

Preparing Peter

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Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 00] Well, if you'd turn in your Bibles to page 121 at the back part of your Bibles, we're going to be looking at Acts 9, 32 through 43.

And we're just continuing on in this marvelous book that shows how the Gospel goes forth into the world right from the very beginning. And as you're turning there, I wonder how many of you saw the interview that Mel Gibson had with Diane Sawyer last Monday night.

It was a remarkable interview, really, and extraordinary things that were said in a very highly rated television interview.

And I would probably be remiss, since David's here, in not mentioning that Mel is an Australian. Even though he speaks English in his movies, we could understand his interview on Monday night.

And what he was saying was that the beginnings of this film, the passion about the last hours of Jesus' life, really had its beginnings in a time of spiritual bankruptcy, as he put it.

[1 : 15] He said that he was highly addicted to a number of different drugs, everything from smoking to drinking to harder drugs.

And interestingly, he said, he said, that was my thing, addiction. Everybody has their thing. And he's actually right. They are all expressions of our rebellious nature, of the effect of sin on our life.

But he said that he had reached such a low point that he considered jumping out a window. And he said, I was looking down thinking, man, this is easier this way. You have to be mad.

You have to be insane. You have to despair in that way. But that is the height of spiritual bankruptcy. There's nothing left. But of course, instead of doing that, he turned to the Bible, he said.

And ultimately, that's what inspired him to do this movie. He said to Diane, I think I just hit my knees. I just said, help, you know. And then I began to meditate on it.

[2 : 18] And that's in the gospel. I read all those again. And I remember reading bits of them when I was younger. Pain is the precursor to change, which is great, Gibson said.

That's the good news. And he went on to tell us what the good news was. He said, you know, in response to all the publicity about it being anti-Semitic, he said, no.

He said, this movie is about faith and hope and love and forgiveness. It's about Christ's sacrifice. Jesus Christ, he said, was beaten for our iniquities.

He was wounded for our transgressions. And by his wounds, we are healed. That's the point of the film. It's not about the blame game.

Now, that was a powerful testimony. You know, here's this man that's lost and ready to take his life. And Jesus Christ reached into his life and caused him to cry out to God on his knees for help.

[3 : 18] And as a result, Jesus healed his relationship with God. And that resulted in spiritual, relational, emotional, and psychological healing for him and his family as well.

You know, he's not perfect now, but there's a radical reorientation in his life. He should probably go back to redo some of his movies. You know, probably Mad Max would be changed to Glad Max.

And road warrior would be prayer warrior. But there's not many people who would publicly testify that Jesus' death was a sacrifice. That he was wounded for our transgressions.

By his wounds, we are healed. There's this deep change in Mel. A change in orientation. He recognized at the bottom that there is a direct relationship between the living Jesus, who he was portraying in that movie, and his own life.

That Jesus' death on the cross brought him healing today. And you know, we saw that in the last two sermons that David was talking about Paul. This extraordinary, real, powerful connection of the living Jesus with his life.

[4 : 28] That turned his life upside down by the power of the gospel. And today, in the reading, we turn back to Peter again. And in this account, we see two healings.

And in those two healings, we see the power of the gospel in a very direct way. So that Jesus' own ministry is mirrored in Peter's.

It was a unique thing. A man is raised from being paralyzed. And a woman is raised from the dead. Something unique to him as an apostle.

To show that he had the very authority of Christ. That he was carrying Jesus' own ministry into the world. Very, very important. Because in the next chapter, he is going to experience a fundamental change.

Is that very controversial? He is going to take the gospel to the Gentiles. It has to be known that it's Jesus' own ministry that's doing that. And that's why this unique healing, these two unique healings.

[5 : 29] And you see this wonderful thing about Peter, too. That sometimes we forget. Peter was an undependable kind of person. He was up and down when he was with Jesus. He was somebody who could on one moment say, I'm going to die for you.

And on the next, tell the person who accuses him of knowing Jesus, I don't even know this man. But now, Peter is this strengthening and steadying presence for all the churches he visited.

You know, he's been in Jerusalem during the time of the toughest persecution. He stayed there to strengthen the church. And now that there's peace, he goes out to what's now Tel Aviv, out near the Mediterranean Sea.

And he visits the towns where churches have been planted during the persecution. And Philip has gone up and started churches. And in Lydda and Jaffa, there is this preparation that happens in Peter's life to show the world, to show him as well, that there is a direct connection between the risen life, risen Jesus and his new life.

And so there's a question really that's answered if we look at these verses. And that is, whose ministry is Peter about? And of course, very clearly, Jesus tells him and the church, it's Jesus' ministry.

[6 : 48] It is his ministry. And so there are these two identical, almost, healings that take place. The first is Aeneas. Here's a paralyzed man that stands up.

And you see that in verse 34. That was just, what comes to mind when you read that is Jesus healing the paralyzed man who's lowered from the roof.

And the same words, take up your bed, get up, and walk. Identical, identical healings. And then there's the account of Tabitha, a little further down.

So if you just turn the page, you see in verse 40 that Peter, just like Jesus did with the daughter of Jairus, puts people out of the room. And he goes in and he prays for this woman.

And she gets up from the dead. She rises, literally, from the dead. And he uses the same exact words. It's almost with just the change of one letter. He says, Tabitha.

[7 : 50] And in Aramaic, it would be, come. Tabitha, come. Get up. And Jesus said to the young girl, Talitha, come. So the words would be echoing.

Probably in his mind as well. This is Jesus' own ministry. It's an unmistakable connection with what Jesus had done. And I think that what must have gone through Luke's mind and Peter's mind after those words were done was this promise that Jesus had made to his disciples where Peter was listening.

And Jesus said in John, I tell you that anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.

And this is what Luke is teaching us in this passage. You know, that the power of the gospel is so great that there is a direct connection between what Peter is doing and what Jesus did.

He's actually continuing Jesus' ministry. And Luke doesn't write these two miracles just to show us how great Peter is. He does it to show how powerful Jesus' ministry is.

[9 : 00] That it would continue through Peter and into the present. And that's why, if you look at verse 34, Peter first speaks to Aeneas and he says, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you.

Jesus Christ saves you. In the Greek. And then he commands him to arise and make your bed and immediately he rose. What Peter is making very clear to this man is that Jesus is doing the ministry.

That it's Jesus who is healing and saving Aeneas and transforming him. It is Jesus' power. It is Jesus' good news that has broken into this person's life.

And that's why in verse 35, many in the town turn to the Lord. They turn to Jesus. They don't follow Peter.

They follow Jesus. So Luke tells us about this extraordinary healing to teach us. Not simply to make us marvel at what's happened. Peter is the example to us, the church, that we are to be about Jesus' work.

[10 : 10] And so when Jesus said anyone, there is an uncomfortable sort of directness to each of us in our lives. When he says anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing, he is saying he will carry out his ministry through you and through me.

We are the anyone that he is talking about. And I think that the biggest block to us doing Jesus' work is simply thinking that it is our work.

There was a person in my last church who prayed for me very, very faithfully. She said she prayed every day. And she told me the content of one of her prayers once.

It's sort of looking into her prayer time. She said, I pray two things for you often. That God will keep you from conceit. And that God will keep you from despair as well.

And this was actually a kind prayer. She was praying that I wouldn't get full of myself. But also that I wouldn't get down on myself. Because things looked overwhelming. Or they weren't going the way that I wanted.

[11 : 13] And it's a great prayer. Because she's actually praying. That I would remember that it is not my own ministry. But it is Jesus' ministry that I am continuing.

It's his gospel that I'm sharing. It is his power that transforms lives and changes hearts and minds. And when things don't look like they're going well. It is his timing that he is working through.

And we should never let the two great obstacles of ego. Or our feelings of unworthiness. Stop us from serving Jesus. And interestingly in this passage.

I believe that Tabitha is a very good example for us. About what it means to continue Jesus' ministry. She is a wealthy woman. And Luke calls her a disciple.

And he emphasizes that. It's an important word. It's used by the twelve who follow Jesus. The first ones who are with Jesus. And here Luke is saying she is one of those.

[12 : 14] Now she could have felt very comfortable with her wealth. And said I'm not going to get involved in ministry. Or she could have allowed the culture to tell her she couldn't do Jesus' work. Be a minister on his behalf.

Because she was a woman. But the gospel is so powerful. That it made her into Jesus' own minister. She was a disciple. And she did his work.

And that's why verse 36 says that she was full of good works. And her acts of charity. Her giving money. Is what she was known for. And because of her wealth.

She was able to have the time to do a wide range of good things. For the church. And for those in need. And if you just jumped over to 39.

You see that all the widows stood beside him weeping. And showing the tunics and other garments. Which Dorcas made while she was with them. She especially gave clothing to widows.

[13 : 13] Who were the most vulnerable in that society. And finally because of her wealth. She was very effective at using her money. To cause the cause.

The spread of the gospel to go forward. And to meet the needs of people in that church. It was truly an extension of Jesus' ministry. Because the physical and the emotional care of God's people.

And the giving of money to strengthen the ministry of the church. Is critical. Back then and today. It's critical for the spread of the gospel. And so Tabitha shows us.

That the gospel is no respecter of status. Or role. Or education. Or sex. Or wealth. And that's why Luke makes sure that we know.

She was a disciple. Her life is the example of how Jesus will. Do his work through everyone. Who has faith in him.

[14 : 11] Everyone. Who knows the gospel. The power of the gospel in their life. Is a minister. And the book of Acts shows us. That very early on in the church.

There are already a variety of people. And ways of doing Jesus' work. The role of the apostles was at times. To perform these extraordinary miracles. Miracles. But Stephen.

And Philip. And Tabitha. Are very different people. And their ministries are varied. Some were preaching. Some were serving tables. Some were praying. Some were giving money.

Some were doing one-to-one evangelism. Or having a very powerful evangelistic ministry. And some were planting churches. Some were helping the needy in the church. And some were strengthening.

And encouraging the fellowship. Very different ministries. But all of them. Had one thing in common. People were coming to know Jesus. Through their work.

[15 : 09] And that's how we know. That that work. Was Jesus' work. That they were doing. What Jesus was doing. They were following the commission. That Jesus had given to all of us.

To make disciples. To make followers. Of him. And I want to close. By looking at a challenge. And a deep encouragement.

That this passage leaves for us. The first one is a question. It's a question that naturally comes out of this passage. Do you believe. That you are called by Jesus.

To do his work. Do you believe. That there is a direct connection. Between Jesus' own ministry. And ours. Not that we will necessarily be raising people from the dead.

But that we will be bringing people to know him. As the one who saves. Who heals. Utterly and completely. Through the resurrection of the dead. It's very interesting.

[16 : 06] That twice during this little passage that we heard. Luke calls Christians saints. He calls them holy ones. People who are set apart.

For a purpose. A special purpose. In fact Peter says later on in his letter. That you all. Are a royal priesthood. Who are God's chosen one.

And a priesthood. Is a group of people that represent God. And do his work. And the royal priesthood. Means that we. Who have Jesus as our king.

Serve him. And speak about him. And represent him. To those around us. And so Tabitha's life. And Peter's life.

Show us. The example of what it means. To have a purpose in our life. It is. For everyone who has faith. To actually do. Jesus work. To serve the gospel.

[17 : 00] And to act on that calling. And to know that there's a variety of ways. That Jesus calls us to do it. And finally. Secondly. There is an encouragement.

After that challenge. The gospel. The gospel we are called to serve. Is the power of God. For salvation. And we know that. The two healings had a purpose.

Not just to bless. One man. And one woman. But those. Those healings. The healings were signs of salvation. Of what it is all about. So that as powerful.

As it was for Aeneas. To finally. Be able to feel his hands. To be released from the prison. Of his muscles. It is a far more powerful act of Jesus.

To release a person from the prison. Of their own sins. And their own idolatry. And as powerful as it is. That Tabitha was raised from death. It is a sign of a deeper.

[17 : 56] Spiritual healing. Where Jesus gives. A second new life. To the spiritually dead. And he gives the gifts. Of a resurrection body. That will never die. As an inheritance.

To every believer. The greatest work that God does. In verses 35 and 40. Or in verses 35 and 43. Very simply. Many turned.

To the Lord Jesus. Many believed. In the Lord Jesus. And I think that we need always. To know how powerful that gospel is. We can never get sick.

Of hearing. The power of God. Working in this world. This way. Because. There is something. That can be deceiving. About the way the gospel works. There is a humility.

That surrounds it. Mel Gibson. Knelt down. With nobody around. Kneeling. At the bottom. Of his. Life experience. Nobody saw it.

[18 : 51] It was a very humble. Place. Where God's powerful work. Happened. Peter. Told the paralyzed man. To make his bed. You know. How a mundane. A thing. He could ask him to do.

To do Jesus work. Make your bed. And then Peter. Kneels. Alone. By Tabitha's. Body. Praying to God. This expression. Of humility. That we actually do.

In our service. In our liturgy. To kneel. And pray. A very humble. Sort of act. And yet. God's power. Mighty. In that place. God's power.

And I think that much of our own ministry of the gospel. Will be humble. It won't be spectacular. And flashy. But the gospel. Will always bring the powerful work of salvation.

With it. You will be about Jesus' own ministry. And receive his own power. To serve. When you pray. When you welcome people. When you teach in Sunday school.

[19 : 46] In the giving of your money. In your conversations. About faith. In your care for the needy. In our church. In your conversation. With your co-worker.

Who is asking questions. About God. Or in your preparation. For Bible study. Because this is Jesus' ministry. It will result.

In hearts. And minds. Turning to Jesus. And believing in him. And probably like Peter. In fact. I know. Like Peter. It will involve your own transformation.

As well. That's the great work of healing. That this mission. That is the mission of St. John's. And really the mission of God's people. Throughout the world.

So we join in Tabitha's ministry. We join in Peter's ministry. As we serve Jesus. In Jesus' ministry. As we serve the gospel. May God give us grace.

[20 : 41] To have faith. That our work. That we do in Jesus' name. Is truly. Is truly. Jesus' work. And his ministry. Amen.