles were for the purpose of confirming the Word of God, specifically the grace of God message, to the world.**

Last time we were together we saw that after Saul left, God was building up His church in various areas (9:31). The apostles had a responsibility to instruct in doctrine and to equip the saints and to build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12). This was part of the apostolic gift. The Apostle Peter decided to pay some of these somewhat Gentile areas a visit in order to help establish and instruct these churches. So Peter was now out touring the area to help establish these people in the faith. What we see here is that:

PETER WAS USED BY GOD TO MIRACULOUSLY MINISTER TO BELIEVERS OUTSIDE OF JERUSLEM IN ORDER TO SHOW HIM AND US THAT THE POWER OF JESUS CHRIST IS ABLE TO MEND BROKEN LIVES AND GIVE LIFE TO THE DEAD OF BOTH JEWS AND GENTILES.

We have just come through a section of Scripture that taught us a great deal about the amazing conversion of Saul, and when you come to this portion of Scripture we would expect to continue the story. However, the story abruptly ends with Saul's trip to Tarsus (Acts 9:30) and we pick up the ministry of Peter. Why is this? As near as I can determine, Saul is the man who will be greatly used by God to take the Gospel to the Gentiles; however, he will not be the only apostle who will do this. Peter is also a key apostle and he takes center stage from here until the end of chapter 12, and then he will somewhat disappear.

Both Peter, the apostle to the Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, teach the same doctrine of Grace. **There is no question that God calls Paul to a Gentile ministry, but in chapter 10, God will also call Peter to a Gentile ministry as well and this is a prelude to that ministry.** Before Peter leaves the historical scene of Acts, we find him zeroed in on God's Grace.

We come now to the moment when the Gospel is going to begin to move out to the Gentile world. Jesus told his apostles take my Gospel from "Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria and to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Dr. Luke who writes the Book of Acts is very much interested in tracking geographical matters. He tracks things to precise locations. Paul will be gone from the scene for about ten years, so the data of taking the Gospel to this part of the Gentile world will somewhat fall to Peter.

The last time we actually saw Peter, he was doing some ministry work in Samaria (8:25). We know from Paul's accounts that he was in Jerusalem when he was there (Acts 9:26-28). Saul had met with Peter and stayed with him for fifteen days (Galatians 1:18). **God needs to break down some of Peter's prejudices and the way he does it is to use him to minister and see amazing grace results in lives of people you would never expect.**

Peter was now moving in somewhat of a pastoral way to check up on the saints and minister to the saints; most of whom were Jewish. **This passage is critical because this sets the stage for a major change in Peter's ministry and theology.** Peter is about to dramatically move from Law to Grace, from Jew to Gentile. As F.F. Bruce said, there is a "gradual widening of the circle from its native Palestinian beginnings" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 211).

The two cities mentioned here were cities that were known to have churches and Gentiles. They were both "semi Gentile" cities (Ibid., p. 211). What Peter would do in the name of Jesus would give hope to any person whether Jew or Gentile.

Now we do not believe that the gift of healing miracles is operative today. We do believe that God miraculously heals, but we do not believe that any person has the gift of healing which was a gift the apostles did have. The reason why this gift was operative during apostolic times is that the Scriptures were not written and the religious world was filled with wrong concepts and prejudices and the miracles proved the apostles were telling the truth.

KEY MINISTRY MOMENT #1 - God uses Peter to minister in Lydda . 9:32-35

It would appear from **verse 32** that Peter is now interested in moving outside of Jerusalem to check up on "the saints" in other areas. He came to the city of Lydda (Λυδδα), called "Lod" in the Old Testament (I Chron. 8:12; Ez. 2:33; Neh. 7:37; 11:35). It is a city that is located in the "fertile plain of Sharon." When Peter visited Lydda, it was a very important city that sat on a very important trade route. Lydda was a city located about twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Today this area is very near the Tel Aviv International Airport. This is interesting, because now powerful jets land there; but they do not have the power that the Apostle Peter had, to do what he did there. They have powerful planes, but not the power of Jesus Christ.

Now the saints of Lydda had probably been converted through the ministry of Philip. We may recall in Acts 8:40 that he was preaching in that region; or, it is also possible that some of the people had come to faith under the apostolic ministry in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5-11, 41, 47).

In the city there was a bedridden man whose name was Aeneas (Αἰνεαῖς), who had been paralyzed for eight years (**9:33**). Aeneas is a Greek name which means he was either a Hellenistic Jew, or he was not a Jew at all. We do not know for sure whether or not he was a believer; the text does not specifically say, although most assume he was because Peter had gone to minister to the "saints".

For eight years he had been a paralyzed man. The implication is that he had not always been a paralyzed man. He must have been discouraged and depressed. But to God it doesn't matter whether a person has been in their lousy condition for eight years or eighty years, because Jesus Christ can turn lives around. He can change things instantly.

In **verse 34**, Peter says to him "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you." Jesus the Savior and Christ the Messiah heals you. Then Peter says "arise and make your bed." Immediately he did. This would have been the first time in years he could make his own bed. When you are paralyzed, you lie in a bed and others have to wash you and change the bedding. For the first time in years, this man could make his own bed.

Dr. Swindoll said this is an amazing and stupendous miracle because most of us parents have said those very words to our children for many years, but to no avail. We have said "get up and make your bed" to children who are not sick and we get no results.

Carefully notice what it is that Peter does; he draws attention to Jesus Christ. He does not draw attention to himself, but straight to Jesus Christ. He doesn't claim to be the Head of the Church. He doesn't tell him that he has the power to do this. He simply says Jesus Christ heals you.

This is a pure grace moment. There is no evidence that Aeneas was even asking to be healed. It was an amazing miracle with amazing effects. According to **verse 35**, "all" in Lydda and Sharon saw this man and turned to the Lord; that is, they believed on Jesus Christ to save them from their sins. There is a plain of land (Sharon) that runs about thirty miles along the sea coast from Joppa to Caesarea and the transforming Gospel spread like wildfire because of this miracle. Notice the text says "they turned to the Lord." That is what you must do today for deliverance; turn to the Lord.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is what the power of God's Grace can do with you. It can take a life that has been mangled by some sin for eight, eighteen, or eighty years, and transform a person and set them free.

If Aeneas was a believer, this shows that no matter how long you may have struggled with something, Jesus Christ can set you free even if it is years later. He can deliver you from flesh things that have paralyzed you. Every one of us who knows the Lord have been crippled by sin. We all have a flesh and we all have deficiencies in our character, our knowledge, our obedience and our maturity. We all need God's Grace to grow. We all need a fresh touch of the Lord and when we zero in on our relationship with Jesus Christ. He is able to lift us up out of our rut, turn things around, get rid of hindrances and use us for His glory.

God spread the Gospel with Peter performing an apostolic miracle concerning a man and now Peter will spread the Gospel to another city with a woman.

The grace of God touches men and women. The grace of God touches boys and girls. The grace of God touches Jews and Gentiles. **The grace of God is interested in restoring believers to a full healthy spiritual life, even when that life has been paralyzed by sin.**

KEY MINISTRY MOMENT #2 - God uses Peter to minister in Joppa . 9:36-43

Joppa was a commercial city that from a distance looked “beautiful”. Today the city is known as “Jaffa”. It was a city that contained a high population of Greeks. Not far away from Joppa there was a certain godly woman named Tabitha, which is an Aramaic name, which in Greek is called Dorcas. This name in both languages (Aramaic and Greek) means gazelle. According to **verse 36**, she was known as a woman who did good things as a believer. She must have been a woman who had quite a bit of money because the Greek word “charity” (ελεημοσυνη) means that this woman showed pity and mercy on people and actually gave them things (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 145). She was obviously a woman of means and she used her money to help the people of God.

She was continually loving and kind and giving. Actually, Tabitha is a picture of a woman who is full of good works, but dead and needs life. She is a believer by virtue of the fact she was a disciple (**v. 36**). **Verse 37** says she got sick and she died. They washed her body and put her in an upper room as they prepared the body for burial.

Back in this culture a funeral service was held in the home. The dead body was laid out for a brief time and friends and relatives would come to pay their last respects and then the body would be buried.

The story of what happened in Lydda spread to Joppa and so the believers sent two men to go ask Peter to come to them (**v. 38**). Peter was about ten to twelve miles away. To walk this would take about three hours to get from Joppa to Lydda. The text does not say they were expecting him to raise her from the dead, but they wanted him to be there in the loss of this dear woman.

According to **verse 39**, they took him to the home where Tabitha’s body was and they took him to the upper room to view the dead body. All of the widows for whom she had made things were there weeping and showing Peter the things she had made. **The verb “make” is imperfect tense, which means she continually did this all of the time in the past when she was alive.** These ladies all had been helped a great deal by this dear woman.

Peter obviously saw the fruit of her ministry for she had made a great impact on these widows. The early church did its best to see to it that the widows had food and clothing, because the government didn’t help at all. This is a tremendous testimony for Dorcas. All of these widows had been so touched by what Dorcas had done for them that they wanted her back alive. Not one of these widows asked for their husbands back alive, but they did want this woman back alive.

This was a woman of God who would truly be missed. What a great testimony. I am sure that there have been moments when a believer has died when under your breath you say, I am kind of glad the person has gone to be with the Lord and isn’t here anymore. Probably more than one believer has said “Well the Lord took him or her and good riddance.” But that was not the case here. This woman was truly missed.

Now raising people from the dead is not your normal apostolic experience. Peter didn't walk around doing these kinds of things every day even though he was an apostle. He didn't go around and raise every dead person and neither did Jesus. In fact, if you put this in its context, the criteria here is that this woman was loved by so many because she was so generous to so many. Peter would not bring back some stingy, ornery person from the dead. There are three specific actions he takes:

(Action #1) - Peter sends everyone out of the room. 9:40a

Peter had seen Jesus do this. In fact, the verb "sent them out" is the same verb used when Jesus raised up Jairus' daughter from the dead (Matt. 9:25).

Now Peter sent the messengers, the widows, and anyone else out of the room because he knew he needed to be alone with God.

(Action #2) - Peter knelt down and prays. 9:40b

This power to do this would not come from Peter; it would come from heaven.

(Action #3) - Peter turns to the dead body and says "Tabitha, arise." 9:40c

Now Peter uses her Aramaic name rather than her Greek name here and the language he uses is very similar to a command Jesus gave to a dead girl. His command was "Talitha kum" which means in Aramaic "Talitha arise" (Mark 5:41). Now Peter is using almost the identical construction when he says "Tabitha, arise".

The text says that she opened her eyes, saw Peter and sat up. According to **verse 41**, Peter took her by the hand and stood her up, called the saints and widows and presented her alive to them. Now this text does not mean the "widows" were not saints, although there is that possibility.

Can you imagine what this must have been like for Tabitha who was already in the presence of the Lord enjoying eternity? She probably looked at the people and said what is wrong with you. I was already in heaven enjoying the eternal splendors of God and now I am back here in this struggling sinful world again. Can you imagine the Lord or someone else in heaven telling Tabitha she had to go back to earth? She could have said, why me, send someone else. Get someone else to go. But back to earth she came. This would mean she would have to die all over again.

According to **verse 42**, this story became known all over Joppa and many believed on the Lord because of it. That is the reason she was sent back. She did not get a new glorified body; she got her old one back. That must have depressed her too.

We learn something here about the grace of God: **The grace of God is interesting in giving spiritual life to one spiritually dead.**

Now these two Grace Age miracles illustrate the power of God in being able to transform people and develop people for the glory of God. In both cases, there wasn't one thing either could do to deliver themselves. It was solely by God's Grace. This is a key lesson the Church needs to learn. It is God's Grace that saves. It is God's Grace that transforms. It is God's Grace that develops. Now according to **verse 43**, Peter stayed in Joppa with a tanner named Simon. This is a critical verse and piece of information. It tells us that Peter is mellowing in his religious traditions. Tanners were considered taboo and off limits to a good Jew because they dealt with dead animals, blood and skins. A tanner was considered to be unclean to the Rabbis. In fact, rabbinical law said that if a woman found out that the man she was engaged to or married to was a tanner, she could divorce him.

Peter had met a tanner who loved the Lord and this becomes a key turning point in the life of Peter. God is moving him away from his religious prejudices. God has a way of doing that. **God can transform our prejudices by transforming others.** In fact, this very house of this tanner will become important to the vision of Cornelius in chapter 10 (10:6).

This becomes a key part of the process of Peter eating with Gentiles. We are beginning to see God move people away from religion and into a relationship with God.

Jesus Christ is the One and Only healer of sin-sick souls. Jesus Christ is the One and Only Savior who can give eternal life to one who is dead.