



Walking Through the Scripture Together

May 18 - 24, 2008

Acts 9:32-43

Small moves

Text Acts 9:32-43 (TNIV)

32 As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. **33** There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. **34** "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. **35** All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. **37** About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. **38** Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

40 Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. **41** He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. **42** This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. **43** Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Thought

One of the glories of Luke's writing is that he can take us, in a couple of strides, from the enormous, earth-shattering, history changing moments like the conversion of Saul to a small, intimate scene: an upstairs room in a poor home, filled with the knitting and sewing that had occupied the good lady who has just died. This too, of course, plays its part in the larger whole, since what Luke is doing here is to bring us back into Peter's story, having inserted Saul with appropriate and violent suddenness into the narrative of the Jerusalem apostles. And he is getting us ready, in particular, for another long view, as Peter, having found his way down to Joppa, will be called from there on another and more widely significant errand.

But there is no such thing as a small errand in the kingdom of God. If all we knew about Peter was that he had healed the crippled Aeneas, and had raised Dorcas from the dead, that would be enough to know that the power of God was working through him; and perhaps these apparently smaller stories were told here by Luke to remind anyone who might be disposed to think otherwise that Peter was where he was proper business from the Lord, the gospel business of healing and encouraging and building up God's people.

These two healings, unlike the one which occurred in chapter 3, seem to have provoked no controversy. Nobody started an inquisition against Peter because he had used the name of Jesus and had once again discovered its great power. But then, he wasn't standing beside the Temple. Things had moved on. These healings are signs of hope, bringing people to faith...

(Then) there is Dorcas herself, who stands as it were for all those unsung heroines who have got on with what they can do best and have done it to the glory of God... We have to assume that were dozens in the early years and thousands in later years, who, like her, lived their lives in faith and hope, bearing the sorrows of life no doubt as well as celebrating its joys, finding in the small acts of service to others a fulfillment of the gospel within their own sphere, using traditional skills to the glory of God. Luke is right to draw our eyes down to the small-scale and immediate, in case we should ever forget that these are the people who form the heart of the church, while the apostles and evangelists go about making important decisions, getting locked up, stoned or shipwrecked, preaching great sermons, writing great letters and generally being great and good all over the place.

Acts for Everyone

Small Group Discussion Guide

Lean In

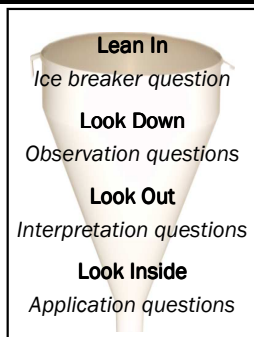
- What small act of kindness really touched you recently?

Look Down / Look Out

- Why does Peter come to the town of Lydda? Describe the healing that took place. Why Aeneas? What effect did his healing have on the surrounding area?
- Tabitha/Dorcas “was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor” (we learn later that she was quite the seamstress). How was she different from the Pharisees Jesus was dining with in Luke 11?
- When Tabitha dies, what do the believers do? Why do you think they are calling on Peter? Do you think they wanted Peter to do her funeral or that maybe they were expecting something more? Why?
- Put yourself in that upper room — what do you see and hear? Why does Peter ask everyone to leave? Describe how the miracle takes place. How did this affect the believers and the town?

Look Inside

- Aeneas was “paralyzed and bedridden for eight years.” Where might you have been experiencing paralysis in your life? Where in your life would you like to get out of bed? How can you let others help you?
- Tabitha/Dorcas was literally surrounded by her legacy when the widows were weeping and showing the coats and clothes Tabitha had made. What legacy are you leaving for yourself? How would you like to be remembered?



Family Discussion Guide

Day One Acts 9:32-35; Hebrews 12:12-13

Where in your life might you feel “stuck” and unable to move right now? How can others help?

Day Two Acts 9:36; Luke 11:37-41

What gifts and talents do you think you have that God can use to be a blessing to other people?

Day Three Acts 9:37-38; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

What are your thoughts and feelings about death and dying? Is death something really scary to you? How does knowing Jesus change the way we see death?

Day Four Acts 9:39-41; John 14:12-14

What is the scariest part of praying for someone who is sick? Can you imagine yourself praying like Peter that God will raise someone from the dead? Why does God heal some people (and even raise some from the dead) and not others?

Day Five Acts 9:39-43

Whether it’s sewing like Tabitha or praying like Peter, how do you think God is calling you to impact your world?

Looking Closer

The flow of Acts 9 through 12

In his portrayal of the gradual widening of the Christian mission from its strictly Jewish beginnings to its ultimate Gentile outreach, Luke presents in this third panel three episodes of the Gospel’s advance:

- (1) the ministry of Peter in the maritime plain of Palestine (9:32-43),
- (2) the conversion of a Roman centurion and his friends at Caesarea (10:1-11:18), and
- (3) the founding of the church at Antioch of Syria (11:19-30).

Two notes are sounded in these episodes of advance. First, the Gospel was now spreading into areas more distant from Jerusalem than before. The second, and undoubtedly the more important, has to do with the attitude of the converts and that of the missionaries. Then, before moving on to speak of the distinctive advances of the Gospel within the Gentile world through the ministry of his hero Paul, Luke again returns to an account of the circumstances at Jerusalem and gives two vignettes of God’s continued working on behalf of his people there (12:1-23). Luke seems to be trying to make the point that though his interest is in tracing the movement of the early Christian mission from Jerusalem to Rome, his readers are not to assume that God was finished with Jerusalem Christianity or that his divine activity within the Jewish world had come to an end — a point all too often ignored by Christians since then.

Finally, Luke summarizes the material in this section with the following statement: “But the word of God continued to increase and spread” (12:24).

Luke’s rationale for the inclusion of Peter’s miracles at Lydda and Joppa has often been debated. Most likely he had two goals in mind. The vignettes of the healing of Aeneas and the raising of Dorcas shift the focus of Luke’s narrative from Jerusalem to the west country of Palestine, thereby setting the stage for the conversion of Cornelius at Caesarea. Luke may also be suggesting that with Peter’s ministry in the maritime plain, the evangelization of Palestine was completed and it was therefore time to look farther afield.

details, details...

He came down to visit the believers in the town of Lydda

Lydda was an important commercial center, located twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem, at the crucial intersection of the highways from Egypt to Syria and from coastal Joppa to Jerusalem.

“Jesus Christ heals you”

Peter’s words, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat,” express in Greek the idea that “this moment Jesus Christ heals you.” Aeneas responded immediately to Peter’s command. News of his healing spread throughout Lydda and northward into the Plain of Sharon (the largest of the maritime plains of northern Palestine, stretching from Joppa to Mount Carmel).

There was a believer in Joppa named Tabitha

Joppa (modern Jaffa) was the ancient seaport for Jerusalem. Situated on the coast thirty-five miles northwest of the capital city and ten miles beyond Lydda, it possesses the only natural harbor on the Mediterranean between Egypt and Ptolemais (see 2Chronicles 2:16; Jonah 1:3). Its rival in NT times was Caesarea, thirty miles to the north, which Herod the Great, because the people of Joppa hated him, built into a magnificent new port city and provincial capital. At Joppa lived a woman called Tabitha (Heb.) or Dorcas (Gk.); both names mean “gazelle.”

“Tabitha, arise”

Luke tells of both Peter and Paul raising someone from the dead (and both were believers). We’ve seen Peter involved in a good number of miracles, but there’s no indication that raising people from the dead was a common feature of his ministry. You can’t help but hear in this story echoes of Jesus’ raising (perhaps his first) of Jairus’ daughter, as Jesus emptied the room and then stooped over the dead girl and said, “Talitha koum” — “Little girl, arise.” Peter saw it, now he does it.