

### **The Powerful Presence Of The Lord**

Luke's narrative in the first few chapters of the Acts of the Apostles has laid a foundation of doctrine and spiritual life of the early church. Up to chapter 9 it has also been peppered with the Apostle Peter. In chapter 9, Luke took a break from Peter and focused on Paul's conversion and the expansion of the church. Now at the end of the chapter he again returns to Peter. Paul does not reenter the Book of Acts narrative until chapter 13. In our passage today, we close out chapter 9 with Luke recording two miracles that seem to be, at least on the surface, randomly placed.

Please open your Bible to Acts chapter 9, at verse 32. As we begin, I will quickly go through Acts chapter 9, verses 32 to 43 to lay the foundation for the rest of the message focused on its application to our lives.

#### **Overview**

Starting at verse 32, *“Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.”* During this time Peter was an itinerant preacher in western Palestine. He was also visiting and teaching the Christians who lived north and west of Jerusalem. Lydda was located in the Plain of Sharon on the road from Jerusalem about 12 miles from the coastal town of Joppa. The congregation in Lydda most likely was composed of Jews converted to Christianity who fled the persecution in Jerusalem or some could be converts from the preaching of Philip after he left the Eunuch, *“Philip appeared in Azotus, A city north of Gaza near the Mediterranean coast. When the Philistines captured the Ark*

*of the Covenant, they brought it to Ashdod now known as Azotus. and he was traveling and preaching the gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea.”* (Acts 8:40)

Continuing in verse 33, “*There Peter found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed.*” As we know from history many Jews had both Hebrew and Greek names. The wonder of the healing miracles reported in the Gospels and in Acts is often accentuated by the details of the person’s condition. In our Luke chapter 9 passage, this man had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years! This was not some temporary condition; it had greatly affected and hampered his life!

Now turning our attention to Tabitha at verse 36, “*Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha (Aramaic), which, translated, means Dorcas (Greek). Both names mean gazelle. She was full of good works and acts of charity.*” Her reputation was, as it ought to have been for a Christian woman, one of generosity and the love of others or “*good works and acts of charity*”. In verse 39 we are given more information about what she did for others and how many were indebted to her and loved her in return. In order to provide, as she had done for the widows, it is clear she was a kind and generous woman and one of means.

Verses 37 and 38, gives one several things to consider, “*In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.*”<sup>38</sup> Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, “*Please come to us without delay.*” As I pondered these verses I was led to ask, “Why was Peter sent for?” Did the disciples simply want Peter to pay his respects to this faithful Christian woman? I mean after all, to have the Lord’s own disciple and the leader of the apostles at her funeral

would be a great honor and they may have desired him to preach at her burial. But it may also have been they knew the apostles were known for doing miracles in the name of Jesus; so, did they entertain the hope that Peter might do something to bring her back to life? These verses are not definitive. I suppose because it says, [“Please come to us without delay.”](#) We could even understand the verse to mean Peter had been called while Tabitha was alive, but arrived only after she had died.

Moving to verse 40, [“Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.”](#) What Peter did was as the Lord had done on the memorable occasion found in Luke chapter 8, verses 51-56, of synagogue leader’s 12-year-old daughter, an occasion when Peter himself was present. Jesus sent the crowd out of the room and he raised the girl from the dead. Why Peter raised Tabitha is not said, nor is it said whether some of the woman’s family remained behind when everyone else was asked to leave. Peter, of course, had witnessed that earlier miracle of resurrection by Jesus, and, in effect, did what he had seen the Lord do.

Our passage ends with verse 43, Peter [“stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.”](#) It is not insignificant that Simon was a tanner and that his occupation was mentioned here. Jews widely thought of tanners as unclean because they were in constant contact with the hides of dead animals. For Peter, he was no longer troubled by Simon’s occupation, though, as we will see in the next chapter, he still had some anchors to his Jewish up-bringing and its laws.

### **Evidence Of Jesus As The Christ Through Miracles**

When persecution had broken out in Jerusalem, of which we read in chapter 8, the apostles had remained in Jerusalem. They had felt it important that they not

flee. But as we read here in verse 31 of chapter 9, the church was enjoying a period of peace and accordingly we find Peter on a preaching tour. I would, of course, love to know what the other apostles were doing at this time, but Luke concentrates on the ministry of Peter and of Paul. As Peter traveled, he was not only evangelizing by preaching the gospel to those who did not yet believe – but encouraging or discipling the Christians whom he met as he went from town to town. On this preaching tour Peter encountered two believers, a paralyzed man and a saintly woman, Tabitha, who had just died. In each case he performed a miracle. I say “performed,” because he was the agent of the Living God, Jesus Christ, empowered by God the Holy Spirit to perform the healing. It is worthwhile to ask ourselves “Why did Luke include these two accounts?” After all, he has already made clear that the apostles worked miracles. Peter and John had healed a lame man at the temple, an episode reported in detail in chapter 3. Philip had performed a number of miracles in Samaria. Why do we learn about Aeneas and Tabitha among all the people who were miraculously healed of serious illness by the apostles? Why did Luke sandwich these two brief accounts between the account of the conversion of Saul and that of Cornelius in chapter 10? In one sense Aeneas was simply another paralyzed man who was healed. There had been many such miracles of healing. Why this one? Tabitha was brought back to life from the dead and even the Lord, who performed many miracles, did that on only three occasions that we know of. This raising someone from the dead is an unusual case, for all we know from the scriptures this was the only time Peter actually brings someone back from the dead, and perhaps this miracle was included in Luke’s narrative for that reason. But then why Aeneas, his healing is not all that unique?

What is clear is from the details of these two accounts, is they go against most of the miracles found in the scriptures because they lack an eyewitness.

Someone who was there and saw it all and reported it. In the case of Tabitha there does not appear to have been anyone actually in the room when Peter healed her. But in both cases, it seems more likely that Luke during his two-year stay in Palestine, while Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea, had access to someone who had been present when the healings had occurred and Luke dutifully recorded them. So much of the New Testament narrative was verified by eyewitness testimony, a fact that has become more and more clear and certain as the result of continued scholarship and research into the Bible.

William Ramsay, the son of a secular lawyer became the great 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century classical scholar and archaeologist, trained in the skepticism of 19<sup>th</sup> century German scholarship regarding the historical reliability of the New Testament. He began his archaeological researches in Turkey expecting to find that Luke's account of the travels of Paul to be worthless as real history. But he discovered that in fact Luke was precisely accurate, even about first century place names and political boundaries and nomenclature, matters about which scholars at that time supposed Luke to have been in error. Indeed, Ramsay concluded that Luke's data was too accurate to have been written in the second half of the second century, more than a century after the events it purported to describe, which is what the Germans were mistakenly claiming at the time. Ramsay's researches led him not only to rehabilitate Luke's reputation as a serious and reliable historian, but to argue that Luke was more accurate than any other ancient historian. His researches on the ground also led him to believe in the message that Luke conveyed in the Book of Acts its history. Ramsay became a devout Christian and celebrated theologian.

To be sure, all the miracles of the apostles served certain purposes and those purposes were certainly served by these two miracles as well. Such miracles

accredited the apostles, here Peter in particular, as men sent from God with the authority of God to speak and act on His behalf. In that way miracles were powerful confirmation of the truth of the message the apostles proclaimed. In the time before the New Testament was written, it was critical that the men who would write it were known to be men who had the authority to communicate the Word of God. Doing what no other human beings could do was the evidence of that unique authority. The fact that Peter could do such marvelous things, that he could wield supernatural power in the same way that Moses, Elijah and the prophets had in the Old Testament and in the same way that Jesus, the Messiah and Christ had, proved beyond doubt that God was working through Peter and speaking through Peter. It is no accident that the miracles of the apostles were so similar to the miracles performed by God's prophets and by the Lord Jesus himself. The Apostles wielded the same power and their words had the same authority.

But I do not think all this fully explains why these two particular miracles are reported at the end of chapter 9. What Luke seems particularly interested in demonstrating in both cases, and what is key to his entire theology and message, is that it was the living Jesus Christ Himself who was at work in the ministry of Peter and the other apostles, and, for that matter, in the ministry of Stephen and Philip. What these miracle accounts are intended to demonstrate – as so much of the history that Luke has already recorded – is that **Jesus Christ is alive and at work in the world**. Not only was He not dead, He was not some absent god figure, but Jesus is present with His people as He had promised He would be. Notice how this point is made an emphasis in these accounts.

First the miracles as Peter performed them closely mimicked the Lord's own miracles. The healing of Aeneas is reminiscent of the healing of another long-paralyzed man, the account of which we find in Luke's Gospel, chapter 5, verses

17-26. On that occasion also – remember when the man was dropped through the roof of the house – the paralyzed man was told to rise, take up his bed, and walk, just as Aeneas was here. The parallel is even more precise in the case of Tabitha when compared with the miracle of the resurrection of Jairus’ daughter reported in Luke chapter 8. As Jesus had done, Peter sent the mourners out of the room. The words he said to Tabitha, lying dead before him, are very like the words Jesus had spoken to the dead girl. Indeed, if Peter spoke to Tabitha in Aramaic, as seems likely he would have done since she is identified first as Tabitha, an Aramaic name, only one letter would have been different in the very words spoken by the Lord in the first instance and by Peter in the second. The Lord said, *Talitha koum*, that is, **“Little girl, get up.”** Peter would have said, *Tabitha koum*, that is, **“Tabitha, get up.”**

We also note that as the Lord had taken Jairus’ daughter by the hand, so Peter gave Tabitha his hand. Peter was consciously imitating what he had seen the Lord do and say on earlier occasions. Luke has taken care to report the similarities between the two occasions to draw our attention to them. Luke draws our attention to the fact that Peter did what Jesus had done. I found this remarkable!

Luke places special emphasis on the fact that it was by the power of Jesus that these healings were performed. In the case of Aeneas, Peter makes the point explicit, telling the man not simply that he was being healed by the power of Jesus, but more than that, he says, **“Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you”!** (v. 34) Peter was declaring it was Jesus and not himself. That is, Jesus was doing the healing. It was not as if Jesus, upon leaving the world, had given the apostles a supply of His power that they could then use to heal the sick. No, it was Jesus Himself in that room healing the sick man.

If that were not enough, Peter makes the point even more powerfully in the case of Tabitha. He knelt and prayed by the body. He was asking the Lord for a result he knew perfectly well he was unable himself to bring to pass. The resulting miracle was the answer to that prayer. Power was being unleashed without question, extraordinary things were happening, but Peter was the last person to suppose that it was his own power or that he had in some way effected these cures. Given that Peter had said to Aeneas “[Jesus Christ heals you](#)”, it seems right to me to suppose that when Peter prayed over Tabitha’s body, he prayed directly to Jesus, not to the Father. Peter said something to the effect, “Lord Jesus, please do for this dear servant of Yours what You did for Jairus’ daughter.”

It can hardly be accidental that the word that Peter used in commanding both Aeneas who was not dead and Tabitha who was dead to get up is the very words used of God raising Jesus from the dead. Verse 40, ‘[Tabitha, arise.](#)’ ἐγείρω, is the word Luke uses three times in the last chapter of his Gospel to refer to the Lord’s resurrection. These miracles, in this way, became visible signs of the eternal life and the conquest of death that Jesus accomplished on behalf of those who trust in Him as their Lord and Savior. What Luke wants us to understand is, the risen Christ was in those rooms to share His life and His power over death with others!

Another great point is made of the fact that it was Jesus that the credit for the healings was given by everyone, and the result of the miracles was a large number of people believed in Jesus. We see that in verse 35 where Luke emphasizes the impact of Aeneas’ healing by saying that “[all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw](#) Aeneas walking normally – no doubt they also heard his account of what had happened to him – “[And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.](#)” When Luke writes “[all the residents](#)” it is hyperbole or exaggeration for effect, for emphasis, but what is being emphasized is how many



became Christians as a result of these miracles. A great many people turned to the Lord. But no one made the mistake of supposing that they ought to believe in Peter or that Peter claimed these miracles by his power, but all credit was given to Jesus.

In the case of Tabitha, the women who had washed her body and who had begun to prepare her for burial, together with the other believers who were there, saw her walking toward them, coming out of the room where her body had lain, heard her speak and after they had shed their tears of joy and exchanged their hugs, they began spreading the word. Which resulted in [“many believed in the Lord.”](#)

### **Peter Empowered By The Holy Spirit**

This was everywhere the case in the New Testament. When the Lord’s disciples were sent by Him on a preaching tour and given authority to perform miracles – healing the sick and lame and casting out demons – we read that this resulted in great interest about Jesus as the Christ and not about them. Nobody assumed that this was a power possessed by these men themselves. People wanted to know about Jesus whom these men were serving. It was clear to everyone that the power did not rest with these men, but with Jesus whom they served.

Acts began, as you remember, with the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that Jesus said He would send in His place. Peter’s sermon at Pentecost made clear and it was the central point of his sermon; that it was Jesus who had sent the Spirit, Jesus who was present by the Spirit and Jesus was calling the nations to Himself. Throughout Acts this is going to be the convicting theme of Luke’s record of the history of the early church. Jesus is present in the world by His Spirit, but Saul saw the glory of Christ and he heard Jesus, this is an exception. No one since, those who became Christians or even those at Pentecost, had seen Jesus or heard Him speak. Now in Peter’s two miracles we are reminded that whether or not one can

see the risen Christ or His glory, whether or not one can hear His voice, it is still Jesus, present and working by his Holy Spirit. My beloved, Jesus is here, right now. He may reside in heaven with the Father, but He is also on earth by His Spirit to speak and to act. By His Spirit Jesus is here in this room with us now.

### **Christ's Spirit Indwells Believers At All Times**

If you want to know what Pentecost means and what these two miracles meant, what the Book of Acts is all about, it is this: the Jesus who ascended to heaven and who sent the Holy Spirit in His place, is now at work in the world through that Holy Spirit. Jesus said before He ascended to heaven that He would be with his disciples until the end of the age. He had taught His disciples in the Gospels that where two or three of His followers met together, He would there in the midst of them. Understand, clearly Jesus is here! Jesus, himself made clear, <sup>15</sup>“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **Helper, to be with you forever,** <sup>17</sup> even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for **he dwells with you and will be in you.** <sup>18</sup> **I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.** <sup>19</sup> Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. **Because I live, you also will live.**” (John 14:15-19) My beloved, you and I believe this, but do we allow the world to creep in giving moments of doubt causing us to forget to live daily walking with the Lord? Do we live in the consciousness that the Lord is present to help us, to provide for us, and, to be sure, sometimes to correct us. We do not live our lives alone – Jesus is with us always! We are, you and I, never alone! Jesus is always with us by His Spirit. These great miracles are only dramatic, unusual, once-for-all demonstrations of that tremendous fact. We are always, you and I, in the company of the Son of God.

Acts is the same story of the kingdom of God, the rule of Jesus Christ, His ministry in the world as were the Gospels. It is the same Lord Jesus, but not physically, not immediately, not visibly present; instead, Jesus is present by the Spirit, and all the words in all the world cannot describe what a universe of difference that presence must make. Luke's whole interest in these miracles is to accent his main point: that Jesus was there in Lydda and Jesus was there in Joppa, that Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead, even if He did it by the power of the Holy Spirit and even if He used the words of his disciple. So, obvious in the passage is the fact of Jesus' divine presence - no one failed to grasp it. People turned in great numbers to Jesus, to the one who had healed Aeneas and had raised up Tabitha. Jesus had been there; He had shown His power and His love to them, and they had no choice but to believe in Him – Jesus is the Christ, the living Son of God.

Miracles were exceedingly rare, else they wouldn't have been miracles. Appearances of the Lord, such as to Stephen and to Paul, were rarer still. But the raising of the spiritually dead is happening all the time and it happens here. Tabitha was the only dead body brought back to life, but the miracle of her resurrection was the cause of a great many who were spiritually dead being raised to life and it is all about Jesus – Jesus alone raises people from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Do not miss the point. Jesus is here to see you, to know you, to help you, to respond to your prayers, to love you and to save you. He is, by His Spirit, in reality next to you and near to you as He was to those people who saw Him and heard Him during the days He walked the earth. That is the extraordinary lesson of Luke's history and the extraordinary fact of our existence in this world. We are not alone. We are not by ourselves. Every moment of every day Jesus is here with His power, His love, His truth, His care, even sometimes with His frown and His rod of

judgment. He is no less with each of you than He was with his disciples along the lake in Galilee or in a home in Capernaum or at Bethany with Mary and Martha or in the upper room in Jerusalem.

That fact absolutely changes the meaning of human life and more important still, changes the opportunity that lies before every human being in this world. The Lord Christ is here; He is present. What will you do about Him? Will you ignore Him or will you turn to Him for help and salvation?

If you believe what I have taught out the Word of God this morning, will you live it? Will you share the Gospel with the lost? My beloved this is all yours – that is if you will surrender your life to the Living God and His Spirit to rule your life and bring you unceasing joy and all the promises of Christ.

Do you believe God when He said to Joshua <sup>(1:5)</sup> “I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ *If you believe this in your heart, then -* <sup>6</sup> *So we can confidently say, as David did (Psalm 118:6) ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’”* <sup>(Hebrews 13:5-6)</sup> If you believe, say with me, “Amen and Amen”!