

Acts 9:32–43

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[0 : 0 0] 2017. Again, the scripture text is Acts 9 verses 32 to 43 on page 1017 of the White Bibles.

Now, as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Anais, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed.

And Peter said to him, Anais, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed. And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which translated means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died. And when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 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. So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, he took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. But 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 and he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa that many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. You may be seated. This is the brief prayer as we make our way, Father. We assemble together as one of thousands that assemble this day to sing your praise, to sit under your word, to declare aloud our allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. And Father, we, as we come to your word, we ask that it would speak to us.

And we ask that, as the psalmist has said, that the voice of the Lord thunders, that it would thunder aloud in our ears and in our mind and our hearts, that it would not be a mere man speaking, but it would be the voice of the living God. And Father, we think of Jerome and the Green family, especially in the loss of their brother, Joseph. And as they mourn, would they look to your word and would they be comforted in the days ahead? Father, we thank you that you not only bestow life, but you will bring about new life and that one day you will resurrect all life. And it is that day we anticipate and that is that day we look forward to. Help us in our time. Go before us. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.

[3 : 28] Amen. If you've been with us for an extended amount of time, you would know that we are making our way through the book of Acts. And one of the statements that Luke leaves along the way are these summary statements. These summary statements are like cords or knots that tie together what is unfolding in the early life of the church. And last week's passage ended with one of these summary statements. And it's there that I want to commence this morning. Chapter 9, verse 31. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. It multiplied. It multiplied. Luke embeds something in this verse that we should not miss as we proceed. Namely, he takes the church and he is communicating that it has now spanned three regional areas. Interestingly, the word church, ecclesia, is singular. It is one church that is over three regions. See, Luke is trying to combat a danger that may be arising. One may be tempted to think that as we've made our way through the book of Acts, that this movement is all led by these various small movements. Well, there's Peter's church over there. And we've discovered Philip. Maybe Philip's church is over here. And now all of a sudden, Saul, soon to be Paul, is arising. His church is over there. But Luke wants us to be clear that it is the unified work under the Lord Jesus. It's in the language of the

Apostles' Creed, which we regularly affirm. We affirm that we believe in the Holy Spirit. We believe in the Holy Catholic Church. Catholic meaning universal, spanning time and location and geography. Church, capital C, singular. Judea, Galilee, and Samaria are all familiar sounding places if you're students of the Bible. Why?

Because they're all central places that Jesus hung out. They're all places where Jesus ministered. And it should be no mere surprise or no mere coincidence that the places where Jesus spent the most time were now places who are responding to his message. This morning, our camera takes us to two cities. We are brought alongside the Apostle Peter, the individual who pretty much, who kind of launched the movement in a way. He had great significance as the book opened. But in recent chapters, he hasn't been that present. But Luke is bringing us back to Peter. In much the same way that when you see movies, great movies, spend a lot of time developing a character, and then they kind of transition to another character.

And meanwhile, this character is doing this, and this character is doing this. In the same way, literally, this is what Luke is doing. He's trying to develop, redevelop Peter. All that to say that the movement is not tethered to one person. We've already seen proper nouns introduced along the way.

Stephen, Philip, Saul. See, the Lord is at work at various places through various mediums by the hands of various followers. It's always good to remind ourselves that as we make our way as Christians, that the Lord is transforming the city of Chicago, this nation, this world, not through just the vehicle of Holy Trinity Church. He does so in many ways. When you and I only see one way God is working, He's actually working in a million unseen ways. Our text is packaged into two parts, distinguished by location, but unified in purpose. Luke is well aware that location matters, not just for property values, but it matters because what was recorded is the plan of God was for the people of God to experience the power of God everywhere. We see that in chapter 1, verse 8. They are to be witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria all the way to the end of the earth. And here we see two towns, Lydda and Joppa, are both in the region of Judea. And as the book of Acts continues, you will see that Luke goes to great lengths to remind Theophilus, the person who's receiving this original document, and us as modern readers, that we are geographically, we are to think about geography. We are to trace the geography. We are to follow the progress progress of the gospel message as it spans the earth. If you have the privilege of traveling or extensive travel, you will always receive a travel itinerary, which shows your destinations, how long you'll be staying. The book of Acts resembles a travel itinerary, not of a single apostle, Peter, James, Paul, but it documents the travel of the message of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 03] And before we, I gotta get started, we're taking off, but before we focus on these two signs and miracles, I need to talk about Peter a little bit more. Why is Luke going back to Peter? We know the text is split geographically, but it's unified by Peter. And Peter is the central figure for the next few chapters, and his reemergence is important. And Luke, the writer, is well aware of this, because Peter's authority must be established, and his credibility must be asserted. Luke has to confirm Peter's role in what is taking place. Two things, and then we'll talk about Lydda and Joppa.

Peter appears to have an itinerant role in the early church. He did not confine his ministry only to Jerusalem. He ventured to other locations. It would be safe to assume that wherever he traveled, he spoke publicly about Jesus. He demonstrated the power of God in signs and wonders, and he was given a special quality control role. Quality control role. You hear of maybe quality control engineers, people who are on, who are at the end of the assembly line, and they evaluate products and say, oh no, this is no good, doesn't pass inspection, send it back. Or this, I approve of. Peter had that type of role. And what do I mean by this?

He had, he was given the power to approve and disapprove what was legitimate and illegitimate.

I say this because if you've been with us for a while, you know, you've seen this role. When Ananias and Sapphira came, and Peter said, no, no, no, that's illegitimate. Out. He was the judge. And again, in Acts chapter 8, Simon the magician comes, and he says, I want to do these things. I want to manifest this power. Give me the spirit. Peter says, no, wrong, illegitimate. And you begin to see this role of Peter, that he has this authority granted to him, that what he pronounces, what he judges, is actually final and authoritative. You'll see this in the following weeks. It's very important in the following weeks, because something radical happens. And the church says, Peter, what do you think? And Peter says, it's legitimate. Secondly, being students of the Bible, you know that the episodes that surround Peter in these two episodes sound vaguely familiar in the Bible.

A paralytic rising to their feet, a dead, one who is deceased rising back to life. They sound familiar because these signs were done by Jesus himself early in his ministry, in his earthly ministry.

[12 : 16] It's recorded in Luke's gospel, Luke chapter 5, Luke chapter 7. And this is Luke's way of affirming that Peter carries the authority of Jesus himself. It is the means of saying that Jesus, though having ascended, is still actively working on earth. This happened even in the Old Testament through Israel's and the other way. And as we make our way through the book of Acts, you'll begin to see another man who has arisen, who is able to heal paralytics and to raise the dead, namely,

Paul. See, Peter's role in the early church is essential both in carrying the authority of God and authenticating the works of God. All this to say that the words of Jesus are being fulfilled. Do you remember the words? When Jesus says to Peter, hey, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to heaven. And whatever you bind on earth, whatever you approve on earth, is approved in heaven. You begin to see Peter's crucial role in the early church. Now on to the passage. This morning, my desire for you is to see that God is in the business of making much of his son, Jesus. God is in the business of making much of his son, Jesus. Two miraculous episodes in Lydda. The episode in Lydda is framed by the double mention of the city in verse 32 and 35. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Lydda is about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Apparently a day's walk. 25 miles. Peter must have walked really fast.

Lydda was on the way to Joppa. And Luke's record is incredibly brief and pointed. And as Peter found his way to Lydda, he met with the saints at Lydda, the believers. And he comes across a man named Aeneas, who was a paralytic, bedridden for the past eight years. He's introduced and he's identified primarily by his infirmity. It doesn't say whether he's a believer at all. His paralysis could have been a result of stroke, a sickness, or a fall. And whether or not he if whether or not he belongs to the community of believer is uncertain. But it would even be more incredible if he didn't.

Regardless of what made him paralyzed, it was unimportant to Luke the physician. It was Jesus Christ that made him well. We are not to think that Peter was the means of how the paralytic was healed. Rather, Luke is clear that it is Jesus Christ who heals. The text is very explicit.

Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. And in so doing, Aeneas rises immediately. And we are not to miss the outcome of Aeneas healing. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and they turned to the Lord. Perhaps speaking hyperbolically, Luke declares that the result was that Jesus Christ was magnified and the residents of not only Lydda, but another nearby town, Sharon, were all turning to the Lord. In other words, the faithful action of Peter proliferated the message of Jesus through the towns. The object receiving the attention was not Peter, not the messenger, rather the content of the message, Jesus. Peter and the power of God heals a paralytic resulting in the publicity of God. God is in the business of making much of his son in Joppa, the next city. The second episode grows in detail. Once again, Luke wants us to know where we are, namely Joppa, according to verse 36 at the beginning and verse 43 at the end. About 12 miles northwest of Lydda along the Mediterranean Sea. It was a coastal town.

[17 : 04] Peter was summoned to Joppa by believers from the town. They were motivated by the recent death of one of their own. Tabitha or Dorcas, who had fallen ill and shortly afterwards died. Tabitha's introduction is noteworthy. She is the first and only female in the entire book given the term disciple. She was one of exemplary character. And Luke gives us insight on what Tabitha meant to the believing community. She was full of good works and acts of charity. There is an aura about her which conveys an indispensable nature of her place in the community of believers. It is as if Luke is writing, what do you do when you lose one of your best? Even in death, after being washed and treated, instead of laying her in a tomb, she is unusually laid in the upper room. Her value in the local body of saints is compounded by the fact that her efforts were largely toward widows. Those whom the apostles had initially overlooked in Acts chapter 6. The weight of her loss is seen in the snapshot given in verse 39.

When Peter arrives, he is surrounded by these weeping and lamenting widows who are showing him the tunics and the garments and the provision that Tabitha had provided out of her good works and charity. The text is ambiguous as to what was expected of Peter. I wonder, I can only imagine, he's summoned in haste. And it would require at least a half day to walk 12 miles, unless he teleports like Philip. Sorry. Possibly two days for this journey.

Were they expecting Peter to raise her? Were they hoping that maybe Peter, this premier apostle, would be able to encourage a community that had just lost one of their best? Well, verse 40 is a terse summary of what transpired.

Peter, seeing the commotion, does what he only knew how to do because he was there when he saw Jesus do it. Get out. Everyone get out. Get out of the room. Close the door.

And Peter's probably saying, okay, Jesus, now what? And he falls to his knees. He prays. She opens her pen. He commands her.

[20 : 02] He commands her. Tabitha, rise. At which she opens her eyes, sits up, takes Peter's hands, stands to her feet, and then Peter returns her to the community from which death had taken her. The outcome was that it became known throughout all of Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

And once again, you see, the action of Peter proliferates the message of Jesus through the city. The object receiving the attention is not the messenger, though it could have been.

Rather, it's the content of the message, Jesus the Lord. The man of God and the power of God raises the dead, resulting in the publicity of God.

God is in the business of making much of his son. So we're given these two episodes. Aeneas the paralytic is told to rise to his feet, and Tabitha the deceased is told to arise from her death.

Both are unnatural. Both are uncommon. Both are what we would call miracles. Both are demonstrations of power as promised to his disciples by Jesus.

[21 : 11] The result gives us the primary purpose of these miraculous episodes. Remember, God is in the business of making much of his son.

Well, for the remainder of our time, I'd like to reflect on two questions. Two very important questions.

What are the role of miracles in the days of the early church? And secondly, if time allows, how are we to think about the role of miracles in the present day church?

What were the role of miracles in the early church? And how are we to think of the place of miracles today? C.S. Lewis in his work, *Miracles*, calls miracles raids on nature.

They are coherent invasions. Employing the language of conquest, he argues that miracles are simply that, a conquest. It's a takeover of the natural order in order to establish a new order.

[22 : 17] By definition, Lewis adds, miracles are exceptions to natural law. And you and I are fascinated by exceptions, aren't we? Scientific journals thrive on exceptions.

Today, if you were to go out and conduct an experiment and climb up to the top of your building, and you began to drop Cheerios one by one by one by one off the rooftop, classic physics or natural law requires that every single one of those Cheerios falls to the ground.

However, if one were to hover, you might have to switch from classical physics to quantum physics, but whatever.

You would write it up and you would publish it. You would write it up and publish it. Why? Because it's an exception. We're fascinated by exceptions.

And we see two exceptions here in the biblical text. I remember that day very vividly when Christie's doctor communicated that having children of our own would not ever come naturally.

[23 : 34] We were immediately bounded by science, medicine, and natural laws. So we prayed asking for exceptions. We have received four exceptions up to this point.

And I still remember the first ultrasound because Christie's on the table in tears. The doctor is in awe, and I remember her words verbatim, this should not have happened.

And I'm staring at the monitor saying, what happened? But you see, we're fascinated by exceptions.

And both the accounts of Aeneas and Tabitha are exceptions. They are unnatural. What is anticipated by natural law is somehow overturned and replaced with exceptions.

Raids on nature, coherent invasions, as if another kingdom is taking over. What are the role of miracles in the early church?

[24 : 35] I'm going to accelerate because there's... I want to get to the second one because I think that's what everyone wants to get to. Much can be said, but I like to try to root it in our text here. What can we say?

Firstly, they encourage the community of believers. It is no coincidence that twice mentioned... Luke twice mentioned the community of saints in verse 32 and 41.

The people of God are encouraged by the miraculous works of God among them. It doesn't take much to think about how the early church would have received Aeneas, or how...

It doesn't require much imagination to think what it must have looked like for Peter to return Tabitha alive to the community of believers.

It's an encouragement to the believers. Secondly, it serves as a witness to the unbelieving community, and it actually brings some to faith.

[25 : 33] Verse 35 and 42. It's no doubt that miracles draw attention to the message that regularly should accompany them. The signs and miracles in themselves, however, don't point to themselves.

Signs and miracles are not salvific. They are not saving. See, you and I can be tempted to think, oh, if I'm delivered from a demon, or if my physical infirmity is healed, or even if death is overturned, that everything is fine.

It's actually not totally salvific. They do not save signs in and of themselves. They do not create faith, which comes rather through a proclaimed message.

See, signs invite attention to the message. See, the miracles point to the message. The message points to the source of the miracle, namely Jesus.

Jesus being the object worthy of one's trust. The miracles take place to proliferate and validate the message. And you're going to see this in Paul. Paul does miracles and they want to make him, they believe him to be a God, yet they don't come to saving faith.

[26 : 47] Thirdly, signs authenticate the messenger, Peter. He was one of the twelve. And it's worthwhile to remember that Peter actually was doing signs and miracles long before Jesus ascended into heaven.

He was actually doing them as early as Luke chapter 9. It's not a post-Pentecost phenomenon. The signs authenticate not only that he was a legitimate messenger, but that the very message itself was legitimate and authenticated the Messiah who is being preached.

The signs are signs commending those who see and hear and experience them to consider the messenger, the message, and the Messiah. Fourthly, the signs and acts are point to or eschatological.

They point to the end. They point to the future. They point to what is promised to happen. It's no coincidence that the word used to tell Aeneas to rise and Tabitha to rise are the same word the Bible uses to describe Jesus rising.

Jesus' rising from the grave foretells a promised future, a day where none will be paralyzed, a day when none die, a day when all will rise in Christ.

[28 : 04] Fifthly, the signs demonstrate divine compassion and sympathy and mercy. Both were healed by Jesus. Both were restored. Both emblematic of God's willingness to alleviate suffering.

So how are we to think about the role of miracles today? How are we to think about the role of miracles today? The way I frame the question presumes I hold on to a belief in the miraculous today, which I do.

There are two ends of the spectrum. There are ones who say it no longer happens. It cannot happen. It will not happen. It only happened in those days. There are some that say it must always happen, and we should always look for it, and it happens all the time.

I operate somewhere in between, and you'll find Christians all over will hold different beliefs, but I want to give us some tools for discernment.

Firstly, not all Christians perform miracles. It's interesting that in both Lydda and Joppa, there were already Christians. There were already Christian communities, yet Aeneas remained paralyzed, and Tabitha remained dead until Peter came.

[29 : 28] It required Peter for some reason. Not all Christians perform miracles. Secondly, they are publicly verifiable. There are witnesses to these things.

It is something that can be verified and attested to by more than one individual. Thirdly, signs and wonders, particularly miracles, have an unpredictable nature to them.

Allow me to explain. Aeneas wasn't looking to be healed, at least not according to the text, yet he received it. There was no indication that he was, that was even an option.

He was content in his condition until Peter came along. He sought no miracle, yet received it. Tabitha's community following her death boldly sought a miracle and received it.

Tabitha's death put her in the presence of the Lord, and, I mean, I can only imagine she's in the presence of the Lord and then gets pulled back. She is thrust back onto earth. You have Simon the magician seeking miracles and he's denied it.

[30 : 33] And you might begin to think of Jesus' lines as the crowds were increasing. Jesus says to them, this generation is an evil generation.

It seeks a sign. It seeks signs. And they're rebuked for it. Stephen was sentenced to death and he was not spared. Surely the Lord could have spared Stephen.

If he could teleport Philip, he could definitely teleport Stephen. But he didn't. Stephen died. Ananias and Sapphira were alive and well.

Visibly they seemed to be contributors to the Christian community. Yet they died. They were not spared. They were generous donors, financial backers of the cause, yet the Lord took their lives.

Tabitha was dead for a day and raised back to life. So you begin to see that the Spirit of God works in ways that are not fully disclosed. He does what he pleases.

[31 : 35] Jesus himself said the Spirit is like the wind, not visible, unpredictable, but its effects are traceable. Some will pray and be healed. Some will pray and remain sick.

Some will be forever confined to a bed. Some may, by the mercy of God, walk again. All that to say, signs and wonders and miracles have this unpredictable nature to them. fourthly, don't place your hope in the miraculous.

Like I mentioned, miracles don't induce faith. They do not secure eternal life. It's interesting later on that the Apostle Paul, which we will look into his life more and more, he does some incredible things.

But later on, as he's crafting this letter to the church at Rome, and it's fascinating how he tells them how faith arrives in a person.

He does not say, hey, go to the nearest miracle worker. He does not say, go seek signs and wonders, the spectacular. Instead, he says, listen, faith comes by hearing and hearing the Word of Christ.

[32 : 53] He doesn't encourage the believers to pursue signs and wonders. He encourages them to listen or hear the Word of Christ. And isn't that how you came to faith?

That's how I came to faith. I didn't see the heavens in open and talk to me. I wasn't paralyzed and raised back up. It was the slow, steady prodding of the Word of God chiseling and sanding away my stone cold heart.

It's appropriate Jesus' words here to Doubting Thomas. Blessed are those who have not seen yet believe. Five miscellaneous things.

Be wary of the human, or not five, fifthly, a few miscellaneous things. Be wary of human mediums. mediums. You may, and I think we do, encounter people who do miracles for popularity.

We may see those who do it for profit. However, miracles in the Bible are always a platform to preach. Well, I see that in the passage because there's people turning to the Lord and people believing in the Lord.

[34 : 07] The chapter ends so abruptly. And Peter, he stayed in Joppa for many days, one Simon, a tanner. And I just imagine, Luke didn't make much of the crowd seeking Simon Peter.

Can you imagine if you host Peter the Apostle who just raised the paralytic and raised someone from the dead? If you're Simon the Tanner, you know how many people are banging on your door? I want to see Peter.

I need to see Peter. But Luke doesn't mention any of that. He actually belittles the messenger in some sense. Well, I need to conclude.

See, we're fascinated with the paralytic walking and the deceased rising. Two exceptions to the natural order.

And it's interesting to consider what will transpire next week and how it links to these two cities, Lydda and Joppa. people have noted that they move with increasing detail.

[35 : 17] In the episode with Aeneas, not much is mentioned. All of a sudden you get to Tabitha, more and more is mentioned. And next week we'll find a whole lot is mentioned, actually mentioned twice. And the details increase.

And I can't help but wonder if the scale of the miracle increases, miraculous increases as well. Because the first miracle is the healing of a paralytic.

Eight years in, or eight years, like, ah, that's pretty good. Oh, a dead person, one day? Ah, maybe signs can do it. Maybe, you know, a defibrillator can bring someone back.

And you're asking, what can possibly be greater than bringing someone dead back to life? I think Luke is trying to show us next week the greatest miracle of all.

It is the promise of what God will do with you and I. See, we marvel that a paralytic walks. We're astounded that emotionless body is raised alive and restored.

[36 : 27] Yet, we overlook this fact that the God of heaven has given humanity an invitation to spend eternity with Him.

You may be looking for a miracle, but you've ignored the fact that the gospel message went from Jerusalem to Lydda to Joppa to Hyde Park seeking you.

See, the greatest, see, the message that Jesus is enthroned and He's appointed as a judge and you know your plea, you are guilty. You are unable to live out the standard that you even set out for yourself.

You can't even achieve it. And the exhortation of Acts is, though you've rejected the rule of God in your life, in thought, speech, motive, and action, He comes to you again and again and you know how far He's come?

Not 25 miles, not even 2,500 miles. He's come from heaven to earth and He lands here. And Acts tells you that all who believe in Him receive the forgiveness of their sins through His name.

[37 : 46] And may God grant you faith this morning, whether it is born anew or it is rekindled in your heart. Turn to the Lord. believe in Jesus.

That is the greatest miracle you will ever experience. Do not marvel that paralytics walk. Do not marvel that even the dead are raised. Marvel in the astounding fact that though we are sinners, we can be saved.

And I can assure you, I will sing with the hymn writer, when my poor lisping, stammering tongue lies silent in the grave, then in a nobler, sweeter song, I'll sing Thy power to save.

And if you are buried in the deepest ocean or buried just six feet in the ground, I can assure you that in Christ He will raise you and you will stand to your feet and you will walk to His face or walk or fall.

Amen. For all eternity, this is the grand exception.

[39 : 00] This is the raid on nature. This is the coherent invasion of God, laying claim on the undeserving, wretched, pitiable, blind, poor, naked, impoverished, crippled, dead soul.

And He secures them for Himself. May this be the great miracle you're looking for. May it be so. May it be so.

Father, we come to You and we thank You that there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Jesus' veins and sinners who are plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

And Father, we want to see, we want exceptions. And Lord, You've given us one. And Father, would You draw, You said as we raise Your Son up, You will draw men to Yourself, men and women.

And so Father, I pray that as the Bible, as You make much of Your Son, that You would draw men and women to Him because it is Your business to make much of Jesus.

[40 : 36] We ask these things for His namesake. Amen. Amen. God