

Ministering Outside the BOX

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Date: 23 August 2015

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[0:00] If you would take your Bibles and turn to the book of Acts, please. Or open your devices and turn them on and go to Acts.

Acts chapter 9, if you're visiting with us and you don't have a smartphone, you can use the Bible in the chair in front of you, the black Bible.

Open up towards the back and go to page 100. Page 100, you'll find Acts 9, Acts chapter 9, starting in verse 32. We're going to finish the chapter and then we're going to hit all of chapter 10 next week. But I wanted to do these few verses, which are important. 32 through 43 of Acts chapter 9, again page 100 in the black Bible. Acts 9, 32 to 43.

I'll read the passage and then we will dive in. Amen. Now it came about that as Peter was traveling through all those parts, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

[1:18] And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years before he was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you, arise and make your bed.

And immediately he arose. And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. Now in Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which translated is called Dorcas. This woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did. And it came about that at that time she fell sick and died. And when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room.

And since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him and treated him, Do not delay to come to us. And Peter rose and went with them. And when he had come, they brought him into the upper room.

And all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed.

[2:21] And turning to the body, he said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And it came about that he stayed many days in Joppa with a certain tanner, Simon. My father-in-law, years ago, began to work at a certain prestigious company, which I won't name the company, a big computer company though, I don't know, back in the late 70s, early 80s.

And their motto was, Think. And yet he felt like he was in a box. He later ended up leaving that company, which today is not what it used to be.

Maybe about a year ago, my niece gave my father-in-law this picture frame, and he put it up on his study. Think outside the box.

So it made him think about the fact, when he was at that company, and the motto was think, and he felt like he was in a box. Think outside the box. It just reminded him, it connected with him.

[3:47] To think outside the box. Today, in our passage, we're going to see how Peter was challenged to think outside the box, or rather, to minister outside the box.

As we come to this portion of the book of Acts, just do it, be who you are, let God use you to fulfill his mission. We see we must be people who are willing to minister outside the box.

Ministering outside the box. We haven't seen Peter in a while, haven't we? Since chapter 8, verse 25.

I mean, it started out with Peter. Peter, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, and all of a sudden, he's gone. Now he comes up, back on the scene. We get to see how God was using him in the molding and shaping of God's new community.

But why this little section of miracles? These two miracles, just kind of, right? Just kind of there. Why? Because Luke is setting up the next part, which is the first official Gentile convert. [5:00] And the one who's going to do it is not the one that you thought was going to do it. Saul. No. It's Peter. The Jewish guy.

Who doesn't hang around Gentiles. Peter was moving farther and farther away from Jerusalem into Gentile areas. So if you're looking at a map, here's Jerusalem.

Lydda's up here. Lydda and Sharon. Joppa's over here, a little bit more north, on the coast. And then Caesarea next week, up here. So he's moving farther and farther away from Jerusalem. Kind of getting a little bit out of his comfort zone. In the midst of the different needs that come up, God blesses him as he's pastoring and evangelizing.

Friends, see, it's all preparing Peter for the biggest challenge of his life. Gentile conversion. God was still working through this key apostle, using him as his instrument to show that salvation, as promised in the Old Testament, has now come to Gentiles.

[6:15] Now, you might say, wait a second, time out. Hasn't God always saved Gentiles? Non-Jews?

Non-Israelis? Hmm, yeah. It's just different now, though. You got, before Jesus Christ, and after Jesus Christ.

It makes a difference. So before the Lord Jesus Christ came, a Gentile had to become a Hebrew or a Jew, to find salvation.

A Gentile became part of Israel. It was Israel's responsibility to be a beacon of light to the nation. to display the glory of the Lord to the world. Come and see His glory.

Because He was dwelling in Jerusalem at the temple. His glory was there. Come and see the glory of the Lord. And one of the ways, I mean, as, it's kind of odd for us today, but in those times, it was a big deal.

[7:21] To be circumcised, you were known as a Jew, and you would connect yourself in that way. You had to become a Jew. You had to come to Israel, be a part of Israel. That's how you were saved, so to speak.

Come and see God's glory. Now it's different. Now it's, go and tell. Go and tell the good news. One does not become a Jew to find salvation. One must repent and trust Jesus Christ alone. Jews and Gentiles become one in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's no distinguishing of ethnicities. Hispanic, from Spain, from Germany, from Russia, Israel, Palestinian, Algerian, Saudi Arabian, from United Arab Emirates, to Cottonwood, Arizona.

Everything in between. All are one in Christ. I have up there Ephesians 2, 14 through 18. Saul, who became Paul, says this, or wrote this, For Jesus himself is our peace, who made both one, Jews and Gentiles.

[8:46] He broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, abolishing in his flesh the enmity, the law of commandments, and ordinances, so that in himself he might make the two into one new man, establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near. For through him, we both have our access in one spirit to the Father.

That's the key verse. Through Jesus Christ, we both have our access in one spirit to the Father. Whether you're Jew or Gentile, it doesn't matter now. Now for Peter, that's going to be a little weird. He's not going to be used to that. So this portion of our passage is preparing him for what he's about to embark, and what he's about to face, this challenge, where he's going to see, not just one, but many Gentiles coming to Christ.

Just like the Jews did. So God validated Peter again, as his authentic representative prophet, who did these signs and wonders, among the people.

[10:07] God was still using Peter. He brought this lame man, he healed him. He brought this lady back to life. God is still using Peter. He truly was Christ-like in his actions, following the Lord each step of the way, and called by the Lord as the instrument to bring Gentile salvation.

That's why the reason this section is so important. That's why this section is so important. God was using Peter for his glory. Peter wasn't acting on his own. Or on his own initiative.

The same God who healed these two people, the lame man, and resurrected Tabitha, is the one who calls all people, Jews or Gentiles, to come to trust in his eternal Son.

And this would rock Peter's world. So what does this have to do with us? He calls us to speak this message too.

Now you might say, how can God use me? How can God use someone like me? Look, if you are a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, he calls you no matter where you are at in life, to be his messenger to those around you.

[11:30] Maybe it just means you just need to pray. Maybe it means you need to pray through the night. Maybe that's why you're up at two o'clock in the morning consecutively. Because God needs you to pray for this church.

And you're up from two to four. Why am I being up from two to four every single night for the past week? Maybe that's why. Maybe that's why.

Because God needs you to pray. Just a couple weeks ago, I was speaking to one of our members. Who thinks, why am I even here?

I said, because I need you. You know what? I need you to pray. I need you to pray for this church. Are you ready?

Are you ready to be used in ways that you didn't expect, you're not ready for, or possibly had no desire to do? Here's Peter, ministering outside Jerusalem.

[12:31] That's his comfort zone. I am safe in Jerusalem. Here's my little circle. I'm safe right here. Don't touch my circle. Get away from me.

Right? This is my circle. Are you ready? Are you ready for God to use you outside your circle? Are you open to God's plan and trusting in His plan for you?

Where does God have you today? Is it like, Lord, why is this happening in my life right now? Why are you putting me through this pain, this turmoil, this suffering?

Name it. What are you doing? Look, He's still using you for His glory. Maybe you're in the preparation stage, like Peter is right now.

Just be faithful. Don't be discouraged, Christian. Just be ready to serve outside the box. Outside your comfort zone.

[13:41] What's your comfort zone? Where is it? Maybe God's preparing you to get out of that circle.

Now, keep in mind, I understand. Acts is descriptive. It's not prescriptive. Acts describes to us what happens.

It doesn't tell us, okay, you gotta do this. So, we're not to do things exactly, we're not to go and heal lame people and resurrect people from the dead. Okay, I get that. I understand that.

That's true. But we're able to identify key principles that we can understand by which we can grow as a local church here in Cottonwood. Peter's ministry paralleled Jesus' healings and the works of the prophets of old like Elijah and Elisha.

And God was using him. See, God uses people of all kinds to bring the fulfillment of His mission. That's why for Acts, it's, let Him use you. Just be who you are.

[14:43] This is who you are. God saved you by His grace and He's given you grace. Just go be who you are. And be ready. You've got to minister outside the box.

So, let's go into our text. That's introduction. Wow. Ministering outside the box, 32 to 35. We begin here at Lydah and Sharon.

As Peter was traveling through all those parts, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydah. Came down, you guys, why came down? I thought he was going up to Lydah. It's because you're coming down the mountain from Jerusalem.

It was on a mountain. That's why they always say come down. Lydah was 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It was a mixed population, mostly Jewish.

Now, where did the saints come from? Where did these Christians come from, though? Maybe they were from those who scattered about from that persecution that happened in Jerusalem.

Remember that in chapter, end of 7, chapter 8?

[15:45] Or possibly from Philip's preaching. Remember, Philip, he started preaching from the coast and ended up in Caesarea. Maybe that's how. But there are saints there.

And come to find out, he found a certain man named Aeneas who had been bedridden eight years where he was paralyzed. And notice, verse 34, Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed. As part of his ministry, Peter healed him. And notice, he declares the healing. Instead of calling Jesus to heal him, he just declares the healing. And he tells him, Get up

and make your bed, man.

That's kind of what I tell my kids, too. Get up and make your bed. Sometimes you think you're resurrecting them from the dead, too. So anyways, get up and make your bed. And notice, the healing is connected to the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

And the healing was immediate and thorough. He immediately arose. Now he was able to care for himself. Now he was fully restored by the power of Jesus Christ.

[16:46] Oh, and by the way, yes, we might believe that the spiritual gifts, the static spiritual gifts have ceased. Yes. But Jesus Christ still heals today. We still believe that.

We don't believe that because we do. He can do that. And then notice, verse 35, here's the focus. And all who lived at Lydah and Sharon saw him and they turned to the Lord.

This healing laid the foundation for the Lord to bring about the conversion of sinners in Lydah and the Sharon regions. Sharon was right next to Lydah.

So all these people, they heard about it and they turned to the Lord. A significant amount of people, they turned to Christ. Now it doesn't seem from the text that Gentiles came to the Lord and lived in Sharon.

But as Peter's going deeper and deeper into Gentile territory, God is bound to do something unexpected that he didn't expect. But here you have these non-believers, non-followers of Jesus.

[17:50] They acknowledge Jesus' authority and his gracious saving power by the actions and words of his representative, Peter. Notice the focus. Sinners were converted. They turned to Christ.

Are you here today? I spoke about this earlier. Are you here today and you identify with the people who are not followers of Jesus? Do you identify with those that are not followers of the Lord Jesus Christ?

You're not a Christian today. Do you need to turn to the Lord today? Come. Come to Jesus Christ. You deserve judgment and wrath from God.

Yes, because you are a lawbreaker. But that's why the Father sent the Lord Jesus Christ who was perfect. Every time you sinned he was perfect.

He died as a substitute for sinners. And he resurrected from the dead. Repent. Turn away from your sin and put your trust in Jesus. He will save you.

[18:55] That's the gospel. That's what Peter was speaking to them. Christian, you never know how God is going to use you. Are we called to do healings by Peter?

Did in order for people to respond to the Lord? No. God doesn't need to authenticate the message because his word has already been verified. But he does need us to speak.

How is God going to use you, Christian? Think outside the box. Minister and serve outside the box. Well, further ministry happens outside the box.

Notice verse 36 to 43. He goes farther away from Jerusalem. Joppa, there was a certain disciple named Tabitha. Joppa, or Joppa now it's known as, is 12 miles from Rida on the coast.

This was a Greek city. There were some Jews there. But this was mostly Greeks there. Oh, and don't forget, this is the place that Jonah took a ship to avoid Nineveh. Remember that?

[20:04] Ooh, that's like a spooky place, Joppa. So anyways, we're introduced to Tabitha, or Dorcas, who's a woman of great character.

Deeds of kindness and charity, it says. Abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did. A disciple who showed mercy through charitable giving to others.

So in other words, she was wealthy and generous. And apparently, she was not just wealthy and generous to anybody, but specifically even to widows. Like making them clothes and stuff like that.

Now remember, there was no such thing as social security in that day. No such thing as people being able to get things of this sort, so widows would be on their own. If you didn't have any family, that's it.

So she's sitting there caring for these women. They loved her dearly. By the way, her name, in Aramaic and Greek, it means gazelle, or deer. A special disciple who truly loved people generously caring specifically for widows.

[21:08] When, excuse me, a follower of Jesus is graciously generous, it's a sign that God's Spirit is working in that person's life. Sacrificial giving is what she's doing.

Notice what happens in the text. Verse 37, it came about that at that time she fell sick and died. Tabitha Dorcas fell sick and died. And then it happens that when they washed her body they laid it in an upper room.

It was a custom for them to wash the body and then place her in an upper room. Well, that's weird. That seems to be the influence of Hellenistic Jews because more traditional Jews in Judaism, they would bury the body that day.

They wouldn't wait three days. Here they put her in an upper room. Maybe they're expressing faith and hope that she would be raised from the dead. Maybe. Notice verse 38, and since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples having heard that Peter was there sent two men to him entreating him, do not delay to come to us.

And Peter rose and went with them and when he had come they brought him into the upper room. So the disciples they heard Jesus, excuse me, Peter was there at Lydda. They sent two emissaries to Peter pleading him to come and given the situation they sent probably Peter would definitely come.

[22 : 31] Coming without hesitation he meets the weeping widows who were ministered to by Dorcas. Notice what this says in the text.

And all the widows stood beside him weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. The tunics, the clothes that she made.

Maybe they even showed them the ones that they were actually wearing. She made this for us. She was dearly loved by them. Notice just the sad pictures being painted for us. They were heartbroken at her death.

And notice what Peter does. He acted just like his leader Jesus. There in verse 40. But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed.

Like his leader Mark chapter 5 Jesus did the same thing with the little girl. He sent all the people out. Remember that? He asked everyone to leave. Actually, Elisha did the same thing in 2 Kings chapter 4.

[23 : 36] He had everybody leave and it was him with the little boy. And then he knelt down and he prayed. Maybe, maybe he remembered Jesus' words of expressing dependence on God for these special situations and that prayer was vitally important.

He needed to pray. Definitely a great principle for us to see here. The need to show our dependence upon the Lord in prayer.

If we are not praying, then we are not depending. Even Peter expresses dependence upon the Lord in prayer. Even Peter understood he needed God.

Even Peter understood and fell upon the fact that he was totally dependent upon God. And look, when you minister or you are serving outside the box or outside your comfort zone, you will need to pray depending upon the Lord.

Because it is not easy. But God gives us grace, right? He gives us grace to follow through with this thing that He is challenging us. calling us to do.

[24 : 53] Plus, Peter didn't want to draw attention to himself. He was the one who brought her back to life. So he sent everybody out. It was God that was at work. God is still working through His Son, through His Son, through His Son in the Holy Spirit.

And He is still doing that today. So notice what happens in the text. Knelt down and prayed and turning to the body, He said, Tabitha, arise. Depending upon the Lord Jesus Christ, the risen Lord Jesus Christ, He turned to the body and said, Tabitha, arise.

And she opened her eyes. And when she saw Peter, she sat up. And He gave her His hand and raised her up. Tabitha. This is amazing.

Peter prayed for Tabitha and Jesus heard and she came back to life. She was dead. Gave her her hand, raised her up. Here you see the power of God moving.

And notice what He does. Calling the saints and widows, He presented her alive. And notice it says, they became known all over Joppa and many believed in the Lord.

[26 : 12] This healing became known throughout all of Joppa, throughout all that surrounding region, and many came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, the healings, they bring the belief, the healings were done so they could verify that Peter is speaking, God is using Peter as His instrument, as His representative of prophets, so that now the focus was not the healing, but the focus was the gospel.

So people will turn to the Lord. Now, were Gentiles saved at this point? The pastors didn't say, probably say no at this point, but it's prepping us for chapter 10, it's prepping us for the fact that people are going to respond to the gospel.

When we proclaim the gospel, people respond. But then it's kind of an odd way to end. Look at verse 43. And it came about that he stayed many days in Joppa with a certain Tanner Simon. Tanners, they worked with dead animals' carcasses. Oh, that's kind of a nice job. Kind of an unclean occupation.

Skinning animals, animals, you know. Located near the ocean, because water was readily available, there's plenty of water there in the ocean, and it kind of keeps the smell out, right?

[27 : 33] It's kind of nice, keeps it way out there. Now, I get Peter was a fisherman, I understand that, and so he'd be, so to speak, used to this. But housing himself there showed that he was not highly sensitive to all the aspects of Jewish purity laws.

See, this would prepare him, it would prepare Peter for what the Lord had in store for him come the next few days with Cornelius. Because when you come to chapter 10, it's going to be off the map, so to speak.

He's going to be way up there, past Jerusalem, and he's going to be the one who's going to proclaim the gospel to Gentiles. So the Lord was still using Peter for his glory as we come to this next section whereby God would really stretch Peter's confidence in the truth of the gospel.

It was for all people. Peter's having to just get outside that box, getting outside his comfort zone.

This was pushing him, it was challenging him. But God was the one who was using him.

And the ministries of Peter and Saul, or Paul, they did not conflict with each other. They're unified under the risen Lord Jesus Christ, who calls all people to come to him and find grace, love, forgiveness of sins.

[28 : 50] Whether it's Peter or Saul. Peter was a faithful servant who was authenticated by God to be trustworthy to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles.

The good news that anyone can come to the Lord Jesus Christ to find salvation. All are called to come and trust the Lord Jesus. All are called. And God has entrusted this message of good news to us, his followers.

God has no matter who we are. Your age, our infirmities or frailties, your strengths or weaknesses, male, female, young, old, black, white, whether you've been a believer for a long time, or you just became a Christian.

It doesn't matter. So what are the implications of the gospel in your life today? What are the implications of the gospel in your life?

How is God going to use you in carpentry, business, as you're a plumber, as you're a mother, a nurse, art, government, journalism, police officer, you're in college, going to school, you're an investor, you're gardening, you're retired, or maybe you're starting a new job.

[30 : 35] What are the implications of the gospel in your life? How will God stretch you to serve Him outside your comfort zone, in those different areas?

God has saved you by His grace, giving you grace to speak the grace to others. How is God going to use you? And what's the comfort zone that He's calling you to step outside of?

In those areas, in your business, in your gardening, in your retirement, in your new job, in your college, are you ready to be used in ways that you didn't expect?

You're not necessarily ready for, possibly had no desire to do. Are you open to God's plan and trusting in His plan for you?

So where does God have you today? Be faithful, be ready to minister, to serve outside the box, outside your comfort zone. And praise Him for His grace that sustains us in those times of difficulty, in those times of stretching us.

[31 : 45] He's stretching us as His people, calling us to do what He's called us to do. So where does He have you today? Where's the box that you must minister outside of?

Take a few moments, if you would, and ponder what we've seen in God's Word here in Acts chapter 9. Take a few moments of silence for you to think and to ponder. And then we'll do our time of giving.

Following by our last two songs in our closing prayer. Think and pray. You know those places that you're in right now, those difficulties, those stretching times you're in right now.

Ask God to give you grace, and He does. He will. He will. He will stretch us just as you stretch Peter. So take a few moments and think and ponder.

Take a few moments. Take a few moments and think and ponder. Take a few moments and think and ponder. Thank you.