

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”

Vance Havner

Text

Acts 9:32-42

Topic

Peter gets stirred-up and embarks on a ministry tour during which two notable miracles occur

Title

Saint Peter's Miracle Ministry Tour

Acts 9:32 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.

Acts 9:33 There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed.

Acts 9:34 And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately.

Acts 9:35 So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

Acts 9:36 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.

Acts 9:37 But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid *her* in an upper room.

Acts 9:38 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.

Acts 9:39 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.

Acts 9:40 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.

Acts 9:41 Then he gave her *his* hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

Acts 9:42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

Introduction

Have you ever forgotten to shake or stir a beverage that requires shaking or stirring? *The first sip tells you something is wrong!*

The need for shaking and stirring was common in Bible times as well. When wine was left too long to ferment in the same barrel the sediment that settles to the bottom turned the wine sour. The barrels needed to be stirred-up and poured out from time to time to guarantee good aging.

The Holy Spirit used stirring as a spiritual metaphor. A few verses in the New Testament suggest that believers tend to 'settle' and need to be stirred-up to guarantee good aging.

The writer to the Hebrew Christians said,

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another in order to **stir up** love and good works,

Peter, who is prominent in our text, twice used the imagery:

2Peter 1:13 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to **stir you up** by reminding *you*,

2Peter 3:1 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in *both of* which I **stir up** your pure minds by way of reminder),

It's a stirred-up Peter who embarks on a ministry tour that takes him to Lydda and Joppa. We're going to see Peter exercise his gifts. In Lydda, it *adds* to the Church. In Joppa, it *edifies* the Church.

Your gifts may not be healings and miracles – but if you are stirred-up the exercise of your gifts can add to and edify the Church all the same.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Get Stirred-up & See How It Adds To Your Church, and #2 Get Stirred-up & See How It Edifies Your Church.

#1 Get Stirred-up & See How It
Adds To Your Church
(v32-35)

When we last saw Peter in the Book of Acts he had been sent from Jerusalem to see what was going on in Samaria. It seems he returned to Jerusalem because that is where Saul (the apostle Paul) visited him. Immediately after Saul's visit Peter set out on a ministry tour away from Jerusalem.

Could it be that hanging out with Saul had stirred something in Peter?
I don't see how you could hang with Saul and not get stirred-up!

When we fellowship with one another, whether it is official or unofficial, our desire should be to stir-up one another spiritually. We should come away from each encounter wanting to love and serve the Lord more, never less.

Peter headed out:

Acts 9:32 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.

All Christians are **saints**. You don't have to do anything special; something special was done to you when Jesus saved you and set you apart for Himself.

Lydda was a town that Phillip would have passed through after he left Jerusalem some years earlier. Whether he established the Church there, or other Jews who had been dispersed by persecution, we cannot be sure.

It must have greatly encouraged the saints in Lydda to receive a visit from Peter. Visiting the saints, especially in foreign countries, is itself a ministry of encouragement.

Acts 9:33 There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed.

Aeneas was probably not a believer. We say that because he was called **a certain man** rather than a disciple (as Dorcas will be called).

He might have been the friend or family of a believer. There was no medical hope for this guy.

Acts 9:34 And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately.

Peter evidently had the gift of healing. He and John had been used previously to heal the beggar at the gate of the Temple.

The gift of healing doesn't operate whenever you want it to. You can't just go around healing everyone.

Make your bed is a version of *take up your bed and walk*. The man heard and received the word and was enabled to do what he could not do.

That is what God's Word does! When you were yet dead in your trespasses and sins, you nonetheless heard the Word of God and received it and began to do what you could not do – walk with God. Then, as you continue in the Christian life, God speaks to you through His written Word. He tells you to do many things you cannot do but you are enabled to do them.

Acts 9:35 So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

God used the miracle of healing to add to the Church at Lydda. The miracle validated the message. Rather than debate whether or not God still heals today (He does!); or whether the Church is failing somehow because we don't see healings everyday; let's make a more practical application.

Sure, Peter's gift of healing was spectacular by our standards. **But it was still only a gift and he was still only a believer exercising his gift.**

Always remember that God the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to believers as He sees fit. If gifts of healing or miracles were necessary God would give them to us. If He hasn't, rather than complain or stress, we should trust His wisdom.

Rather than 'settle' in to an average Christian life because my gifts seem ordinary I am to stir-up whatever gift or gifts I have been given and use them in the Church. We are to exercise them. When we do, one of the things that happens is that God adds to the Church.

While Peter was healing Aeneas in Lydda a godly woman was dying only ten miles away in Joppa.

#2 Get Stirred-up & See How It Edifies Your Church (v36-42)

The woman we are about to meet on her death bed was definitely stirred-up. She was a daily blessing to her Church family.

Acts 9:36 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.

Both her Hebrew and Greek names mean *gazelle*. From the comments about her we would say she had the gift of helps, the gift of giving, and probably the gift of showing mercy. Luke, the author of Acts, emphasized that she was actively exercising her gifts in the fellowship when he described her **works** and **deeds** using the word **full**. Like a vessel overflowing, her works and deeds were pouring forth. - being changed to bring change -

I like the last three words of the verse: **which she did**. A lot of believers talk about what they would like to do or what they intend to do to serve the Lord. Dorcas **did** things! She didn't just talk about them or plan them or even pray about them. She did them.

Acts 9:37 But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid *her* in an upper room.

I'm so tired of the suffering that goes on in the world. I want the Lord to come before anyone else gets cancer, or dies in a car crash, or is otherwise left sorrowing and suffering. *Even so, Come Lord Jesus!*

Acts 9:38 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.

Maybe they sent for Peter while Dorcas was still alive thinking he could heal her. Maybe they sent for Peter after she was dead believing he could raise her from the dead. We don't know. Either way they saw Peter as a resource they could call upon. God was using him to heal.

Peter had made himself available. Rather than hang-out in Jerusalem and write his memoirs, he headed out on a ministry tour. Sometimes you just need to make yourself available to God and He will begin to use you.

Acts 9:39 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.

Dorcas had a tremendous impact on the Calvary Chapel in Joppa. She wasn't a pastor; she wasn't a deaconess; she wasn't a teacher. She was a seamstress but, coupled with her spiritual gifts of helps, giving, and showing mercy, she touched the lives of countless widows.

Your skills and your trade are not supernatural gifts. They were acquired and learned. You might be 'gifted' in an area from a human standpoint. But those things are not gifts of the Holy Spirit.

- being changed to bring change -

However, like Dorcas, when coupled *with* supernatural gifts, your skills and trade should be touching the lives of others for God – especially in the household of faith. It should be said of all of us, of every Christian, that we are **full of good works and charitable deeds** which we are doing.

The scene was set. Dorcas was dead. What was Peter going to do?

Acts 9:40 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.

Maybe Peter looked down and saw his *What Would Jesus Do?* bracelet! Commentators accurately point out that Peter's actions are very much like Jesus' actions when He raised Jairus' daughter from

the dead. Peter had witnessed that resurrection. He would have remembered Jesus putting everyone out, and saying to the little girl, **Talitha cumi** – *Damsel, arise!*

Peter prayed and evidently God told him He was going to resurrect Dorcas. He turned to her and said, Tabitha cumi – **Tabitha, arise!**
And she arose.

I always like to point out that, although raising the dead is fantastic, those who were raised returned to a mortal life to face suffering and death all over again. I'm not sure how thankful I'd be if I had to leave Heaven to return to earth.

We need to be careful that our prayers for others have their best interests in mind and not our own.

Acts 9:41 Then he gave her *his* hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

God had given Dorcas back to the Church and the **widows**. What do you think she did? *She went right on sewing for them.*

If she was full of serving before, she must have gone into overdrive now. Serving the Lord only increases the closer you get to Him.

Acts 9:42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

Evangelism was a by-product of the miracle. But it seems that Luke's emphasis in the story about Dorcas is more upon the Church being edified and encouraged.

Once again we might be put-off that we do not see the gift of miracles being exercised. We must remind ourselves that the distribution of the gifts is up to God. We do not earn them. It's not that God wants to grant us miracles but we are not quite holy enough to be entrusted with them.

We should be content with the gifts God has granted us. We should be exercising them. In the Church it isn't going to be productive to chase after certain gifts and let those God has already given settle.

When we exercise our gifts, believers are built up in their love and faith.

We might, just for fun, compare Peter and Dorcas. Who had the greater impact on the Church? **Your answer depends on whether you needed a healing or a house dress!** The apostle was more notable; the disciple was just as needed.

The Church in Joppa was doing just fine without Peter or the other apostles. But when Dorcas got sick and died, it sent shock waves through their midst as they realized her importance.

It's not that she was irreplaceable. It is to emphasize the importance of every single believer being stirred-up to exercise his or her gifts so that the Church can be built up.

Instead of wondering where all the healings and miracles are, and wanting to be like Peter, we ought to learn to be content with the gifts, talents, and abilities God has given us and take our cue from Dorcas.

In fact, we are like both Aeneas and Dorcas:

1. If you are not a Christian you are Aeneas before he was healed. You are unable to walk with God. But if you hear the Word and receive it you will be enabled to do what you cannot do!
2. If you are a Christian you can be more-and-more like Dorcas. You can throw yourself into serving the Lord by serving His people.

Christians always ask, How do I discover my gifts? It helps to know what gifts are available to you. There are lists of gifts in Romans chapter twelve; in First Corinthians chapter twelve; and in Ephesians chapter four.

More importantly and to the point, you discover your gifts by being available among God's people and responding to their needs.

It ultimately comes down to this: Am I full of good works and charitable deeds that I am already doing?

