

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 9:32.

The book of Acts is a thirty-year history of the early church. It is God's report to us of the establishment and the growth of His work. It begins with Jesus ascending into glory, the Holy Spirit being poured out upon the saints at Pentecost. And we've been asking ourselves two questions, which I think are the important ones to ask if you're going to read the book of the early church. One is - what kind of church should the Lord want us to be? What kind of church did He establish? What are their priorities, and what are their interests? And second of all - what kind of people did God use? And could we be those kinds of people that could be used by the Lord today? The example of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century church is very important because it was that starting work. It was the purest in form, if you will, from that regard.

From the three thousand people that got saved on that first day, to the five thousand men plus women and children that we run into in chapter 4:4, to this ongoing work of God's Spirit through the lives of the saints, there was continual fruit being gathered by the early church. And it continued to be gathered, even in the face of growing opposition and intimidation and persecution. There were false arrests, there were threats, there were beatings. There was a lot of internal strife, even, and deception, and yet the early church in Jerusalem thrived. It got to where the multiplication (rather than the addition) caused the church to have to, early on, make some organizational decisions (Acts 6). Seven Hellenist men were chosen to attend to the Hellenist widows' interests; they were not being taken care of (as widows) the way that the Hellenists thought. The Hellenists were Jews growing up in Greek cultures; they came with different practices with them.

As a result of those seven men being made deacons, it really was the first organizational step in the early church. We are introduced to two of them in a detailed fashion. We get to meet Stephen in chapters 6 and 7; faithful guy who, doing the work that God gives him, continued to do so in other ways. He began to preach, he began to argue for the gospel, he began to confront Hellenist men that had come to the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) in Jerusalem. He

found himself there, really, winning souls, if you will, but also angering others. Eventually he was arrested and charged with ludicrous things, but he defended himself. In chapter 7, he preached the gospel, he took them through their history, and these men killed him. Standing, watching and approving of their actions was a young man named Saul. He held the coats of those who had thrown the rocks. He consented, as we read, to his death. And it turned this fellow Saul into a raging, angry man that would begin to persecute the church, and he's mentioned at the end of chapter 7 and just the first part of chapter 8. And then the Lord turns our attention to Philip, another of the seven deacons, if you will. And when the church began to run for its life (the Diaspora) because of the persecution, only the apostles stayed in town; but everyone else went running for their lives. And Philip was a fellow that had gone north into Samaria to preach the gospel (it is recorded in chapter 8). The gospel began to save, as it always does. There was a sorcerer named Simon that ran the city, and he had for years. But God began to break his power. We talked about the Samaritans' background and how that a fellow like Philip, a Hellenist, would be more patient and tolerant with the half-Jews, half-everything else admixture, false doctrine as they were taught. The apostles, hearing about the revival, sent Peter and John from Jerusalem north to the Samaria area. They came, and they prayed for the people that were saved to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. They eventually would go back to Jerusalem preaching along the way - as they'd learned from Philip that God's Word would save.

Meanwhile, Philip is taken away from the revival in Samaria, and the Lord speaks to his heart to go down to the middle of nowhere in the desert near Gaza. God had a plan for him. Philip (we talked about how do you hear God's voice?) followed God's direction. When he arrived there, the Lord had him join himself to a chariot of a high-ranking official who was going home, if you will, who was a eunuch, but he had come from Ethiopia. He had come for the Feast Days. He had been disappointed with what he felt. He was wanting to meet the God of Israel there; hadn't. But he wasn't giving up on the Bible or God's Word, and so he sat, and he began to read it, and Philip was directed by the Lord. He leads the guy to Jesus. He baptizes him along the way. The fellow couldn't be happier, and he kind of just disappears from the scene. Philip also does. In fact, Philip won't show up until later on - chapter 21 we'll find him living in Caesarea with his family and especially four daughters who are prophets as he was.

In chapter 9 (I don't know how long we'll be able to do this little review every week) comes the dramatic account of the rescue and salvation of Saul. He had

been creating havoc in the church. He was murdering and threatening, and he was certainly the champion for the hard-liners. But in the midst of going to Damascus, ninety miles away, to arrest more Christians, Saul met the Lord. Jesus called a meeting right along the roadway, and Saul loses his religion, and he is taken by hand into the house of someone that lived in Damascus. He sits for three days in blindness, unable to see; but seeing, maybe, for the first time in his life. He didn't eat, he doesn't drink. He's just kind of reviewing his life and the voice that he heard.

And then last time, in verses 17-31, we followed the Scriptures to learn of the preparation that God would take Saul through. We did look at that fellow Ananias, who the Lord sent to pray for Saul, and how hesitant he was because he knew of his reputation. But last week we wanted to point out to you, more than anything else, how long it took for Saul to become Paul in the sense of he is ready to become a preacher. He spent a little time in Damascus. He spent three years in the Arabian wilderness, according to Galatians 1:17-18. He returned to Damascus to preach. He still thought he could reach the Jews, though God had said he was primarily going to reach the Gentiles. It didn't take long for a murder plot to be hatched against him. They let him down through the wall in a basket. Got to Jerusalem, where he only spent fifteen days (according to Galatians 1:18); only met with Peter and James before he caused trouble there. And the disciples, lovingly, the church, said, "Just go home." They took him down to Caesarea, they put him on a boat, and they said, "Go home to Tarsus," and Saul would go home. And he would be gone from the Scriptures and from the scene for the next seven to about ten years. In fact, we won't see Saul again until chapter 11, where we'll have a little insert about how Barnabas, in Antioch, sees revival; knows he needs a teacher, remembers Saul, and goes to get him and brings him back, and his ministry begins there. So three years in Arabia, seven or ten more in obscurity in Tarsus. If you ever read through the book of Acts, and you say, "Gosh, he gets saved, and look what God does with this man, how quickly He works," it's easy to miss the fact that there were years of paying your debts, of learning God's Word. He didn't come up with the book of Romans right away. He wasn't able to write the doctrinal statements that you find there as a young man. But he had come to know the Lord.

All of the verses between what we're going to look at tonight, all the way through chapter 12 (with a couple of asides to tell us that Saul was taken by Barnabas to Antioch) is really the story of Peter. And Peter will end in the middle of chapter 12, getting busted out of prison and then running away. He kind of disappears from

the scene. We have some idea from history where he might have gone, but not biblically so. And then, until we get his letters later on, the rest of the book is going to be filled with the ministry of Paul and various others as the church begins to really take root, if you will, in the world. So I know it's a big book, but it outlines pretty easily, and I think if you can get the flow of it in your mind, it becomes a little easier to follow.

We ended last week with verses 30 and 31 where it reads, "When the brethren found out, they brought him" (Saul) "down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus. 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." So, with Saul gone, for a time Saul seemed to be the greatest threat to the church, and then when he joined the church, he was the greatest problem to them as well. So, for a while, there was a great time of peace and blessing. Notice that the fruit (at the end of verse 31) was still being multiplied, and the church was going strong. But at least for a time, there wasn't the kind of pressure that they had faced. The saints, like I said, had run in every direction when Stephen was killed. They took their faith with them. They began to share in whatever places they stopped. And so, early on in the book of Acts, you find a lot of these pockets of believers kind of scattered around the area. And Peter now feels led of the Lord to begin to visit some of these towns and hamlets and small gatherings, if you will, to encourage them in the Lord. The apostles won't stay for long in Jerusalem. They also are going to have to be moving on eventually. And so these saints who had been driven away now leave their mark in these various cities, and I guess it's a natural thing that if you get saved, you would want to share your faith with people. I think the first thing I remember as a Christian was wanting to sit my mom and dad down and tell them how to go to heaven. They didn't listen, but I tried. And I think that was the first thing in my mind. Let's make sure that everyone knows what Jesus can do. And so you see this happening here. There's a fruit, there's a sharing, there's a moving forward.

Evangelism classes can be helpful to you if you are uncomfortable sharing your faith. There are certainly ways to start up conversations with people that you can learn or things that maybe you would share that would be more effective. But I'll tell you what - evangelism classes can never teach you the hunger of sharing your faith. That God has to do. And you certainly see that. Pastor Chuck used to say, "Healthy sheep will beget healthy sheep." His belief was if you could just have Christians be healthy in the Lord and their understanding of the Bible, they will

naturally reproduce. And I think that's biblically correct. So, you teach the Word, and you disciple them in the ways of the Lord, and that's the most paramount, if you will, or the most fruitful.

I don't know how many invitations the apostles must have gotten in Jerusalem to come and speak at these little places that were being gathered as the multiplication continued. Peter ends up in our story tonight (from verse 32 to the end of the chapter) heading towards a place called Lydda and Joppa. They are both along the Mediterranean coast. They are literally the same area that those who accompanied Saul to Caesarea to get on a boat would have traveled to go. And maybe he went with them, and so then he saw, "Gosh, I've got to come back to these places and visit." These saints might very well have been the fruit of Philip's ministry because he traveled this same route earlier, as well, when he met that Ethiopian eunuch. So Peter has this desire in his heart to go and say, "Lord, use me. See what You can do with my life." He wanted to go and be a comfort and an encouragement to the church that continued to grow as they feared the Lord, and the Holy Spirit was at work.

Verse 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. There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.' Then he arose immediately. So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord." Notice verse 32, "Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country." Who does God use? Well, from Peter's example and the report that God gives us of Peter's ministry, God uses people that are on the go, that are willing to go. We had our pastors' meeting today, and we were talking about some of the groups that had gone out to do flyers at the college and in the neighborhoods and stuff, and some of the coolest reports that we got back from people who came out to meet them, they talked.....people are oftentimes afraid to go because, "Gosh, I hope I don't have to say anything," were nervous about that. But I'll tell you what - unless you go, you'll never have a report. Unless you're willing to step up and go, you'll never be able to say, "Oh, and then the Lord brought this guy, and he got saved." We had a bunch of our guys go out to Fullerton downtown, which has a lot of restaurants; but it has a lot of bars, too - it's near the college. And so we went in all the bars and said, "Hey, can we put up flyers for the Easter service?" And I said, "How were you received?" and the guy goes, "Oh, they loved us." He said, "Of course it was St. Patrick's weekend" (Laughing) "so

they were all pretty happy to see anybody." But it was good, man. The Lord opened so many doors. And unless you go, how will you know? Unless you're willing to step out and to go. If you're available, God will use you. And certainly one of the lessons of the life of Peter (that kind of fills these couple of chapters) is that if you're available, He'll use you. But if you don't have time, if you won't make time, if you won't go, then you're probably not going to have much of a testimony nor much to share when people say, "Well, what has the Lord been doing with your life?" and you really have nothing to say. You can make all the difference in the world by just being available. Right? You can't see God answer prayer if you don't pray. You'll never see someone come to the Lord if you're not sharing your faith. You're never going to see someone healed if you won't stop and pray for them or follow up to see how they're doing. We had a brother here in the church that was diagnosed with brain cancer, and they basically just said, "You probably should just get your house in order. There's nothing we can do." And we went and visited with him in the hospital and prayed with him for a couple of days. And he decided to get another opinion, and they sent him to another doctor, and the doctor - about a week later - said, "You know, the tumors are really shrinking." And now he's being given a much better prognosis. But you'll never know what God is going to do if you don't go. So, learn from Peter. And I suspect that you read through this, and it almost sounds like a report. And I think that's what it is. But it is a report from the Lord to us as to what He was willing to do through the lives of these men that we've come to know and love. And Peter's got a pretty good bunch of pages in here. We watch him. God used him to reach the Jews. He's going to take the gospel, officially, to the Gentiles. He's going to do a lot of good things. But this trip - at least these verses - we find him just being available. So, as Saul disappears from the scene for many years, Peter comes to the forefront, and he's one of those available, ready guys who is ready for God to use his life. He puts himself in the position where he's going to need God's help. People sometimes say, "I wish I could see more miracles." Well, then get out there, and call upon the name of the Lord. Because you'll never know until you go.

Well, his first stop here on his little tour was in a place called Lydda. This fellow, Aeneas, was a man who was paralyzed. He'd been bedridden, as a result, for the last eight years. That's a long time to be sick, a long time to lay in bed; no hope in sight. The doctors had apparently given up on him. The suffering was relentless, the sense of uselessness or feeling like you were a burden. Maybe he was asking, "Why me?" Now we have no indication, at least in our Scriptural report, that Aeneas was a believer. We can assume that he was, or we can assume that he

wasn't. But we don't know. What we do know is that Peter's next encounter down in Lydda will be because the saints are calling for him to come pray for a woman that was definitely a part of the church. So we don't know where this guy came from, but we do know this - God loved this man, He was interested in him. He was near the saints. The people were certainly reaching out to him. And Peter, like Philip earlier, was being led by the Lord to come here and wanted to hear and to see what God would want to do. I love reading these little short stories in the book of Acts because it convinces me that God can use my life, especially when I read about Peter. I read about guys like Daniel and Joseph, and I absolutely don't relate to them at all. I see those guys as the head of the class, sitting in another building. In heaven, I'm gonna watch everything on videotape. I'm gonna be closed circuit. But those are guys that are in the room, you know?

But Peter's gonna be sittin' right next to me. He's as boneheaded as I've ever been. Right? He's weak, he's stumbling. There are more recorded foul-ups in his life - in print in the New Testament - than anyone else. And yet here he is filling the pages of the early church, going, "God used him tremendously." I go, "Oh, good, I can be a part." And I'm more confident in you now because of this same picture. God doesn't just use perfect saints or holy saints or super saints. And I think if you have that concept, let Peter dispel that false idea once and for all. God used Peter. God will use you. I think about my life. I got straight A's in school, got a full scholarship to college, but I was absolutely the class clown. I don't think ten days passed without me getting loaded in four years in school. I was a loud mouth, got in a lot of trouble, got in a lot of fights. You wouldn't have liked me. You might not like me now, but you really wouldn't like me then. (Laughing) And I would be one of those "act now, think later" kinds of people, and yet God can use me because He used Peter. And I read some of those guys: an unwilling Jonah and yet God used him, a willing Ezra, a prayerful Nehemiah, and a donkey. God has a way of using people like Peter and you and me. I think about Peter just because the Lord gives us this little brief insight into his ministries, and I think about here's a guy that within just months earlier had shot his mouth off saying that he was holier than everybody that was around him. All of his friends. He bragged to Jesus, and yet he falls asleep in the Garden when Jesus is suffering. He fights a guy with a sword when the Lord has to fix the guy's ear - the last miracle has to be to fix Peter's stupidity. He denies the Lord three times in one evening. He argues with Jesus when He spoke about His death and rebuked Him for even thinking about it, and told Him he was in league with the devil. He boasted to Jesus he wouldn't run off or be afraid or not be willing to stand for Him, and he did all of the above. And

yet here God, by the Holy Spirit, fills this vessel - holes and all - and sends him out. So, what do I take away from that? That God is going to be able to use you and me, though we are not perfect for the job. We're able to be used if we're willing to let God use us.

So, Peter shows up in Lydda, and he meets this fellow, Aeneas, and he says, "Jesus the Christ makes you whole. Get up and make your own bed for a change." And I love the fact God is working. It says that he just immediately got up, and he did just that. And (verse 35) news travels fast in the valley, and many came in to see Aeneas, and they were saved and were given the purpose for the miracle. It wasn't just an end in itself. It wasn't just, "Let's let this poor man, who has been down for eight years, be able to walk. Let's do far more than that. Let's, through his life, reach the whole town." If it had just simply been an end in itself, you would expect Peter to pray and then the Lord to heal, and then he would just move on. Yet this miracle did something more. Like all miracles in the book, they verify God's Word as people are sharing it, and, as a result, people come and they believe. So it was the power of God to heal that matched the Words of God to save. And many folks came. I love the miracles of God in the Bible or in our lives. You got saved. That's a miracle, don't you think? I know everyone that knows you thinks it's a miracle. (Laughing) And if you're married, your spouse knows it's a miracle. He changes us so that others can see that we are changed. And notice (from verse 35) the result in this town, and the towns around, was that people came to meet him, saw him walking, and, as a result, they turned to Jesus.

Verse 36 says, "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." Lydda is on the coast. But if you go ten miles or so north and a little bit to the west, you'll come to the port city of Joppa. Joppa was famous. Right? It had been famous since the days of Jonah. And here's another little group of believers that had spring up as God's Word has gone forth. It's a beautiful coastal city. If you go with us to Israel, we usually land at Ben Gurion in the mid-afternoon, get a bus, get through customs, do all that stuff. And then, on our way to the hotel - whether we're staying in Tel Aviv or in Netanya (I think, this time) - we usually stop in Joppa because it's a beautiful place to see all of Tel Aviv. It's a historical place. It's a very artsy kind of town today, lots of painters and all. But it is a beautiful place, and you can walk there from Tel Aviv if you like. So it is there that Peter stops in Joppa. And when they had called Peter, this woman was sick. So her name was Tabitha - it's Aramaic; Dorcas is Greek. Both of the words

mean gazelle. Apparently that was an endearing term. "That's my little gazelle." Well, we use the word "dear." They were just spelling it wrong. Dear. And notice that the Holy Spirit specifically points out, first of all, that she was a believer; second of all that her zeal for the Lord was very practical - she did a lot of good works, she did a lot of charitable deeds, she didn't lack in doing good in giving and serving to others. So in the church, here in Joppa, was a woman who was appreciated by everyone, had a giving, kind of a serving heart, and people knew her. She wasn't self-serving, she wasn't a problem in the fellowship, she was there to be a blessing to others. So at Joppa, there was this disciple named Tabitha. Now remember, Peter is ten miles away - south and east - to Lydda.

Verse 37 says, "But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 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. 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." The question becomes (in verse 37) why was Peter called? Was he called to a funeral? And I suspect the answer would be no. If he was called to a funeral, then when they say at the end of verse 38, "Tell him to hurry" makes no sense. If she was dead, she wasn't going anywhere, and they certainly could have made plans around that time. It appears to me that they called for Peter when she was sick. They may very well have heard of the healing of Aeneas there in a town just to the south. Maybe they hoped that Peter might come and minister to Dorcas as well. "She was a beloved sister. We loved her." Peter was a well-known fellow, and God had used him. But verse 38 does say that they said to him, "Make no delay in coming." There was an urgency that was stressed, that there was a need.

So verse 39 says that "Peter went with them." And the way that the present tense is written, it would suggest that he went right away. It wasn't like, "Well, can we go tomorrow or how 'bout after the weekend?" The suggestion, at least in the terminology and in the use of the terms, would say that he took it to heart. I would ask you again - who does God use? I would say - God uses people that are willing to go at a moment's notice. I thought about that. What if Peter would have said, "Well, call the office" or, "I'm off today" or, "Make an appointment" or, "Hey, I'm one of only a few apostles, and we're pretty busy"? "It's been a long day, and it's ten miles away. No Uber donkey to get." It is tragic when you are too busy to

minister to individual needs. If you are so busy that you'll run right by somebody in tears in church because you're going to breakfast, that's sad. Or you are so caught up in whatever your time constraints are or your schedule issues or your personal plans. Peter made the time. Want God to use you? Be available. That's all. Maybe that'll take ten minutes of your time or an evening of your time. Go! Be available. I'll guarantee you the television evangelist will not show up to go to the hospital with you to visit with your friend. So Jesus always had time for the individual. In fact, it seems to me reading through the gospels, that many of His most memorable teachings came through these personal encounters. Right? Nicodemus in John 3, the woman at the well in John 4, and you can go on and on. So, when Jesus said in John 13:16, "A servant is not greater than his master; or is he who is sent greater than he who sent him," I think it bears writing down for your own well-being that if you ever feel you are greater than the needs around you, it is time to stop and re-evaluate. Because God uses those who are willing to be involved. And God will work. He'll work without you, but He'll look to use you first. So, word comes to Peter, there in Lydda. "Can you come down to the church here in Joppa? We have a girl that is really sick, and we love her, and she's such a blessing to all of us. And come right away." And it does seem like the implication is she wasn't dead, she was just very ill, and they hoped that maybe Peter could come and pray, and God would use Peter to bring life back to her or healing. So, Peter went with them. And yet when he got there (in verse 39) it was almost just too late. Right? Dorcas had died. They took him up where they had laid her. There were widows from town standing around in tears, showing some of the handiwork that she had created, that she had made; sharing with Peter, through their grief, her goodness. But they just were broken hearted. It's almost like you're too late.

Verse 40 says, "But Peter put them all out." Maybe it was the weeping and despair. But I would think, just reading the story the way that God sets it before us, that Peter (even as we read down through the rest of the verse) really didn't know what to do. Because the rest of the verse says Peter "knelt down and prayed." It almost appears like he is called, he's out serving the Lord, he's available, the emergency call comes, he runs as quickly as he can to the need. He shows up. The poor woman has died. He's too late, everyone's in tears, and they're all looking to him, and he wants all the noise away, but he gets on his knees in the middle of this room where this dead body lies, and he says, "What'll I do now? What am I doing here? Why did You bring me here? What should I be doing?" I think he was just - like we would be - at a place where he didn't know what to do. There was a hopelessness, and there was a difficulty. But here's Peter, and he's a different

guy. He's humble. He takes that humble position on - kneeling down before the Lord. And I think he's just saying, "Lord, I don't know what to do, if anything. Why am I here? Why did she die?" Who does God use? God will use those who are willing to be available when outward hope looks like it's gone. I mean, he's not cashing his chips in. He's not going, "Well, I gotta get back before dark. Sorry about that." He just seeks the Lord. We don't know how long he prayed. We do know he isolated himself from everyone else. And when he does turn to this body (in verse 40) and say to her, "Tabitha, arise," she opens up her eyes, and "when she saw Peter she sat up." I don't know how long he prayed. It certainly, though, makes putting everyone outside more reasonable if he was thinking, "Maybe I should pray that the Lord raise her up. But what if I'm wrong? That would look pretty silly. So I'll just pray for that while no one's looking, and no one will know if I'm wrong or right. So, I don't want to get their hopes up." He clears the room. He doesn't know if he's misread or misheard God on this one. Pretty typical stuff. Kind of stuff we would do, you know? "Lord, what do I do?" And so he turns to her, and he actually follows, as we'll see in a minute, Jesus' example. But he says to her, "Tabitha, arise." I can't tell you how it went, but I imagine he whispered, "Tabitha, arise" (Pastor Jack whispers) and then looked to see if it was working. Right? Imagine the joy and the flood of emotion in Peter as he watched her eyelids begin to move and then open, and finally she sat up. "Man, I've never seen this before. Lord, this is awesome! I'm sure glad I came."

Verse 41 says, "Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive." I don't know who looked more surprised - the widows or Peter. I'm sure the widows were surprised. I'm sure Peter was just freakin' out.

Verse 42 says, "And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner." Well, yeah, I think everybody would want to keep him in town. Now, we do find this selective work of these miracles on God's behalf through the Spirit set forth. They are almost always tied to the preaching of God's Word or to the verification of the truth. They are not isolated instances where only someone gets healed, and that's the end of it. It is always tied to the greater work. Because someone that is sick and gets well is going to get sick again and die. But God's interested in eternity. So, you will always find those to be the case, and there's no way to put a harness on that and say everyone got healed. They didn't. Or someone was more faithful than someone else, and that's why they got healed. They weren't. I think

that verse 40 would tell you Peter was willing, but Peter could not have sworn to you this was going to work; that he was as much perplexed as you and I would be, and yet God used Peter in this case. And the city was rocked by this miracle, and people came to Jesus in droves, and a glorious work of God is done through the likes of Peter. I want to see that in your life and mine. Not raising the dead. I don't know if the Lord would do that or not. But we've seen some pretty awesome things in our ministry life over the years, and God is more than willing to do greater things. Right?

So, I wanted to, though, have you think through these couple of miracles because there's one thing, I think, that we can learn that maybe you'll miss, and I think it's important. And that is Peter sought to know what Jesus wanted to do, and as he sought the will of God for direction and leadership, he emulated what he had seen in the life of Jesus the three and a half years that he spent time with Him. Because both of these examples - the very tone, the action, the behavior, and the approach - mirrored what he saw in Jesus' public ministry. Peter followed Jesus' example.

In his ministry to Aeneas, we find similarities in the ministry of Jesus at that house there in Capernaum. You remember that they let down that fellow through the roof (Luke 5). It was a packed place. But they wanted to get Jesus' attention. This man was in a bed. He couldn't walk, and Jesus said to him, "You take up your bed and walk." And you find those same words echoed by Peter. He doesn't just say, "Rise and walk." He talks to him specifically. "Pick up your bed. Make it. Let's go. This is now your responsibility again." You find the same comparison made at the Pools of Bethesda when Jesus (in John 5) went to a fellow - hunted down a guy in the midst of a bunch of sick people with great hopefulness that somehow this great stirring of the waters would heal them - and Jesus ministered to one guy who'd been there forever, it seemed. And He said, "Take up your bed and walk," and immediately the man got up and walked. And Peter uses the exact same words of Jesus, adding only that it would have to be Jesus that would heal him. The only difference was Jesus said, "You walk," and Peter goes, "Yeah, you can walk if it's Jesus doin' the work." He realized he wasn't Jesus. He was just representing Him. And so he said to him, "May Jesus the Christ enable you to walk or heal." But everything was exactly the same. And even the response was immediate; it wasn't like, "Well, he's sorta healed, we gotta wait." No. He was healed. Either the Lord heals you or He doesn't.

In Peter's ministry to Tabitha, we can compare Jesus' ministry there at Jairus' house (Luke 8), the ruler, who had come to Him asking Him to come to his house for his daughter, remember, was gravely ill. And even while he was returning with Him, someone came from his house and said, "Don't bother the Teacher anymore. She died." And you remember the interruption was the woman with the issue of blood that snuck up, and, "If I just touch the hem of His garment," and then bailed out. And Jesus wasn't going to let her get away with that, and He stopped her and made her confess what she was doing. And all of that was delay, and the poor ruler with his daughter is not going to make it, and then someone comes and says, "It's too late. It's too late. Don't bother the Teacher." Jesus, when He heard that, turned to Jairus and said, "Don't be afraid. Just believe in Me. She is going to be just fine. She's going to be well." Amazing story. In any event, Jesus encourages his faith, and once they get to the house, they put out the weepers. And Jesus turns to this body, and Peter is there with Him (he's one of the three that are taken in to watch), and He says to her, "Talitha, cumi." It literally translates "my little lamb, get up." Peter uses the word, "Tabitha, cumi," "little beautiful one, get up." It literally is just a reflection of what he had learned. He emulated Jesus. He wasn't trying to be Jesus, but he used the examples that had been set before him, and he does what Jesus did. He put out others, he waited upon the Lord. In both cases, Peter was led by the Holy Spirit. He knew he couldn't defeat the enemy, couldn't overcome disease or death, realized it wasn't his power. He was old enough in the Lord now to realize he wasn't going out there braggin' on his own. And yet, in each place, this humble man, though he is far from perfect, is available, and he's still learning. But God can use us - like Peter - if we submit to Him, and we're willing to seek His will and to put ourselves in that kind of position. I think the greatest thing is if you know what God wants, then go do it. You find someone sick, lay hands on them, man, pray. Get in there. Get to work. Let's see what God will do. Pretty exciting! But not very exciting if you're just sittin' and, "Can someone give us a testimony? I'd like to be encouraged." (Pastor Jack says this in a whining tone) And you've got nothin'. You've got nothin'.

Well, it seems to me verse 43 should explain itself. Right? Peter stays in town because everyone wants him there. I'm sure he was high on the list of demand. But at the same time, he is following the Lord, and it's not the Peter show; it's the Jesus show. He's the One who's being glorified. But we are told one other thing that is an important distinction, and it is important because of chapter 10 (which will find Peter at Cornelius' house, preaching to a whole room full of Gentiles, a place that no respecting Jew would find himself - dead or alive). What we are told

in verse 43 is that Peter spends whatever time he was in Joppa at a place called Simon's house (Simon who was a tanner). A tanner was a man who took dead animal carcasses and then took the skin or the wool or the coat and made things with it. So, he's now living in a place that a Jew wouldn't go. There's a dead body. It leaves you ceremonially unclean - any contact with the dead. And for a Jew, a tanner is despised. So Peter finds himself, it would appear, at the house of a Gentile - someone who's willing to open up their house, someone that is open to what he is doing. And Peter was being freed from (verse 43) the legalism of his past, and he was able to begin to see that God had great plans in mind. And by the time you get to chapter 10, he is ready - through a series of visions and direction - to go to Cornelius' house and feel pretty good about going. However, he's not perfectly comfortable with it. He's going to take six of his buddies with him to take notes so that when (in chapter 11) he gets called back to Jerusalem to answer for his behavior - in front of all the other apostles - he's able to say, "All right, here, I want to tell you exactly what happened," and he had six guys standing behind him going, "Yeah, that's exactly what happened." And Peter's argument will be, "How am I supposed to stop what God is doing? They got the Holy Spirit just like we did. I was just speaking, and man, he fell like He'd saved him, like He saved us." And he finally just had to go, "Oh, I don't know. It must just be God's will to save everybody." But this preparation for Peter, like for Paul, takes time. Right? It takes time for him to come to resolving those issues. Who does God use? What would Jesus want to do with you? When you face sickness, when you face suffering, when you face difficulty, what would you like God to do with you? Peter spent time with the Lord. He learned, he watched, he listened, he emulated, and he prayed. I mean, all the very things that you and I should be doing, Peter did. Paul prayed for the Ephesian saints when he wrote to them and said, "I'm praying that you will understand the exceeding greatness of His power that is available to you who believe according to the working of His might" (Ephesians 1:19). "I just want you to know how powerful God can be."

So, we read in chapter 1:1 of this book, "These are the things that Jesus began both to do and teach," and then how He continued to do those same things through the believers - through you and me. Peter, on his own, is a weak and vacillating, at best, guy. He's up one minute and down the next. He wears his emotions on his sleeve. His mouth engages far before reason kicks in. He's the accident-prone man in the Spirit. Yet God uses him gloriously because he was willing, he knew God, he was open-hearted, he was humble, and he was learning. And God would do great things through his life. I only mention that to you because, if you go through this

chapter, you run into Paul who you think, man, just jumped into power, and he takes years; and then you're introduced to Peter, who you know pretty well, who's used to do some glorious things, but he's another guy that's been learning and learning and learning and learning and has been on his face more often than not. He's moving, he's available, he's flexible, he's fruitful, he's prayerful. He's overcoming the legalism of being a Jew. He's overcoming the prejudice of being a Jew. He is not plagued like others around him - like James and the church in Jerusalem will fight this for years. They come around last. But Peter comes around early, and he begins to take hold of it.

I'm convinced, just reading this little story, that we live far beneath what God would like to do if we were available; that I don't think you and I have seen what God would do or that He would want to do if we would just be available. Ask God for some opportunities, and then take them. Don't dismiss yourself because, "I'm not good, I'm not smart, I haven't got what it takes." I don't know what's on your list of excuses, but just erase them all and just put, "Use me, Lord. Use me." And, as you're learning, as you're growing, let's see what God will do through your life and mine. I mean, it is an amazing thought that God would have a plan for your life, for your neighborhood, for your job, for your family, for you. It's the only reason this story is here. We have two little healings that kind of just pass in the night. We don't run into these people at all. Peter, in a chapter and a half, is going to be history to us. We're going to have to turn to church history and secular writings and early church authors to find out where he went at all. The Bible stops talking to us about Peter halfway through chapter 12, and it's done, he's gone. But yet here's Peter, as the church grows, just runnin' around being used to do some pretty amazing things. But the result is people are gettin' saved everywhere he turns, and God is using him mightily.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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