

Scripture Reading:

Acts 9:31 “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied. 32 Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. 33 There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. 34 And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately. 35 So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. 36 At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. 37 But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. 39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. 40 But Peter put them all out, 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 Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. & it became known throughout all Joppa, & many believed on the Lord. 43 So it was that [Peter] stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.”

'Peter Ministers to the Saints'

We have spent many weeks considering the conversion of Saul of Tarsus who God had appointed as His chosen vessel to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. The conversion of the Gentiles will be the final step in the work Jesus gave His disciples at His Ascension when He said to them, ““It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, & to the end of the earth.”

We know from the revelations given to Saul that this would include the Gentiles...

- The salvation of the Gentiles had been promised in the Old Testament all along...

Remember that beautiful picture God gave His people as they journeyed up out of Egypt when they came to the oasis Elam & found 12 wells watering 70 palm trees.\ The twelve tribes of Israel were to bring blessing and salvation to the seventy nations of the earth, both of which had been described in great detail in the Book of Genesis.

- As we shall see from the reaction that Paul and others get when they take the Gospel to the Gentiles, the Jews of that day had long forgotten this calling.

In AD70 the words of warning from Jesus in Matthew chapter 24 would be fulfilled and the nation of Israel, the Temple and all the remnant of the Old Testament sacrificial system would be destroyed.

The old creation would pass away and the new creation would be brought forth by the power of Christ's resurrection, His ascension to the Father's right hand and the coming of the Holy Spirit: A new kingdom that would fill the earth.

Now we need to realize that even the Apostles did not fully understand all of this at this point.

- **Saul had wanted to go and minister in Jerusalem because of his love for the Jewish people.**
- **The disciples likely thought the command to go to Judea, Samaria and even to the ends of the earth was just geographic, telling them to reach all the Jews who had been scattered over the centuries**

As we shall begin to study next week, the conversion of the Gentiles is going to come as quite a shock!

- **Peter will be given visions to help him understand.**
- **Paul is continuing to be prepared by Jesus at his home town of Tarsus**
- **And after the news reaches the Church at Jerusalem they will investigate the work of both Peter and later Paul and Barnabas.**

Looking at the big picture reminds us that Luke is writing an orderly account and not just bouncing around in the history of the early church.

- **Just as a fine novel has several interlocking plot lines, Luke does the same in his telling of a very important story...**
- **One that his friend Theophilus and all of the Saints down through the history of the Church need to understand.**

The disciples have preached the Word in Jerusalem, and when persecution scattered them they carried the Good News that Jesus is the Messiah who takes away our sins to the people of all Judea and even Samaria.

- **Saul has been called and converted and now it is time for the Church to understand God's entire plan.**

As we studied at length last week the churches in Judea, Galilee and Samaria are being blessed and now Luke turns back to the ministry of Peter for two very good reasons:

- **His example and his location!**

He shows the work Peter is doing as an example of what the other Apostles and disciples from Jerusalem would have been doing to support and instruct the new churches in these outlying areas.

Those in the Roman Catholic Church who insist that the Pope is the rightful heir to Peter's leadership in the church look to these portions of Scripture as their proof. However, Peter's ministry is not to be seen as the chief, but one among many, just as Phillip was an example of others scattered by persecution. Peter can certainly be looked too as the lead Apostle: One of the three in the inner circle that Jesus kept close, the one who preached at Pentecost and who along with John was very prominent in the Jerusalem church and who now is shown ministering in the other areas.

However, this is a far cry from how the Roman Catholics treat him, saying that he began an Apostolic succession that continues down to the current Pope serving in Rome. The problem is that there is no such succession given nor commanded in the Scriptures and they struggle to show it even in their own history.

The other major problem is that Peter is not the only prominent leader here in Acts:

- **Obviously Paul the Apostle could be considered the greatest leader, especially in the Gentile world.**
- **James is looked to as the leader of the Church in Jerusalem**
- **And there comes a time where Peter is even criticized by Paul.**

So, we will see that Peter's ministry to these Saints is a good example and that he converts the first Gentiles, but we will avoid the errors of Rome! And the conversion of the Gentiles is the second important thing that Luke is leading up to:

- These accounts of Peter's work show his movement from Lydda to Joppa where he is prepared to go to the Gentiles in Caesarea.

Luke is not just throwing together bits and pieces of the story, he is telling the orderly account of how the Kingdom of Jesus moves forward to fill the earth! With that understanding of the big picture I want us to consider two important teachings from our text this morning about miracles and ministry in the Church. We see here two more examples of miracles in the early church, confirming the ministry of Peter and spreading the message of the Good News far and wide.

- Jesus promised the Disciples that they would do the very works that Jesus had done and more!

There is a narrow and broader way of looking at how that was fulfilled and I think both are correct: When we consider the accounts given about Peter and Paul as examples of the work being done in those early days you can clearly argue that they performed more miracles than Jesus did in His three years of ministry as a single man.

- Those who want to argue for a cessation of miracles would argue in this way.

However, we see from this account and the others that it is the Holy Spirit who ultimately directs these miracles and there is no place in the Bible that says He cannot continue to do so today.

The second way to look at the promise of Jesus is to see the work of His Kingdom as a whole down through two thousand years of history.

Jesus and the Apostles healed the sick and even raised the dead... As the Kingdom has advanced through history it has changed and advanced many things.

-- With political liberty have come governments that are much less oppressive and as the Kingdom advances we will see less and less of war and destruction.

-- Advances in sanitation and caring communities prevent untold thousands of cases of disease

-- The Christian faith has given us modern science and medicine which can heal the sick and even raise the dead in a manner of speaking.

Today we treat many common ailments that would have killed in the past, giving them an extension of their lives much as Tabitha received from Peter. In just our family my wife lost a sister who was just a few months old and a father at 51 to heart disease:

- They both had conditions that today could have been treated giving them greatly extended lives!

The error to avoid here is very similar to what the Roman Catholics do with Peter:

- Making miracles more than the Bible intends them to be!
- Turning them into a show if you will and sadly we see much of that today to our shame.

As we noted last week, it is easy to build a crowd, but tough to build a church.

If all of our great Christian scientists and doctors or nurses had simply sat around waiting for "miracles" there would be hundreds of thousands if not millions more suffering today from sickness and ailments that we now commonly treat. No doctor on his own can raise the dead the way that Jesus did Lazarus, or Peter does here for Tabitha...

But we now have the ability to give people extended lives which brings the same result:

- **Both Tabitha and Lazarus went on to die at their appointed time.**

Unless specifically called to do so by the Holy Spirit, no doctor today can say to a paralyzed man, rise up and walk the way Jesus did to the man brought to Him by four friends or Peter did for Aeneus. However, today we can give them mobility in ways that could not be imagined a few years ago, and in another generation we may be able to restore nerve damage. Think about the returning soldiers who have lost limbs in the war and yet are able to run on their amazing new artificial limbs?

- **As we have seen both miracles in our text were similar to those performed by Jesus:**

The Spirit uses them to confirm the authority of the Apostles and to advance the Kingdom. The text makes it clear that they are under God's control:

- **Peter says to the man on his bed, Jesus the Christ heals you.**
- **With Tabitha Peter clears the room and turns to the Lord in prayer seeking guidance for what should be done and then turns and speaks to Tabitha!**

Miracles like we see in the text are dramatic, but God calls us to faithful obedience as His Kingdom advances and that brings me to the second lesson from our text: The importance of faithful service!

We know little of the man Aeneus, who Peter heals in Lydda, not even if he was a believer. This account fleshes out the blessings that are mentioned by Luke regarding the Churches in Judea and brings Peter one step closer to Caesarea.

The Saints in Joppa know that Peter is near and so when a dear Saint passes away unexpectedly, they ask him to come to their city. In looking at the text, there is no request that he come to raise her from the dead and even Peter prays about what to do when he arrives. It appears that they have called on Peter to come and join with them in the burial and lamentation over their beloved Tabitha, much like the Saints of Jerusalem did for Stephen. And just as Jesus did for the widow at Nain, God gives them a gift beyond their wildest imagination:

- **He bring Tabitha back to life to give her more time to serve in the Kingdom!**

So we have lessons on ministry from both Peter and Tabitha.

Peter is willing to come and help these Saints in their time of need. I think Peter is overwhelmed by the love felt for Tabitha by those thankful widows and thus he puts everyone else out of the room and turns to the Lord in prayer... A good servant is a praying servant!

- **If you are not a praying servant then you are very likely a wandering servant**
- **We should also notice that Peter was on his knees in prayer!**

Posture is important and brothers and sisters there should be times where we are all on our knees...

- **Not as a matter of show for others, but to remind us our humble standing before our mighty God and to remind us of our need for His guidance.**

Peter is humble before God and God grants him an incredible miracle... Peter turns to Tabitha and tells her to arise and she opens her eyes. It should bring to our remembrance the time that Moses was told to speak to the rock so it would bring forth water or Ezekiel being told to speak to those dead bones!

- **Peter then takes her by the hand and presents her to the astonished Saints there at Joppa.**
- **There faithful friend has returned and what a faithful friend she had been!**

Luke gave us no details about Aeneus & he could also have talked only of the miracle that brought Peter to Joppa where he needed to be...

- But instead Luke gives us many details about Tabitha.

He calls her a Saint and gives us both her Aramaic and Greek names along with many details about the works of mercy that she carried out.

- The account of Tabitha should remind us about the importance of these faithful works and the priority we should make of them.
- Thus, I want to focus on the ladies in our application this morning

Today we have women who are corporate executives and astronauts and the world tells our daughters that these are the role models they should follow to be really successful. The Bible points to Tabitha and other women like her as the successes we should strive to emulate and the examples we should follow. Consider those familiar words that we often read together from Proverbs chapter thirty-one:

- This is not the world's standard for true womanhood, but it is God's standard for a faithful Saint like Tabitha:

Proverbs 31:10 "Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies."

- Her virtue and character are MUCH more important than the size of her salary!

11 "The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good and not evil All the days of her life."

- Trust and safety are things the world searches for in all the wrong places...
- The heart of a husband who has a faithful wife can truly be at peace and such a wife can be truly fulfilled

13 "She seeks wool and flax, And willingly works with her hands. 14 She is like the merchant ships, She brings her food from afar. 15 She also rises while it is yet night, And provides food for her household, And a portion for her maidservants."

- The Godly woman is one who seeks to serve for the benefit of others and not for her own glory and certainly not because of what is in it for her!

The world derides the Godly woman as one who is oppressed, kept down by those she serves, uneducated: "Bare foot & pregnant" if you will.

The picture here in God's Word is much different:

16 "She considers a field and buys it; From her profits she plants a vineyard. 17 She girds herself with strength, And strengthens her arms. 18 She perceives that her merchandise is good, And her lamp does not go out by night."

- AND as we saw from the testimonies about Tabitha, she is always looking out for those in need:

19 "She stretches out her hands to the distaff, And her hand holds the spindle. 20 She extends her hand to the poor, Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy."

- Even in her death, the widows whom Tabitha served brought the garments she had made to show Peter!

- **And the Godly woman never forgets her priorities even in the midst of serving those in need...**

21 “She is not afraid of snow for her household, For all her household is clothed with scarlet. 22 She makes tapestry for herself; Her clothing is fine linen and purple.”

- **So much for those who accuse the Godly woman of being dowdy!**
- **And in contrast to all the propaganda of the world, the Bible teaches us how the Godly woman is truly influential in the world’s affairs...**

23 “Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land.” [explain gates]

- **And then, just in case we forget the point about service being central, we read again**

24 “She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies sashes for the merchants. 25 Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come. 26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness.”

- **No hint here of stressing out because there is too much to do:**
- **Just a picture of a strong woman who does not forget her priorities...**

27 “She watches over the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness.”

- **And as an admonition for you children and husbands, there is supposed to be a RESPONSE to all this faithful service:**

28 “Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her: 29 “Many daughters have done well, But you excel them all.” 30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands, And let her own works praise her in the gates.”

- **This Godly woman does not serve well in order to be praised!**

However, if she serves well there will be much fruit that is deserving of rightful praise...

- **And SHAME on us if we do not properly respond to such service with the kind of praise we saw from those widows at Joppa...**
- **And, kids, please don’t wait until Mom is dead to say thanks!**

So we leave Peter in Joppa from whence he will be called to Caesarea to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. Joppa is the town from which Jonah attempted to flee from God when He told him to preach to the Gentiles at Nineveh.

- **I trust you will agree that this is no mere coincidence.**
- **Jonah’s call was to be a picture of what the Kingdom of Jesus would do centuries later**

Jonah knew that if the people of Nineveh repented then God would show mercy...

- **And in his Jewish pride he did not want to see such a thing.**

Now as God prepares to pour out His mercy and bring in the fullness of the Gentiles, it will fall to Peter to be the man willing to go where God calls Him and to do what God commands.

We have seen how God brings Peter to this place and next week we will see how God prepares Peter to bring the Good News to the Gentiles:

The Kingdom of Jesus advances!