

Bringing the Dead to Life
Acts 9:32-43

Ezekiel 37:1-14
Ephesians 2:1-10
Responsive Psalm 113

Today we are going to be finishing out chapter 9 here, where we will see that Luke returns his attention back to Peter and his ongoing ministry as he is moving further and further away from Jerusalem into Gentile territory. The book of Acts has sort of painted this picture, and Luke's writing emphasises on the outward spread of the gospel from Jerusalem. After Pentecost, and the stoning of Stephen, the trajectory of the ministry has been outward, into the larger community, and then spreading into the cities and towns of the Gentiles. And as we keep reading these accounts we see that the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the gospel of Christ is no less powerful than Jesus ministry was before the cross, and in fact through the conviction of the Holy Spirit one might say it was even more effective, for it would seem that Christianity is spreading like an unstoppable wildfire across the land.

So let us start this morning by reading our passage, Acts 9, verses 32-43. We now see Peter, as he is traveling through continuing to minister to the needs of those he comes across and God blesses him with the ability to not only heal a man who is lame and bed ridden, but to also raise a well known, and respected Christian woman from death. It is interesting that this account here that Luke reports, in many ways mirrors the same ministry of Christ himself. For Jesus as well in his ministry not only taught, but healed, and raised people from the dead. But each of those cases served a redemptive purpose, there was always a message, and a reason behind the miracles that would coincide with the message that Christ would bring. They were done to show that he was who he claimed to be, Such as in the case of the paralytic who was lowered down through the roof into the room in which Jesus taught. After Jesus healed him, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." And this statement angered the scribes and pharisees that were there as that murmured among themselves, Who is this man who can claim to forgive sins... is it not God alone who does so? But Jesus knowing their thoughts, asks...which is easier to say. Your sins are forgiven you, or rise up and walk? But I have said this so that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, then he turns to the man on the bed and says, Arise, take up your bed and walk."

The miracle served the purpose to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, that he was indeed set by God, in the power of God. If he could do the impossible by causing a man lame since birth to rise up and walk by merely speaking the words, then surely he too has the power to forgive sins. And likewise the miracles that we read this morning being performed by Peter is for the same effect, to prove and to show that the ministry of Peter, and the gospel message that he brings of the risen Messiah is indeed also from God. In these two accounts that Luke records here of Peter, it brings validation to the authenticity of Peter into the line of prophets who work signs and wonders among the people, so that they may know that Jesus is Lord, and turn from their sin and repent. We find Peter here now in Lydia, which was about 25 miles from Jerusalem Luke writes that he was journeying there to visit the saints who would have been Jewish Christians who likely were there because of the persecution that was in Jerusalem causing them to flee, or it was also possible that there were some who had come to believe through the ministry of Philip who passed through earlier on his way to Caesarea which we saw in chapter 8, verse 40 "But Phillip was found at Azotus, and passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea."

Peter comes across this man Aeneas, who has been bed ridden for 8 years. Luke does not go into any details of this man's condition, or even who this man was, or even if he himself was a follower of Christ, because ultimately it is the outcome that is the important detail. The account simply says, that Peter found him, and said to him, "Jesus the Christ heals you, arise and make your bed." And he did, he stood up, it says immediately then comes the important detail, verse 35, "So all who dwelt in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. The focus here is not on Aeneas, nor really the miracle itself, but upon it's effect in the ministry of the gospel to the people who were a witness to it. Just as with the miracles that Jesus performed, there is a redemptive purpose and meaning behind it, a lesson is learned, the gospel is preached, and unbelievers are changed having seen the authority of God over the physical ailments have believed and recognized his authority over the spiritual.

After these events we see that Peter continues his journey westward toward the coast land of the Mediterranean Sea and winds up in Joppa which is about 12 miles from Lydda. This city, despite it's close proximity to Judea seems to have been distinctly a Greek city. So Peter is now in the land of the Gentiles, having left Jerusalem and traveled here fulfilling what Jesus had said again that the word would spread throughout Jerusalem, Judea, and all the earth. Here he finds a woman that Luke classifies as disciple. The Greek word translated disciple here is *mathetria*, which simply translates to, a Christian woman. She was one who believed in Christ, and had a reputation for always doing good and helping the poor, and Luke gives us even more detail about her when he writes in verse 39 that all the widows who stood by weeping showed Peter the tunics and garments that she made. This woman was a highly respected and probably well known member of the society here in Joppa.

Luke is taking the time here in this account of Tabitha, to show that the spirit had worked through her, that she was generous with her means, and had compassion and care for the poor and the needy. As a Christian her life flowed outward the love of God to those around her making a large impact so that when she died there were many who mourned her. Luke records that while Peter was in the area, she became sick, and died and that her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. The inclusion of the washing of her body, and the placing her in an upstairs room signifies the great loss, and respect that the people had for her. Luke continues the story by saying that when the other believers in Joppa had heard that Peter was in the area, they sent 2 men quickly to fetch him and urge him to come at once. When Peter arrived, he was taken upstairs and Luke paints a very sad picture describing the mourning of the widows as the share with Peter the garments that she made.

It seems a bit odd to me at least to include such a detail, but I think what it does is that it shows the connection that she had with her community, earlier Luke recorded that she was generous to the poor and the needy, perhaps providing new clothes was one of her ministerial outreaches, for it would seem to have played a rather large part into who she was. Luke in his gospel recorded an account of Jesus being in a similar situation, chapter 8, verse 51. "When he came into the house, He permitted no one to go in except Peter, James, and John, and the father and mother of the girl. Now all wept and mourned for her, be He said, Do not weep, she is not dead, but sleeping. And they ridiculed him, knowing that she was dead. But he put them all outside, took her by the hand and called saying, Little girl, arise. Then her spirit returned and she arose immediately."

There is a lot of parallels that can be seen between these 2 accounts, except that Peter does not do this on his own authority, but rather it says, that he knelt down and prayed, it wasn't Peter, but rather God who performed the miracle through Peter. And again we see the redemptive effect it had, for it says that it became known throughout all of Joppa and many came to believe upon Jesus. Belief upon Jesus is the core meaning and purpose of these 2 miracles in the accounts we are reading today.

Showing that the power of God has not left the people, he has not been defeated at the cross, and that the ministry of his word is still effective, and still active..and in fact is even more so then before the cross. For now the Holy Spirit has come working in the hearts of these people to believe. Back when we went through the book of Mark we talked about the stark difference that the Holy Spirit made within the disciples. Throughout the gospel accounts we see records of the disciples arguing with Jesus, even when he is explicit in telling them something, such as about his own death.. they did not believe and would even chastise him for speaking in such a way. Yet as we saw in the early chapters of Acts, when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they seemed to now be able to draw connections between the old testament and what was happening now, the were able to comprehend and see the larger picture. Something that they were lacking before the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

And likewise it is the same with the gospel itself, for it is the spirit that is preparing the hearts and minds of these people to believe. The miracles are just a tool of ministry that God was using for a time to show his power among the people. It was no different as it is now, it is the believing upon Jesus Christ that saves the soul, the apostles were calling people to repentance, to belief upon the one who had been crucified for the remission of sins. Compare the use of these miracles to the ones we hear today who are claiming to perform the same. Jesus and Peter, are both lead to those who have died...it is private, and intimate, and then they both put everyone out of the room. This is not some flashy, on stage production drawing attention to themselves as we see with the so called faith healers of our day. The attention is upon the power of God, and the outcome is the spreading of belief throughout the local area. Where as the so called miracle workers of today, it is all about themselves and they put on a big show of it.

Their ministry does not bring about redemption, but usually is focused around people giving them money, they are scam artists, liars, and deceivers. God seems to have chosen to no longer use such miracles for the spreading of the gospel, now it is the mere sharing of the truth of his word that brings about a new life within an individual. Through the ministry of the holy spirit, and the sharing of the gospel God is still going about bringing the dead back to life, but it is the spiritual dead rather then the physical. And this is no less a miraculous thing then the accounts we see in scripture of Jesus healing the blind, the lame, the sick, and bringing the dead back to life. For this is exactly what has happened in each and every one of of us who believe upon him this morning. Before Christ, we to were blind.. unable to see the truth, unable to see the kingdom of God, unable to believe. We were sick in our sins, we were lame, unable to walk upright, enslaved and held down by our sinful lusts and selfish desires to seek after only that which pleased ourselves. But Christ made us able to walk with him, our sin and unbelief made us lame, but he made us able to walk in righteousness, to stand upright so that we may go and share this gospel with others.

We were dead, and he made us alive by the miracle of the new birth through his grace and mercy, which is no less miraculous then what he did for Lazerus, or for Tabitha. For we were truly dead in our sins, but he called us out, took us by the hand and said....get up, arise and believe, and we have awaken a new creature, the redeemed of God. We who were once dead, have been made alive in Christ. To walk in newness of life, no longer being blind to the word, now able to see, hear, and understand the things of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The accounts of these miracles that we have read about this morning illustrates God's sovereign power over this world, these acts are supernatural, which supersedes the laws of nature as were all such acts done by Christ, and the apostles. By a mere word, the sick are healed, and the dead rise, which is the same with the new birth...by mere words, God has chosen to redeem his people, and it is done this way so that no man can boast. Salvation is not by our power, or by our will, or by our actions but merely by the sharing of the gospel, the words of Christ and if God so chooses he will bring life to the dead through the preaching and teaching of his word.

The Miracles we see in scripture were given so that people may know that the word which is spoken is true, that with it comes the power to save. Today our resurrected lives are the miracle that shows the power of God's word. As we talked about a few weeks ago, with salvation comes a stark change, for you no longer desire that which you hated and hate what which you previously desired. And it is such a change that is seen by our families, by our friends, and those around us. The reflection of God's love flowing outward from us, is the sign and miracle of the new birth. And if this is true, if our lives are now the proof, the show of power of God's changing grace through the new birth, we should be all the more mindful in our conduct knowing that our conduct, how we interact and treat others is a direct correlation with our ministry of the Gospel. And it is in this that we are to judge, for there is no better way to root out false faith than by the measure of their conduct. If one is claiming to love and follow God, but there is no fruit pointing to such...then we know that they are liars and the truth is not in them to quote 1st John.

As this world is turning darker, as sin is becoming more and more excepted and excused, those of us who live by faith should be shining all the brighter as we stand for the truth of God's word. It would seem that more and more the gospel ministry is just as much for the so called church today as it is for the pagans, for it is ever more being revealed the darkness that is calling itself light, and the deception of Satan's hold upon the false faith. As denominations are more and more embracing sinful practices, making excuses for them, and accepting them.. and some even applauding and celebrating....it shows the darkness that has set in, even among those who claim to believe...showing that they are yet blind, and dead, in need of the one who can bring about a new life. We must stand, all the more against such false teaching and faith, as I said a few weeks ago...we are entering into a time where we can no longer merely say, repent of your sins and believe in God...for people are losing the concept of what sin even is. Having a warped and confused understanding of sin, and true expressions of love. We have come to believe in our society to love, is to accept no matter what. We must look past everything and only love. But the reality is, love doesn't accept sinful behaviors, how can you claim to love someone if you know that they are going to hell and you stand by and except the very things that is putting them there?

Do you let your kids play in traffic because that is what they desire to do? Of course not, when that kid runs toward the busy road you do all in your power to stop him, and try to make it so he never does it again. The world would say, well.. if you love him, you would accept him, sure.. he wants to play in traffic, sure it might kill him...but its his choice, and if you love him, you would let him. Sounds absurd doesn't it? But this is exactly what we are seeing today, the acceptance of sinful behaviors and life styles, the celebration of perversion and sin.

And all of these people are in danger of everlasting punishment, they are blind, and they are dead in their sins despite their claim's to any belief or faith. The ministry of the church today, seems to be to the church, for she has been infiltrated and surrounded by false teachers and hypocrites. But none of it is beyond God, for that is exactly what he is about...making the dead alive, bringing new life and redeeming the lost. So as the world seems to turn darker, as we see more and more it would seem those who even claim Christ are revealed to be just as lost as anyone else...we must determine to stand all the more, to preach all the more, and remain faithful to the only one who can bring hope and life, into this hopeless dead world.