

Continuing Jesus Ministry

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[0 : 00] Please sit down. Well now, I wonder if you would turn back there to Acts chapter 9 on page 121.

And I wonder what you make of these two miracles with the Apostle Peter as the key player. Their miracles themselves are simple enough.

Peter, one of the twelve apostles, is the leading Christian of the time. The church is having peace as we read from verse 31.

And so Peter goes out from Jerusalem, both preaching the gospel to those who haven't heard and travelling to new churches which have been established by other people to encourage them to grow in the gospel.

And he comes toward the coast and stops in a town called Lydda where there are a group of Christians who are meeting. Likely they had come to faith through the ministry of Philip.

[1 : 18] And in verse 32, these people are called saints and not because they are particularly perfect or sinless or holy but because all those who have trusted in Christ in the New Testament, all those who've had their sins forgiven are regarded as saints.

You know that. I mean, we've said that before, haven't we? Saints are not just people in stained glass windows. In the New Testament, we are holy.

We've been set aside by what God has done in Christ. And in this church, in this group of Christians in Lydda, there's one man named Aeneas and he has a problem.

He's paralysed. It could be he's been paralysed for eight years. It could be he's been paralysed since he was aged eight. But he can't walk and he can't work and he can't feed himself.

And there's no medical help. There's no hospitals or ambulances or wheelchairs. And I take it from the reference here that he is being cared for by his Christian brothers and sisters.

[2 : 28] And in verse 34, we read, And Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed.

And immediately he rose. And the people in the area have never seen anything like it. And so they turn to the Lord. And there's a second miracle.

We then go to the coast to Joppa, about 15 kilometers away. And there's another group who are also called saints in verse 41. And one of the saints is a woman named Tabitha, who is like a spiritual mother to many in the church.

She's a wealthy woman who owns a large house. And in her house is a room, which is called an upper room, which is probably where the church meets.

And she is a woman full of generosity and full of practical help. She sees somebody in need. And she either supplies it herself or makes sure that person has got it.

[3 : 42] And there's a group of people in the congregation in special need who are widows, who don't have money and have very little hope. And Tabitha has particularly cared for them.

Out of her own wealth, she has made clothes and given clothes to them. She's like a sponsor, a benefactor for the congregation. And there are, of course, women like this here at St. John's.

And one day we may need their upper room to meet in as well. But that's another story. That is why it was such a blow when she falls sick and then quickly dies only a matter of days later.

It's a disaster for the community. And so they gather and weep. And they hear that Apostle Peter is down the road in Lydda. And so they send some people to come and get Peter.

And when he arrives, he sends all the mourners out of the upper room. He kneels down and he prays. And he says to the dead body, Tabitha, rise.

[4 : 49] And she does. He calls the people back and presents her to them. And there's great joy and happiness. And when the news of this spreads, many in Joppa believe in the Lord.

Two very simple stories. But I wonder what you make of them. One miracle for a man, one miracle for a woman, a healing of a sick man and the raising of a dead woman.

What do they mean? Why are they written here? What help do they bring us? And I think the most helpful thing to say to start with is that I think we need to read the miracles in the book of Acts in the same way that we read miracles in the Gospels.

For miracles are signs of something deeper. And these two miracles are placed here to point to three deeper realities.

And the first is our great salvation. You see, there's a very particular word used in both miracles at the very moment of the miracle.

[6 : 06] Did you notice that the same word that Peter speaks to the paralysed man Aeneas? He speaks to the dead body of Tabitha in verse 34 and verse 40.

It's exactly the same word used of God raising Jesus from the dead. Rise. And both of these miracles are signs of the salvation that Jesus brings in bringing life to the dead and strength to the paralysis, which is so much part of our lives.

In other words, the physical healing of Aeneas and the raising of Tabitha are like little thumbnail pictures of the great salvation brought by Jesus Christ.

Both Aeneas and Tabitha are beyond human help. And what happens to them is a perfect portrayal of what happens to us. When we turn to Christ and place our faith in him, he literally raises us to life.

He gives us new birth. And his grace enters our life and heals the paralysis of our will so that we choose him and choose what is right.

[7 : 20] The miracles are not the main point. They never are really. The miracles are not the focus of the apostles' ministry. I don't know if you've ever noticed this or not. If the main purpose of the apostles was to heal people and to jet around Israel emptying hospitals, if that was their aim, if that was Jesus' aim, then they were a complete failure.

No, something else is happening. These miracles are lovely signs of the reality of the forgiveness of sins and the new life that we have in Christ.

That's the first. That's what the miracle points to, the great salvation. But there is a second thing they point to and it is the authority of the apostle Peter.

See, as we just talked about those miracles, do they remind you of any other miracles? They do. I mean, there is a deliberate echo of the miracles of Jesus Christ.

Back in Luke chapter 5, Jesus heals a paralyzed man. In Luke chapter 7, Jesus raises a young woman who has died to life and the very words that Jesus speaks to that young woman are Talitha cum and if Peter was speaking in Aramaic, he would have said to Tabitha, Tabitha cum and the echo is very important because as a chosen apostle, Peter is continuing the ministry of Jesus.

[9 : 00] Like Jesus, Peter tells the man on the map to rise up. Like Jesus, he tells the woman who has died to rise up and he uses Jesus' words. It is to demonstrate that he is a real apostle, that his words carry the authority of Jesus.

The fact that he is able to do these miracles are signs of a true apostle. Now, I wonder if you would, just for a moment, put your finger in Acts 9 and turn to the right to Hebrews chapter 2.

It's on page 203. Hebrews chapter 2. In Hebrews chapter 2, we read about the purpose of the miracles of the apostles.

In verse 2, speaking of the Old Testament, if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, verse 3, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation, i.e. that's been brought in Jesus Christ?

It was declared at first by the Lord, by Jesus himself. Then, it was attested to us by those who heard him, speaking of the apostles. Then, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will.

[10 : 33] In other words, the miracles and wonders, the signs that the apostles did, are God himself bearing witness to the great salvation that they preach.

These miracles in the book of Acts are God saying, you can believe what the apostles say about the forgiveness of sins. If you listen to them, you're listening to me.

If you believe them, you believe me. And if you reject them, you reject me. You see, this is where the miracles are pointing. Not just to the great salvation, but also to the apostles' word.

And finally, and thirdly, if we go back to Acts, the miracles, of course, point to our great saviour, Jesus Christ himself. Because the miracles are not here to demonstrate how terrific Peter is in the end, but how terrific Jesus is.

Peter has no personal authority over healing, disease, or death. Only Jesus Christ holds the keys of death and hell. And this is drawn attention to, in verse 34, as he's facing Aeneas, Peter doesn't say, Aeneas, I'm going to heal you.

[11 : 51] He says, Jesus Christ heals you. And when he comes to the house of Tabitha, he kneels down and prays to the Lord because he knows only the Lord can raise the dead.

And after the first miracle, when people turn to repentance, they don't turn to repentance and place their trust in Peter, but in the Lord and the same at Joppa.

And I think we are meant to see here again that when Jesus rose from the dead and went back into heaven, he doesn't just go off and leave us to get on with the job.

He is here present and he is living and active. And he continues to bring spiritual life and salvation through the words of the apostles.

That's why I think these miracles are very important for us as we begin 2005 together. They point us to the Lord Jesus Christ, to his living presence with us.

[12 : 57] They point us to the apostles' words where week by week we meet Jesus. They point us to the great salvation that comes to us from Jesus Christ and through the apostles' words.

And there are so many things vying for our attention and our hope and our trust. But there is no one who is more wonderful, there is no one who is more worthy of our trust and our love and our worship than Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ alone has died for us. He alone has risen from the dead. He alone holds the keys of death and hell. He alone offers us peace with God, forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

And I don't know what this year holds for you, but it would do you well as it does me well to pay much closer attention to this great salvation. And we need to ask him to help us to take the risk of listening more carefully and obeying him more fully, turning away from every cherished idol, placing our trust in him with all ourselves, our hope in him, asking him that we might love him with increasing fire for his honour and for his glory.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[15 : 24] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

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[20 : 24] Amen. Amen.

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Amen.