

## **Learning from the Rock**

(Acts 9:32-43)

1/22/20; Wed PM Pine Grove

### **Introduction**

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Acts 9:32.

Let's read the passage that we are going to look at tonight..

*32 Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the [n]saints who lived at [o]Lydda. 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed. 34 Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed." Immediately he got up. 35 And all who lived at [p]Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.*

*36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called [q]Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. 37 And it happened [r]at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, "Do not delay in coming to us." 39 So Peter arose*

*and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the [s]tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. 40 But Peter sent 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 And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the [t]saints and widows, he presented her alive. 42 It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.*

On May 10, 1869, the golden spike was driven into a railroad line that now crossed the entire United States.

The first transcontinental railroad had been an incredible engineering feat.

Two railroad companies, the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific would begin on opposite ends of the proposed line and work toward one another.

On the eastern end of the project, which began in Council Bluffs Iowa, was a man named Grenville Dodge.

He was former general for the Union army under Ulysses Grant, who was an expert in construction.

During the Civil War, he built a bridge across the Chattahoochee River in just 3 days.

On the western end of the project was a man named Samuel Montague.

Montague was a career railroad man having worked on the pacific coast building railroads in California.

And historians agree that the endeavor would have never made been completed without the incredible leadership of these two men in charge.

In fact, here is a picture of the day that the last spike was driven into the railroad and Dodge and Montague are in the middle shaking hands.

Now we realize that the church was founded and flourished under the sovereign hand of God, but in the early years, the church was also indebted to the leadership of two incredible leaders.

And those leaders would be Paul and Peter.

Peter would be the first out of the gate as the church in founded in Acts 2.

And he would preach in Acts 2 and 3.

He would lead the church in Acts 4-7.

In Acts 8, Peter would go to Samaria and affirm that the Lord was saving people there, but he would then have to confront a false convert named Simon.

So Peter was so instrumental in those early days in providing leadership and the discernment.

His early sermons were what the Lord used to grow the church from a group of a hundred people to a church that numbered in the 1000s.

But Peter will not be alone because in Acts 9, we were introduced to Saul of Tarsus, who we know better as Paul.

Saul had similar background to Peter in that he was raised Jewish, but other than that, these two men could not have been more different.

Saul was a religious elite.

He was a Pharisee like his father.

He was well educated, having studied in Gamaliel, the most respected teacher in Judaism.

Peter was a fisherman, a blue collar worker in Galilee, far from the center of Judaism in Jerusalem.

Yet, the Lord used each of these men mightily in the early church.

Now we have seen Peter's contribution, and we have met Paul in his conversion and early preaching in Damas

But when we left off last week in Acts 9, Paul had been to Jerusalem where he had met with Peter for 15 days.

While he was there in Jerusalem, Paul did some preaching to the Hellenistic Jews there, but it caused enough stir that the believers there put Paul on a boat and sent him to his hometown.

Look at Acts 9:30.

***30 But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.***

Here is a map of that to remind us of that area.

So Paul has been converted and he has been preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem.

But now he has left the area around Israel and headed to Tarsus.

And the verse we left off with last week simply says this..

Acts 9:31.

***31 So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria [m]enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.***

And that really sums up the previous section since Paul's conversion and departure from the area allowed the church free from organized persecution.

Now how long did this preach last in and around Israel?

From what we can tell, it may have been a number of years of prosperity.

Some have suggested that it is roughly 40 AD at this point in the book of Acts when Peter reappears.

I think it may be a little earlier than that but that is a good year for reference.

Anyway, we turn our attention to Peter for the next few weeks, and understand that Peter is primarily a minister to Jews at this point.

He is Jewish.

All of the disciples are Jewish.

Most of the early converts to Christianity are Jewish at this point, but the gospel is about to open up in a big way to the Gentiles.

And Peter is going to play a major role in their conversion in Acts 10.

But before we get to that, the end of chapter 9 simply lets us see Peter at his best.

Now if you remember the book of John, Peter is the disciple with the foot shaped mouth.

He is always speaking before thinking, and there is no sadder picture of that than his 3 denials of Christ on the night of Jesus' arrest.

But the darkness of those failures ended on a beach in Galilee as the resurrected Jesus restored Peter and told him to feed and care for Jesus' sheep.

And beginning at Pentecost, Peter has been busying keeping those commands.

HE has preached the gospel.

He has healed the lame.

He has led the church.

The often misdirected passion of Peter has been the Holy Spirit directed passion of Peter in the book of Acts.

And the Lord has used that passion to build his church.

Last time, we saw Peter in the book of Acts, he was with John leaving Samaria and headed back to Jerusalem preaching the gospel to Samaritan villages on their way back.

And that was certainly a big change for Peter since the Samaritans were always the outcasts of Jewish society.

But now Peter is so gospel focused that he sees nothing but souls in need of Christ.

And we get to see what a effective life of Christian ministry looks like in Acts 9:32-43 tonight.

In fact, let's look at 6 traits in Peter's life that made effective in ministering to others.

And our prayer is that these 6 traits would mark our lives and make us usable in the Lord's work today.

The first trait is found in verses 32 and 33.

## **I. Peter was Active (32-33)**

Look back at verse 32..

***32 Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the [n]saints who lived at [o]Lydda. 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed.***

The first thing we note in verse 32 is that Peter was traveling through all these regions.

What regions is Luke talking about?

Well, they are the regions that he just mentioned in verse 31..

Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

These are the three regions of Israel.

You can see them on the map here, and the note to make is that Peter has been traveling through all of them.

And what has he been doing?

Preaching and teaching and caring for the church that the Lord was growing all over Israel.

So he comes to see a group of believers in Lydda.

You can see that town on the map.

It is about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem and about 12 miles southeast of Joppa.

The church there was the result of the early persecution of the church that sent believers in all directions.

So Peter comes to visit with them and teach them and encourage them and would also desire to do some evangelism there.

And when he arrived in town, he found a crippled man named Aeneas.

But all I want to say at this point is simply notice that Peter was active.

He wasn't sitting in Jerusalem resting on his laurels.

He was doing ministry.

He was going to churches.

Jesus called him to be a shepherd to the sheep and you can't be a shepherd in the house.

You got to get in the field where the sheep are.

And the same would be true for anyone who wants to be used by the Lord.

Very rarely will God use you while you sit in the Lazy Boy.

You need to be active and among the people of God.

If you want to serve the church and do ministry, a great place to start is simply coming to church, being among God's people and seeing what needs to be done.

Be active allows you to see places to minister.

Peter was on the road and went to Lydda and he found somewhere that the Lord could use him.

And so Peter seeks to be used in the life of this paralyzed man named Aeneas.

This leads to the second trait we need if we want to be used by the Lord.

We must be active and submissive.

## **II. Peter Was Submissive (34-35)**

So Peter finds his way to Lydda.

HE comes across a man who has been lame for 8 years.

We know very little about him other than his name.

There is no indication if he was a believer or not.

Some have said that since Peter is noted as coming to the saints that Aeneas must have been a believer.

But others suggest that Aeneas was an unbeliever who would be saved through the miracle and that would lead others to salvation.

I tend to see Aeneas as an unbeliever like the lame man that Peter healed outside the temple back in Acts 3.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter.

If he was a believer, his faith was about to be strengthened.

If he was not a believer, God was about to give him the faith to believe.

So Peter comes to Aeneas..

Verse 34..

***34 Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.” Immediately he got up. 35 And all who lived at [p]Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.***

The first note to make is that Peter left no doubt about who was healing Aeneas.

In fact, the text is clear.

Jesus Christ healed Aeneas.

This wasn't some hocus pocus, con man miracle.

This wasn't buy a ticket to see Benny Hinn make some crippled guy fall down and limp away.

This miracle was the display of the power of Christ.

For a while, the Apostles were gifted to heal people to prove the validity of their message.

And this is an example of the power that they had for a while.

So Peter speaks the name of Christ and Aeneas rises and makes his bed.

The note to make is that Peter didn't do this miracle for his own glory.

He did it for the glory of Christ.

And the effects of the miracle are incredible.

All in Lydda and Sharon who saw what Jesus did for Aeneas believed.

Now Sharon is not a city but a region in Israel.

It is flat coastal plain that runs along the coast from Lydda north.

And anyone who saw the miracle that Peter performed for Aeneas turned to the Lord.

If you want to be usable to the Lord, put yourself in the back seat and submit to the glory of Christ in all you do.

Yes Peter went to Lydda.

Yes Peter spoke to the crippled man.

But Peter knew it was a work of Christ so that others could come to believe in Christ.

Ministry is never about exalting ourselves.

Ministry is about submitting to the glory of Christ in all we do.

It would have been easy for Peter to accept the praise, but Peter knew that he was nothing more than an empty vessel that Christ was using for his purposes.

May be we all submit our lives and our service to glory of Christ alone.

A third trait of Peter is seen 12 miles away in the coastal town of Joppa.

Look at verses 36-39 where we notice that..

### **III. Peter was Receptive (36-39a)**

*36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called [q]Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. 37 And it happened [r]at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, "Do not delay in coming to us." 39 So Peter arose and went with them.*

Joppa is the town that Jonah headed to as he sought to run away from the Lord's command to go to Nineveh.

The reason he went there is that Joppa is home to a port of ships that travelled all over the world.

It was a good place for people with a craft to live.

They could make their products and send them by ship all over the known world.

And one of those crafty folks was a lady named Tabitha.

Her Greek name was Dorcas.

And the reason for two names is that she lived in a seaport town where many travelers would visit.

Though her names were different, both meant gazelle, which speaks of a graceful animal.

And Tabitha was a graceful woman.

Verse 36 says that she was abounding deeds of kindness and charity.

She was a believer.

Verse 36 says that she was disciple of Christ.

But this precious Christian woman falls sick and dies.

And the end of verse 37 says that they washed her body and laid her in an upper room.

Now that is interesting since Jews quickly buried their dead.

Jesus died and was in the tomb in a matter of hours, and the same was true of most Jews since they didn't embalm their dead.

However, Tabitha's friends wash her and lay her upstairs.

But why?

Well, they know that Peter is nearby, so they send 2 men to fetch him.

And verse 39 simply says that Peter arose and went with them.

I love that.

Here is Peter, a man so influential and important in the early church but so receptive to the requests of these 2 apparent strangers.

Look, I understand that we have to be wise in what we do in ministering to others.

And there are times when we can't go and do.

I understand that.

I truly do, so I am not trying to bind your conscience.

And I want to say is that we ought to be receptive to being used by the Lord.

Look, Peter could have said, "Hey fellas, I am wiped out. The Lord just used me to heal a lame man. I need to take a break."

But he didn't.

They came and he rose and went.

Just be receptive to the ministry that the Lord sends your way.

It may not fit your schedule, but it may require your attention.

Maybe you can call someone who wants to serve.

Maybe you can do it yourself.

Just simple be receptive to the opportunities that come to you.

So be active.

Be submissive.

And be receptive.

#4...

#### **IV. Peter was Pensive (39b-41)**

We don't use the word pensive much, but it is the idea of serious mindedness.

Look at the second half of verse 39...

*When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the [s]tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. 40 But Peter sent 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 And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the [t]saints and widows, he presented her alive.*

When Peter gets to the house, some widows are there weeping over Tabitha's death.

It is likely that she was caring for many of the widows in town.

In fact, they brought the items that she had given to them.

And the whole room where her dead body was is a crying mess, but Peter sends them all out.

This wasn't rudeness.

It was Peter wanting a quiet connection to the Lord in prayer.

So he prays and calls to her, and she sits up in bed and looks at Him.

Such a simple explanation of an incredible miracle.

And poor old Tabitha.

She was in a room that Jesus has prepared for her in heaven.

She was gazing on his glory.

And now she is back in the dirty upper room of Joppa looking at Peter.

But that is what the Lord wanted and that is what Peter did.

And all I want to note is something that we have seen recently in 1 Peter and that is a need for seriousness in the lives and ministers of God's people.

Peter was kind and gracious but he was also very serious when he needed to be.

As he sat in that upper rooms surrounded by weeping and grief, he sent them all out so that he could commune with God and be used by Him.

There is much to be said for those who are serious about ministry being able to find ministry to do.

God uses the pensive.

A fifth trait that we will note will be brief but important.

Look at verse 42, where we see that..

## **V. Peter was Productive (42)**

***42 It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.***

Word of Tabitha's resurrection spreads all over the city and many come to faith in Christ because of the miracle.

Needless to say, the Lord uses people who are productive for him.

There are many things that can be done in the church but the ministries that equip the saints and spread the gospel are the most productive simply because that is why the church exists.

WE exist to help believers grow in their faith and to go into the world preaching the gospel.

Peter was simply focused on making sure that the gospel was spread, so he engaged in ministries that furthered that purpose.

Years ago, the pastor that disciplined told me that the best way to figure out where to serve is to see where God is active and simply go and find a place to add to that production.

I think that is still a good word.

Don't get locked into how you must serve.

Serve in ways that bear the most fruit production for the kingdom.

And then a final thought that is easy to miss in verse 43..

## **VI. Peter Was Nonrestrictive (43)**

What I mean by that is that Peter was open to anyone when it came to ministry.

Now you may say what does that have to do with verse 43...

Well, let's read it again, and I will tell you..

***43 And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.***

A tanner is simply someone who worked with the skin of dead animals making leather.

And in Jewish society, that was unacceptable.

The defilement of dead animals made a person ceremonially unclean.

In fact, some rabbis allowed a Jewish woman to divorce a man who became a tanner.

So Peter staying with one shows how much his heart has been changed by the gospel.

Now this is preview of sorts for chapter 10 next week, but some commentators have said that this is the 3rd miracle of this verses.

A lame man headed.

A dead woman raised.

And a Jewish heart completely changed.

Now we know that Peter is saved, but to see him staying with a tanner is incredible.

And all I will simply say is that the Lord uses people who are open to taking the gospel to anyone.

Income class, skin color, level of education, culture should have no bearing on who we choose to minister to.

Peter's Jewishness is who he is, but it cannot restrict who he loves or ministers to..

WE must not limit the Lord with eyes of prejudice or racism.

The Lord uses people who are willing to serve to preach to the nations.

## **Conclusion**

Some of you may know this but Post-It notes almost never made it to market.

The man who invented them couldn't figure out how to use them, so he passed them out to co-workers in his lab.

One was a chemist named Arthur Fry, who also sang in his church choir.

One day, Fry lost his place in the hymnal during service when he dropped it and the slips of paper marking his places fell out.

At that moment, he remembered his co-workers notes that were sticky but movable.

The next Sunday, he brought them to church and they worked perfectly.

And the rest is Post-It note history.

Look, you may not always know how the Lord can you use you.

But I would encourage you.

BE active in and around the church, and the Lord will present opportunities.

Be submissive and seek the Lord's glory in what you do.

Be receptive and open to being used in all sorts of ways.

Be pensive and treat opportunities to serve with seriousness.

Be productive and look for opportunities that edify the church and evangelize the lost.

Be nonrestrictive and eager to serve people of any culture, color, and character.

May God see us as usable in His Work.

Let's pray.