

Sermon Title: Peter Rides Again
Scripture Text: Acts 9:32-43 (Acts #24)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 10-1-23

It's time to open our Bibles and come to Acts Chapter 9, where—Lord willing—we will finish the entire chapter today; we will finish the *rest* of the chapter.

The first 31 verses of Acts Chapter 9 have turned our attention toward Saul of Tarsus and his astounding conversion. As we return to the text today, Saul is now a believer in Christ, and he is back home in his home city of Tarsus, where he is undergoing expensive training by Jesus for his role as an "Apostle" to the "Gentiles" (Rom. 1:5; 11:13; Gal. 2:8; 1 Tim. 2:7). Now, we are not *privy* to that specific training—but, of course, he did write 13 books of the New Testament, so we have a pretty good idea what he learned (cf. Gal. 1:11-12).

Peter and Paul have intersected as believers in Christ. Remember, Saul came down from Damascus to Jerusalem, and had to be introduced, actually—he had to get the walls knocked down between him and the rest of the Apostles. And we are told that he spent a couple of weeks with Peter. I wish we were told what all he had heard, but we know that it is quite likely that Peter had heard from Saul—who will become Paul (Acts 13:9)—what Ananias had said to him about what he would suffer for Jesus, and how he would reach kings and Jews and Gentiles.

Chapter 9, Verse 31 told us that the churches in "Judea and Galilee and Samaria" enjoyed a season of "peace" and "building up," now that Saul was no longer spearheading a campaign of persecution and arrest, and even imprisonment and sometimes "death" of Christians (Acts 22:4).

Peter left Jerusalem, then. He had been there ever since the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. And Peter began travelling to visit the churches in those regions mentioned in Verse 31. Luke doesn't give us very many details about Peter's travels, but we get an idea from this chapter, and we can also see the cities to which Peter addressed his epistles, First and Second Peter—we can see that there was quite a bit of overlap between the places Paul went and the places that Peter went. Peter mentions "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet. 1:1); and many people think that he got as far as Rome, and they make quite a *big deal* out of that—just, *so what* if there is no *evidence*; if we think he was there in Rome, he can be there in Rome.

So, as we come to see this section, we see Peter now in a different light than we have seen him. He has always been the mighty mouth for God (e.g., Matt. 16:15-16; Acts 1:15; 2:14; 4:8; 5:3; 15:7). He has been the one that does the *great* proclamations at the *big* events to the *most* people. Now, Peter is taking his wife with him—we are told that little detail in First Corinthians Chapter 9, Verse 5 (cf. Matt. 8:14), just like the other Apostles and the close associates of the Apostles, including Jesus' half-brothers, James and Jude—they traveled with their wives, took the Gospel, planted churches, ministered to the saints.

And so now we are going to enter a part of Acts where we are going to see the transition *away* from those early years when Peter was the main figure as the Gospel spread through Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria; and then, just began to break through into the world of the Gentiles.

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And just as God used Peter to preach first to the Gentiles, and then to confirm the salvation of the Samaritans, He is going to use Peter to make the first inroads into the world of the Gentiles; and the end of Chapter 9 is the beginning of that transition.

I titled our message "Peter Rides Again," because he has kind of been out of the loop here for a chapter or two. But the fact is, he never stopped. We had that brief interlude—we focused on Stephen, we focused on Philip, and then we saw that interlude about Saul, who became Paul. Now we are going to see the extension of the ministry of Peter.

And once we arrive at Chapter 13—so we still have 10, 11, and 12, but when we get to 13, then Paul, the new name of the one named Saul, he is going to become the main character for the rest of the Book of Acts.

In Acts so far, Peter has been the primary figure, as I said; he is the main guy for the huge gatherings in Jerusalem. But now, we are going to see him, not with the huge crowds; we are going to see him *personally* involved with people, we are going to see him *personally* seeking out opportunities to preach the Gospel and to serve Christians wherever he went.

In the first records of Peter in the Book of Acts, we have these glorious, masterful, big public sermons. Today, we are going to see him in two encounters with a grand total of 13 words recorded that he spoke. Now, I know he said more than 13 words, but the point is that we are seeing that the Gospel: yes, *it is* these big things, and it is also—and probably more important, and definitely more usually—individual contacts and smaller places.

All the Apostles traveled, all of them evangelized, all of them planted churches; but the Book of Acts is giving us the big picture of the flow of the development of the plan of God: "You shall be My witnesses...in Jerusalem, and in...Judea and Samaria, and...the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8), and that takes us from Peter through Stephen and Philip to Saul—to Paul—and to the rest of the earth.

God sent Peter, as we saw, when the Gospel went to the Samaritans. We saw that God sent Peter and John up to Samaria to confirm the salvation of the Samaritans, to emphasize that there is *one* Church—it involves Jews *and* Samaritans (cf. Gal. 3:28).

And then next, shortly on the heels of that came the first recorded conversion in the New Testament era of a *Gentile*: There's that Ethiopian man that Philip introduced to Christ.

Then we met Saul—saw his conversion, his transformation. And now, the next big development is going to be when the Gospel breaks out among *huge* numbers of Gentiles, and Peter is going to be the one who inserts that key into that lock, and turns it to "open the door" to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27). We will get to that in Chapter 10.

But our passage centers on two events with Peter at the center. What Peter did here led to the salvation of countless people during this trip.

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There are going to be several questions that come up. When you deal with a historical narrative passage like this, there are no commands directly to you; you have to just see: This is what happened, and it is recorded there, and it is "for" our "teaching" and for our "reproof" and for our "correction" and for our "training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). But we have to *think* a little bit about what is here, and how it connects from *those people then*, through the ministry of the Spirit of God, to us today (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11).

And so, I want to plant in your mind a few questions that we are going to confront as we deal with this. For example: Where is "Lydda"? Who is "Aeneas"? Where is "Sharon"? Where is "Joppa"? Who is "Tabitha"? How long is "many days"? Who is this "Simon the Tanner"? And what is going on in Peter's life? and, How can *I* learn from what is going on in Peter's life? So watch for those.

But we will outline the passage based upon two incidents; and in both cases, there is a punchline.

The first one is: They Turned To The Lord (vss. 32-35)
The second one is: Many Believed In The Lord (vss. 36-43).

It's pretty obvious to see what the big upshot of these two incidents was.

First of all: They Turned To the Lord.

It is hard to overstate how big a deal it was for Peter, or for *any* of the other Apostles, to begin to have fellowship and partnership with people who were not Jews. Prejudice dies *hard*. Those walls of separation are *real* (cf. Lk. 9:52-53; Jn. 4:9; Acts 10:28a; 11:2-3; Eph. 2:14).

I remember beginning our ministry in the region of Tambov; and in the first class, we had a man who was pastoring a small group of gypsies. And he was *so welcomed* in the class—it was fantastic. He was a crippled man; the guys would actually carry him up the 77 cement steps to the classroom where we were, and carry him back down for lunch, and carry him up after lunch, and carry him back down again every day. He was doing a handwritten translation of the Bible into the Gypsy language. And we *loved* this guy! He was *so* great. And we heard he was taking the Gospel to these people who were, you know, a little distance away. And then, as we got to know him a little bit better, and about seven or eight trips later that I was there, we had a few of the gypsies in church on Sunday morning, who had made the trip there. We found out that one of the large families had moved nearby, and they invited us—this one guy had been in the class—then invited us, and invited me, to come to an evening time on Sunday to worship with them.

And you know what? Our Russian brothers had *never* been there before! They had never been *invited* there before. And they came to me and they said, "This has never happened! This is happening because of the class that you are teaching. It would mean *so much* to them if you came, and I'm not sure they would invite us if it wasn't for you. Do you really want to do this?" And I'm saying, "Yes! Yes! *Of course* we do!" And now, there is a *wonderful* fellowship between these folks, ministry going on.

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It takes time. It takes work. It takes somebody saying the right thing at the right time, to make the right relationship develop. And those kinds of things have to happen in *our* lives.

Now we know that God designed for Israel to be, as His chosen nation, *distinct* from the other "nations" (Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:19; 28:1). And the idea was then that Israel would be "holy" (Ex. 19:6)—"set apart," that is—and then they would be the instrument to bring other nations to know God (Ps. 98:2-3; Is. 11:10; 49:6; 52:10).

But that distinctiveness got twisted into legalistic separatism and, eventually, *tremendous* antipathy between Jews and Gentiles, and even Jews and Samaritans (cf. Is. 65:5).

But now that Peter and the other Apostles have *actually seen* the Samaritans basking in the grace of God, filled with His Spirit; and now, they have even seen a Gentile converted and baptized—God is at work in Peter's life to change and to mature his attitude. There is a subtext here in Acts 9 about what God is doing in Peter's life to prepare him for these *blockbuster* changes that will include reaching the Gentiles.

Now, Chapter 9, Verse 32—"Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions"—what "regions"? Well, you have to look *way back* in the context to...the sentence before that: The "regions" are "Judea and Galilee and Samaria." "As Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down"—remember, from Jerusalem, everything is "down," no matter which direction you go, because of elevation—"he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

'Lydda' is a town in the plains southwest of Jerusalem, along the Mediterranean coast. "Lydda" is a place that, in the Old Testament, is called by its Hebrew name: "Lod" (1 Chr. 8:12). If you have ever been to Israel, or if you ever *do* get to Israel, it is quite likely that you will be *very* close to this place because you will land at Ben-Gurion National Airport; it's where Lydda used to be, about 14 miles from the modern city of Tel Aviv. Lydda was on an ancient trade route that went all the way up from Egypt to Damascus—from north to south and south to north—and Lydda was where that route intersected the road that went from Jerusalem down to Joppa. So: trade route, intersection, lots of business—natural place for a city to grow up.

Peter came there to visit "the saints who lived at Lydda." First of all, let's deal with that word "saints." I trust that you know by now that "saints" is literally "holy ones"; it is the adjective for "holy," used as a noun: "the ones who are holy." It is a synonym for "Christians" (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 14:12). All who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation are made holy "by His grace" (Rom. 3:24; cf. Is. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9).

The idea of "saints" as special dead people who are "canonized" and who then mediate between God and His people on Earth—that is not theology, that's *mythology*! And as a matter of fact, it is *anti-biblical* mythology! And as a matter of fact, it is *blasphemous*! "There is...*one* mediator...between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5; cf. Jn. 14:6; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1). We do not pray to saints or anybody except God Himself.

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Now, you might be thinking about this: Lydda? "The saints...at Lydda"? How did there come to be Christians in Lydda, where Peter went?—and then later, the same question about Joppa. It's not possible to be really dogmatic about it, but one of two things, or a combination of those two things, had happened.

For one: There were likely people from Lydda who had been in Jerusalem for that pilgrim feast of Pentecost when the Gospel broke out, and then they went home. That could be one source.

Or, if we are going to take clues from what Luke has said, remember: When Philip met the Ethiopian eunuch, led him to Christ, and baptized him, then all of a sudden, Philip got teleported to a place called "Azotus"—that's in the same region, and it says he went from there all the way down to "Caesarea" (Acts 8:40). We know "Philip" was an "evangelist" (Acts 21:8), and if you are sitting there and there is an empty seat next to you, and, *Bam!*—all of a sudden, Philip is sitting there: You know, you'd say, "Where'd *you* come from?" "I don't know. I just baptized this Ethiopian guy, and, *Zap!*—I was *here!*" That would get some attention! We don't know how it happened. I don't know if there was the Star Trek music when the transporter worked.

But, either through Philip or through people who were in Jerusalem—or any other means—Christians were now in Lydda and Joppa.

So, "Peter" goes to "Lydda" visiting "the saints." Verse 33—"There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed." We know nothing about this guy, except that his name was "Aeneas," he lived in Lydda, "he was paralyzed," and that had been his condition for "eight years."

But there *is* an interesting little tidbit buried in the text here. It is not in your translation. I think *maybe* it is in the King James—I kind of remember it that way. But there is a little Greek particle. What is a "particle," in language? It's a little word that has some kind of an inference, but it usually does not get translated; there is not an equivalent in the other language. Literally, the Greek says: "There was a *certain* man named Aeneas." The contrast is a few verses later—we'll show it to you in a moment. It says there was "a *certain disciple* named Tabitha" (vs. 36, KJV)—same article there: "this *certain* one, that *certain* one." Well, one of them is called a "disciple," and one of them is not; this is the one that is not. The implication may be that Aeneas probably was not a Christian when this happened.

And by the way: There is this *ridiculous* idea today that people have the gift of healing, like in the New Testament—*they do not*; it is all fraudulent. But another thing they say is, "You are not healed because *you* don't have faith!" That was never the case with any of the healings by Jesus or the Apostles.

But anyway, since he is not called a "disciple," and the other one is—who knows? Maybe we will find out when we get there. He was "bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed." We know no other details. But it says Peter "found" him, and he acted immediately.

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Now here comes Peter's big speech in this passage: Verse 34—"Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.' Immediately he got up."

It is *really* significant how Peter worded that: "Jesus Christ heals you." He was *very* careful not to take any credit whatsoever (cf. Acts 3:12-16). He knew that the power to heal was the power of God. Any genuine messenger of God points *all* the attention to Jesus Christ, never to himself or herself.

And this is quite the concise incident report: "Immediately he got up." That kind of boils it down! "Immediately he got up." That is how *all* healings happen: "immediately"! Even when Jesus did a two-step healing once in the Gospels (Mk. 8:22-25), it was still instantaneous, and it was still complete.

Aeneas got up and made his bed for the first time in *eight years*! Even *I* make mine more commonly than that! No more paralysis, no gradual recovery, no physical therapy, no crutches, no wheelchair, no limp, no personal assistant to help him along—he just got up!

And again, this record is obviously abbreviated; it could not possibly include everything that was said. We *do* know, though, that whatever else happened, the Gospel was being preached surrounding that incident, because look at Verse 35—"And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord."

"Sharon" is the plain that surrounds Lydda and the city of Joppa; it extends all the way down to Caesarea, that coastal plain of Israel. So what Luke is saying is that everybody in the city and everybody in the country around there—"they turned to the Lord."

The word "all"—that's kind of amazing! I hope it is absolutely to be taken literally. It might sound a little hyperbolic—not *every single one* (cf. Mk. 15:1 with Lk. 23:50-51)—but it is clear that the impact was *astounding*, and the harvest of souls was plentiful.

And would you notice: Peter did not invite people to form a line and stay for the "healing ministry." It was *all* about turning people to Jesus Christ.

It says "they turned to the Lord." The Greek word *epistrephō* is one of several words to describe the result of salvation. It means: not *merely* a download of information, not *merely* the facts of the Gospel, but a change of mind that includes a change of direction (e.g., Acts 26:20; cf. Is. 55:7). When you come to Christ, you "follow" Him (Jn. 10:27; cf. Matt. 7:21; Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 2:4).

The punchline here: They Turned To The Lord.

Then the next one, the other incident. Number 2: Many Believed In The Lord.

Look in Verse 36—"Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did."

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They heard that Peter was in the area. By the way, I can imagine the people coming to town and saying, "This guy was healed! He had been bedridden *eight years!* And Peter is around!" They knew he was in the area, and so they sent a request to him, and Peter responded to it.

This church at nearby Joppa—about ten to twelve miles away—they were grieved by the death of one of their members, this woman named "Tabitha," or the Greek version, "Dorcas." Both "Tabitha" and "Dorcas," in their respective languages, mean "gazelle." Her reputation was that she was a selfless servant for helping people in the greatest need: she "was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did."

Here is where the contrast is: "Aeneas" was "a certain *man*" who was "bedridden"; "Tabitha" was "a certain *disciple*." She was already a believer; she already had a strong reputation as a believer.

And if you want to win a trivia contest sometime: This verse is the only place where the *feminine* form of the word "disciple" occurs. Greek nouns have gender—masculine or feminine or neuter. Generally speaking, we speak of "disciples" in the plural, and they use the masculine plural; or, "to be a disciple" is generically used in the masculine. Here it is the feminine form. That's a nice piece of trivia. Don't make anything else out of it, except that we know she was a Christian, and she had this great reputation.

We do not know any more about this woman, either, than what is here. She had this exceptional reputation for kindness and generosity. We do not know her age. We do not know if she was married, or perhaps she had been married and was widowed. You are going to see that there is an attachment between her and "the widows" who were "weeping" over her (vs. 39), so I think the inference might be that she was, maybe *not* a widow, but maybe she was one who was overseeing the widows, or maybe she was a younger widow.

Verse 37 tells us what happened: "And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room." There is *no other place* where we hear of that happening. As a matter of fact, that is a very significant detail. We can assume that, because of the timing here, the disciples at Joppa at that time would have been from among the Jews, so their customs and their culture were Jewish. The Jewish burial custom was to clean the dead body, wrap it, and bury it as soon as possible. Remember, they took Jesus down from the cross, got Him wrapped, and got Him in the tomb before sundown—that was because that was the custom, and of course they did not want to dishonor Him, either. But it wasn't *only* a custom, it was a matter of sanitation (cf. Jn. 11:39). And that custom carried over to the early Jewish Christians. But in *her* case, instead of immediate burial, "they laid" her body "in an upper room." *They* had something *else* in mind.

And we are not told exactly how that came to be, we are not told why they thought of that, but we immediately see what it was: They wanted Peter to come. Look at Verse 38—"Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, 'Do not delay in coming to us.' "

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"Peter—you are needed urgently in the next town! Get down there!" This is another place where it would be really interesting to know what else was said in addition to this abbreviated summary. I am sure they briefed Peter as they were scurrying down to Joppa from Lydda. Verse 39—"So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them."

It is pretty obvious how precious Tabitha was to these people. Peter arrives, and he is engulfed in grieving widows who had lost their dear friend. Our society is not like many societies in how vocal and "loud" grieving can be (Acts 8:2; cf. Gen. 50:10). I mean, they would *get into it*. There may be some comfort in that. We like to use the silly word "closure," which is pretty much meaningless. But they would do some serious grieving. They had lost their dear friend.

The ministry of widows in the early church is very significant. We will see a few things about it here and there. Scott is probably going to get to some of it in Titus before long. But "Tabitha," or "Dorcas," was a very special woman devoted to serving the Lord and His people. They had lost one of their *very best friends*. She may or may not have been one of the widows. I think, in my notes, I let something slip through in which I called her a widow. We can't know that for sure.

But we do know what happened. Look at Verses 40 and 41—"But Peter sent them all out..." "Enough! I've had *enough* of you ladies crying!" No, that's not what he meant. He "sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body"—I like that it is phrased that way, not "her" (cf. Lk. 8:55; Jas. 2:26a)—"turning to the body, he said"—and here is his other big speech—" 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive."

Peter asked everybody else to leave the room because he did not want to put on a show. He did not want to attract attention to himself. And *then* he did just what *he* had seen *Jesus* do—it's recorded in Mark Chapter 5—when Jesus raised the daughter of that man named Jairus. He wanted quiet. He wanted solitude. He wanted to pray.

We are not told what he prayed, but then he turns "to the body" and says, "Tabitha, arise." Another miracle, this one more than a healing—this was a resurrection. And like all miracles, it was *instantaneous*! "Tabitha, arise," and "she sat up"! And you might think that with all that he had seen in the past, and you might think that with impetuous Peter, as we have always known him, he would have just raced up to that room and screamed, "Tabitha, arise!" But he didn't. This is the *new* Peter. This is the Peter filled with the Holy Spirit. This is the Peter who *always* turns the attention to the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He knew the power was not in himself, it was in the Lord.

And then, here comes the second punchline, very similar to what we said about Lydda, back in Verse 35. In Verse 42, it says: "It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."

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In the early days of the Church, God used miracles to confirm the truth of the Gospel (Acts 14:3; Heb. 2:4), and He used miracles to confirm the reliability of the messengers who delivered the Gospel (Acts 2:22, 43; 5:12)—that is *exactly* what happened with "Tabitha," or "Dorcas," and with "Aeneas."

I have to tell you some memory that popped into my mind when I got to this: When Marsha and I were first married, we were blessed with an incredible luxury: God allowed us to own, free and clear, a 12-year-old Ford Falcon sedan as our means of transportation. During our first year of marriage, we were on our way to visit Marsha's sister and her husband, about an hour or hour and a half away; and something went wrong with our car, and we wound up just *barely* keeping it running—with noises and smells and emissions. We limped the last few miles on our way to visit the family. And while we were there, our in-laws called a friend in their church, and he knew what was wrong; he took pity on the young seminary student and his wife. I don't even remember who took us home, but they gave us a ride home—over an hour away. And this guy took our car, and he did some *very* extensive engine repairs, and he only let us pay for parts—which was only *a little bit more* than we could afford at that time. And some days later, we retrieved the car. It was in great shape. We drove it another couple of years before giving it to a missionary, who would use it for *another* few years. Well, I married into a family that names cars; and our little Ford Falcon, from that day on, took on the name "Dorcas." She died, she lived again, and she served the Lord. And I have to admit this: We enjoyed calling a Ford Falcon by the name "Dorky." Take that for what it's worth; it has *nothing* to do with this text—except, maybe you'll remember "Dorcas." In several churches, I have seen groups called "The Dorcas Sewing Circle," because she made "tunics," she made clothes, and women would get together and would sew for missionaries, or whatever.

Our passage here ends with a curious detail—something you could easily skip over, but it is fabulous when you see its significance. It's Verse 43. This is the end of the chapter, this is the bridge to Chapter 10, where the door is going to be flung open to the Gentiles. It says simply: "And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon." "Simon" lived near the seashore. Because he was a "tanner," he needed water; saltwater was especially useful for flaying and soaking and cleaning the hides that he was tanning. And this is going to give us insight into what was going on with Peter. The work of a "tanner," and all those hides that he dealt with, caused quite a stench. There was not an emissions control system at a factory, but the house next door to Simon the tanner was *not* the prime real estate in town. So, Simon probably wasn't a favorite in town at all.

And among the Jews, his work was considered ceremonially unclean because of all the dead animals that he constantly handled, and all the blood that would be involved (Lev. 11:26-28, 39-40). But Simon was accepted among the Christians, and he opened his place to Peter. Peter took up residence with him *for some time*; it just says "many days." And I told you, as you try to sort out the chronology of the Book of Acts, it's not like Chapter 2 happened on Monday, Chapter 3 on Tuesday, Chapter 4 on Wednesday. There is some time that has gone by. We are probably a few years into the life of the Church now. And Peter is going to still be living with Simon when we get to the events of the next chapter.

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But as I say to you: This is evidence of God working in Peter's heart to incrementally and relentlessly move him further and further away from that separatistic, Pharisaic Jewish legalism. And He is getting Peter ready to *not only* stay with the stinky guy in Joppa; next chapter, he is going to *go into the home of a Gentile!* That is *too big* for us to really grasp. We can say it, we can know it—*it was huge.*

So, remember those questions that I said would come up here? These help you see that the Book of Acts involves ordinary people with ordinary lives in ordinary places, but God doing *extraordinary* things in them and through them. How many people do you think gave a lot of attention to Aeneas, other than his family and those who cared for him; or this quiet woman who sewed? And now, God has used them and their circumstances to be the catalyst for miracles, and to bring *many* to the Lord!

So, let's think about those questions.

Where is Lydda? Well, you can get to Heaven without knowing where Lydda is, but it was a normal town between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea; normal business was carried on there every day. And that is where Aeneas was healed.

Who is Aeneas? A normal man, but he was dealing with a debilitating physical problem that turned out to be for the glory of God (cf. Jn. 11:4). It's like when the disciples asked Jesus, in John Chapter 9: "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" (vs. 2). And Jesus said, "Nah. This is for the glory of God." God has a purpose in *every* circumstance (Eph. 1:11b), whether healing is involved or not (e.g., 2 Cor. 12:8-9). His healing was the catalyst that brought *many* to faith in Christ: They heard the Gospel through Peter and all the others.

Then: Where is Sharon? "I don't know—she left for the store, and we haven't seen her for days!" Actually, "Sharon" is not a person. "Sharon" is a region. "Sharon" is the plain. Like I said: That's like the countryside between Lydda and Joppa; it's a region (1 Chr. 5:16; Is. 33:9; 65:10).

Where is Joppa? Well, pretty much the same as Lydda. You might want to get into the maps in the back of your Bible, and look up Lydda and Joppa. It was a normal town, closer to the seacoast—right on the seacoast of the Mediterranean Sea. And providentially, it became Peter's base of operations, probably for several months.

Who is Tabitha? She is this precious disciple of Christ; maybe a widow—we don't know, but she was beloved among the Christians at Joppa. And God allowed her to die—it seems to imply surprise. Not that she was very old, not that she was crippled; "she fell sick and died." It seemed like a sudden sort of a thing. But God used that to show His resurrection power over death, and to bring many to faith in Christ—as with Aeneas in Lydda.

And then I asked: How long is "many days"? We don't know for sure, but it is likely up to several months. As I said: Acts 1-9 covers a few years.

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And: Who is Simon the Tanner? A guy who would not have been very welcome in society at large; he would not be on the "A-List" for invitations to the fancy balls. But he was embraced by the Christians at Joppa, and he became Peter's host. A lowly, stinky tanner becomes the one who takes care of Peter—for who knows how long.

Now: What is going on in Peter's life? and, How can I learn from what is going on in Peter's life?

We always think of Peter as the leader. Yeah, he was. He was used mightily by God. But he was a *normal man*. Remember, he was not raised as "a Pharisee" among the "Pharisees" like Paul was (Acts 23:6). He was a *fisherman* from Galilee. He wasn't stupid. Just read the things he wrote, read the things he said—he was a well-educated man. But understand that God tenaciously, patiently continued to file off the rough edges of Peter's prejudice and his preconceptions about people (see Jn. 16:12; cf. Prov. 4:18).

One reason for these little details in God's Word is so that we can learn to grow in a similar way (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11), and allow God to change our most ingrained faults. God transformed Peter, and He just kept chipping away, chipping away, sanding and filing and encouraging and rebuking and strengthening him (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18).

My friends, we can learn from that. We have prejudices. Sometimes we have recognized them, we have dealt with them, we continue to deal with them. Sometimes we don't *realize* how much we can look past people, or ignore situations because of our prejudice.

I was an elementary school kid in the 1950s. That was a *different millennium*, my goodness! And I was not a Christian then. I was from a good family, but my parents had come from the Midwest and from the south, and they had lived in those cultures. And I heard it said in the 1950s—and I was in Los Angeles, which was not as diverse as it is now, but still, it was—and I heard people say, with a straight face—sometimes with real, genuine meaning—I remember *exactly* the mantra: "Negroes prefer to be with their own kind, and it is best that way." I heard that. And, you know, in the context, I could see what they were saying. But, you know, even then—even not as a Christian—that just didn't seem quite right to me. But *then*, when I became a Christian, and I met the Body of Christ, I realized that in that saying, I had been taught an idea *directly from Satan!* (cf. Is. 19:25; 49:6; 56:3-7)

There are not different "races" of human beings! That is *made up!* There is *one race*, and it is human (Gen. 3:20; Acts 17:26a). And we need to act accordingly! And the Body of Christ is the one place—the *only* place—where those things can be *completely* eliminated (Acts 10:34-35; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; Rev. 5:9).

So, what can we learn from Peter? Well, I would say this: Look how God dealt with him—put him in this situation, and a little further in the next one, a little further in the next one; pretty soon, he is having lunch with Gentiles. Oh, and by the way, he is going to snap back and have a little relapse that we are going to have to deal with, later on (see Gal. 2:11-21).

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But I would say, this we can learn from Peter: Never excuse your own carnal behavior by saying something like, "That's just the way I am!" or, "I was raised that way." (cf. Ex. 20:5; 1 Kings 15:3, 26; 22:52; 2 Kings 15:9) Think about what that means! Having a long pattern of sinful reactions is *not* your excuse to do it one more time!

Or, I have heard this one: "I just tell it like it is!" Well, okay, that's better than telling it like it *isn't*. Speaking truth is critical, but we must "speak truth in love" (Eph. 4:15; cf. Prov. 3:3). Being brash or harsh or lacking compassion for how our words might impact other people (Prov. 12:18)—that is *never, ever* justifiable! And if you grew up among a bunch of people who had a problem, *that's no excuse for you to have that problem!* That's the reason *not to!* That's a reason to say, "Look what God can do with a human heart, and I don't *have* to be like that was!"

And don't even think about trying to justify treating people differently because they speak a different language, or because of their ethnicity, or because of their skin color, or because of their zip code (Ex. 22:21; 23:9; Deut. 1:17; 24:17; Jer. 22:3; Ezek. 22:7, 29; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5; Rom. 2:11; 1 Tim. 5:21; Jas. 2:1).

What can we learn from Peter? If *Peter* could grow in grace, *so can we* (cf. Prov. 19:20; Hos. 6:3; Phil. 3:12-14; 1 Pet. 2:2). Remember what the last recorded words in the Bible are from Peter? Don't be deceived, "but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18).

And let's pray:

Father, thank You. Thank You for the likes of Peter. Thank You for those glorious things You did through him. But thank You, too, for those little things, those incremental things that You did in his heart. And we pray that You will help us to receive the encouragement from Your Word, and to let it "reprove" us and "rebuke" us, and let it "correct" us, that we might be "trained" for "every good work"—that we might indeed "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." Have Your way with us to that end, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.