

## **HEALING**

Acts 9:32-43

Physical health is BIG deal. In terms of the number of people who are actively employed in providing services, it ranks second to public education. There are about twice as many people working in providing health care via a larger number of companies as there are people employed by the Federal Government which is the single largest employer in our country. The amount of revenues, salaries, and profits for health care is staggeringly high. As we commonly see in our prayer requests, most of the concerns are physical health related.

Apparently, these were the concerns of many people during the first century. Several significant miracles reported by Luke in his account of the early church were about people being healed.

About three years had passed since Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus. He left Damascus for some time and then returned during this three-year period. Following threats on his life from the Jews in Damascus, Paul left Damascus again, went to Jerusalem and spent some time there with the apostles. Again, there were threats from the same group of Hellenist Jews that killed Stephen and Paul left Jerusalem for Tarsus.

After the dramatic turnaround in the life of Saul of Tarsus and his redirected enthusiasm to help the church, his preaching triggered a new round of persecution from the Jews who resorted to violence when they were not successful in refuting Saul's arguments. Evidently Saul's debating ability proved to be too much for the Grecian Jews and they attempted to assassinate him. When Saul left the area, the persecution all but stopped and the church grew in Judea, Galilee and Samaria.

Following this time, Peter was involved in visiting Christian groups in Galilee and Samaria to provide encouragement to these churches. As he did this, God used Peter to strengthen the influence of the church by healing miracles that were done through him.

### Make Your Bed – 9:32-35

<sup>32</sup> Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. <sup>33</sup> There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. <sup>34</sup> And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. <sup>35</sup> And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. Acts 9:32-35 (ESV)

God blessed the ministry of the early church with miracles that confirmed the messages preached. Evidently, Peter (and perhaps other apostles) would visit the various local congregations that had flourished in the time of relative freedom from persecution. While in Lydda, Peter had an opportunity to be used of God to heal a man who had been incapacitated for eight years. Luke did not give a lot of details of whether Peter was asked to pray for this man named Aeneas; however, we read that Peter boldly told him that Jesus heals you, get up and make your bed. Luke did not tell us whether this was the only miracle done in Lydda or if this was just an example of many things that happened there. This miracle was very similar to what Christ had done when he had healed the paralyzed man who was brought to him by four friends and let down through a hole in the roof. Even the words that Peter used were similar to what Jesus said regarding "arise and take up or make your bed."

All of us have heard statements such as "Miracles aren't needed any longer since we have the written word of God." "God doesn't heal except through the medical profession." "They didn't have all the medicines we have today." However, there is documented evidence that those who are experiencing growth in the "underground" churches such as in China and Russia boldly

believe and are seeing miracles happen.

In the first century, many people believed when the word was proclaimed with power and the church grew greatly. Today, where the church is not growing greatly (or at all in some areas) people do not see that God can provide answers or solutions to their needs. When we deny the power of God and embrace the ways of the world, then we cannot expect anything different from what we are seeing in such areas.

#### Do Not Delay – 9:36-38

<sup>36</sup> Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. <sup>37</sup> In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. <sup>38</sup> 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)

We recall accounts of the “spirit of community” that was active in the church in Jerusalem that resulted in people helping each other as various needs were known. Evidently, this same sense of caring for one another was “alive and well” in the group of Christians living in the Joppa area. As has been Luke’s practice in the accounts of the church, he gave his readers an example of what one of the disciples was doing. Her name was Tabitha. The ministry she had was described as kindness and charity.

We would certainly think that the sickness and death of a saint such as Dorcas (or Tabitha) were tragic and a significant loss to all the people in the church in that area. We would be surprised if her fellow believers had not prayed for her when she became sick. Those prayers were not answered in the way the church would have wanted the events to happen. We can identify with the grief, the sense of loss, and the uncertainty those believers experienced. Many of us have been there and done that. Her friends did all the things that were normally done when a loved one passed away. Then they did one more thing that seemed to be a childlike act of faith that grew out of what they had heard about miraculous things that had happened in the church in Jerusalem and other places.

Peter had been in that area long enough for word to get around to the nearby towns that he was visiting the saints in Lydda. Joppa was about twelve miles away. Since the disciples in Joppa knew that Peter was nearby, they took a bold step of faith in the hope that God would do something miraculous if Peter would be willing to come from Lydda to Joppa and pray for a miracle. Up to this point in Luke’s historical account of the examples of the ministry and miracles in the church, there was no mention of anyone being raised from death. We know that such things had happened during the earthly ministry of Jesus and we know that Jesus had told His disciples in John chapter 14 that they would do greater works.

#### Arise – 9:39-43

<sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. <sup>42</sup> And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. <sup>43</sup> And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner. Acts 9:39–43 (ESV)

If such a miracle had not already happened since Pentecost, then the disciples in Joppa were taking a significant step of faith in believing what God would do. Perhaps they thought that since Jesus raised the dead when He ministered on earth that He could certainly do the same thing now that He is in Heaven. It seems that the people also realized that the individual gifts of the Holy Spirit were more active in some Christians than in others. Paul commented on this in

his letter to the church at Corinth. Past events showed that Peter was used by God in healing and other miracles.

When Peter got to Joppa, they took him immediately to the room where the body of Tabitha was being held prior to burial. Many of the widows whom she had helped over the years were there in the room with coats and other garments she had made for them. It is interesting that they brought these things to the place where her death was being mourned. These things served as a testimony of the “good things” she had done for others. The weeping of the widows was a testimony of the love that so many had for her.

What these widows did reminds us of Psalms 145:10 where we see “All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee.” It would be safe to say that Tabitha was a godly woman and she had acted in a godly manner in helping those who could not help themselves nor could ever hope to repay her for her gracious gifts. Those widows were simply doing what they could do to honor her life that was obviously praiseworthy. I doubt that Tabitha did anything that she did to help others from any motivation beyond the fact that she cared for those in need. Such selfless actions created a legacy for her that lives on even today. We would all do well to follow her example as she followed Christ in graciously helping others as God has provided and works through us.

This second miracle was similar to a miracle that Christ had done that we associate with Jairus’ daughter. Peter had been there when that happened and he likely remembered how Jesus dealt with the crowd and how He had spoken to the deceased young girl. Jesus had stretched forth His hand and took her by her hand and said “talitha cumi” which in Aramaic meant “young girl, arise.” Peter did something similar after he had sent the mourners out of the room. However, we see that Peter put in an additional step that Jesus had not done. Peter knelt and prayed before he spoke to the dead woman and said “Tabitha cumi” which (in Aramaic) is only one letter different from what Jesus had said.

The difference in what Jesus did and what Peter did shows us an important distinction. Jesus did miracles as a result of His inherent power since He is God Incarnate. Peter, as a follower of Christ, saw himself as an instrument or a channel through whom God would work to bring about a miracle. He knew that he had no power inherent in himself but only by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in his life.

Another difference in what Peter did and what had happened with Jairus’ daughter was that Peter did not touch the woman until life had returned to her. He then reached out his hand to help her get up. Some speculate that this difference was a concern that Peter had of becoming ceremonially unclean by touching a dead person. Peter was still a practitioner of Judaism and observed the “ceremonial prohibitions.” Jesus was not inhibited by such ceremonial restrictions.

We can certainly appreciate that the action Peter took with Tabitha was very bold and showed confidence in the power of God to raise the dead. We might argue that his response to Aeneas in his condition was equally bold. Not only did Peter have the benefit of remembering what Jesus did, he had seen such healing miracles in several instances in this own ministry.

What would be the response of people today, if we would take such action as telling a paralytic man or a dead person to arise in the name of Jesus? I doubt that anyone would say that we were being bold. Even those in the church would be thinking that we were at least audacious if not fanatical. Those in the church of that first century thought that God doing such things among them was part of what the community of believers should be experiencing. More than a hundred years ago, Alexander Maclaren stated the following in regard to this passage:

The Christian Church does not half enough believe in the actual presence and operation of Jesus Christ, here and now, in and through all His servants! We are ready enough to believe that He worked when He

was in the world long ago, that He is going to work when He comes back to the world, at some far-off future period. But do we believe that He is verily putting forth His power, in no metaphor, but in simple reality, at present and here, and, if we, will, through us?

Again we see that God blessed those who followed Him and believed His promises and were willing to draw near to him. The benefits of those blessings of healing and miracles went beyond the church and proved to be confirmations of the message of the church that salvation and forgiveness of sins are possible for those who confidently trust in what God had done in sending Jesus. Since this salvation was the culmination of what God had been doing through all His interactions with man since sin caused a separation between God and man, those who were familiar with that history could and many did believe.

With the new believers in the area, there were additional teaching and ministering opportunities for Peter in Joppa and he remained there for several days. What he did not know at the time was that God was preparing him for a new experience that would take more than boldness but would require him to be courageous. Peter was still learning in his walk with the Lord and the church still had a lot of new opportunities of people who needed to hear the good news of salvation.