

## God Prepared Peter for Further Ministry—Acts 9:32-43—2/22/26

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Open your Bibles to Acts 9 & let's read the passage where we pick up in our study of this history of the church—Acts 9:32-43. [READ]

Last week we studied how God prepared Saul for ministry & today we consider how God prepared Peter for further ministry.

Saul's ministry had not been extensive before this & yet Peter already had much ministry experience by this time.

So when I say God was preparing Peter for further ministry, I mean further geographically as he went beyond Jerusalem.

And I also mean further ethnically as God prepared to send him to the Gentiles with the vision in Acts 10.

But when I say that Acts 9:32-43 records God preparing Peter, what further preparation could he need?

Peter was the chief spokesman of the Apostles who had healed the man born lame in Acts 3 & preached Jesus as the source of that healing as the resurrection Lord & Christ.

Peter & John were arrested & Peter preached in Acts 4 & Peter led the church & the Apostles in Acts 5.

Acts 5:14-16 says, "*And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.*"

Then Peter & the Apostles were put in jail & an angel freed them & they kept on preaching the resurrected Jesus.

Even after being recaptured & flogged & released, Acts 5:41-42 says, "*So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.*"

So what more preparation did Peter need?—To answer that, remember what I said about verse 31 to close last week.

Acts 9:31 was a summary for the section that began in Acts 6, a progress report like others Luke gave in this book.

In that section, Peter is only mentioned in Acts 8:14-24 when he & John were sent to confirm the salvation of Samaritans.

Peter was only mentioned when the Gospel spread to a different ethnic group, to the half-Jews.

Peter & John went to represent Apostolic authority as the name of Jesus crossed boundaries & conquered foreign hearts.

But the evangelism of the Samaritans was done by Philip, who was one of the 7 men appointed to serve widows in Acts 6.

And in Acts 7 preaching to indict the Jews who rejected Jesus was done by Stephen as the first Christian martyr.

Then Acts 9 told of Saul's conversion & the prediction that he would be the one we know as Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Yet you need to know that Luke returned to Peter in this theological history because Peter was one of the original 12 Apostles & the next step in the spread of the Gospel was a huge step that needed confirmation.

God had chosen Peter as the Apostle who would confirm the salvation of the Gentiles in Christ just as he had seen it with the Jews.

Yes Paul would be the Apostle sent to the Gentiles—but Peter would be the confirming agent & as an original & lead Apostle to the Gentiles as saved the same way.

So God had to prepare Peter for that further ministry.

Acts 9:32-43 is like a bridge from the Gospel spreading to Samaritans on further to the Gospel spreading to the Gentiles in Acts 10.

As Jesus said in Acts 1:8, testimony would go from Jerusalem to all Judea & Samaria & then further to the ends of the earth.

So today we'll examine 2 encounters in Acts 9:32-43 that we'll outline as 2 ways God prepared Peter for that further ministry expansion.

I'll describe the 1<sup>st</sup> of those by saying—point #1—that God prepared Peter by continuing his miracles to exalt Jesus.

God prepared Peter for further ministry (#1) by continuing his miracles to exalt Jesus as the Christ.

By that I mean God continued what we read earlier from Acts 5 that was happening in the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

God did not stop proving Peter & his message of Jesus after Peter traveled out further beyond Jerusalem.

We see that in the context as we read verses 31-32. [READ]

After the summary statement of verse 31, verse 32 opens with kind of a meanwhile perspective, a reset to tell more details.

Verse 31 used verbs to describe an ongoing experience & verse 32 adds that it happened that Peter was traveling in that time.

Peter had traveled from Jerusalem north to Samaria in Acts 8 & then verse 32 says he was traveling through all the regions of Judea & Galilee & Samaria that were mentioned in verse 31.

His travel extended west to Lydda, a town founded by the tribe of Benjamin & called Lod, according to 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 8:12.

That trip was down in elevation to the broader coastal plain region where Peter went specifically to the saints dwelling at Lydda.

It's interesting that Luke described them as *saints*, literally 'holy ones', those set apart to God, because this was moving toward territory that was increasingly mixed with Gentiles.

Gentiles were not holy, not set apart to God, & ceremonially not clean to approach God for worship in the Temple as closely as Jews could—that's you & me as born sinners & also mostly as Gentiles.

Ananias had used this term 'saints' in verse 13 to speak of how much harm Saul had done to Jesus' followers in Jerusalem.

So it was becoming a description of Christians, of those set apart as holy to God through the atoning work of Jesus on their behalf.

Let's remember that—when we speak of the Gospel spreading, we're speaking of the Good News that God cleanses sinners.

We are all defiled spiritually, unfit to approach God because of our sins apart from a sacrifice to pay sin's penalty to wash those sins away.

But Jesus' death provided access to God—& that can be true of anyone—even Gentiles, those outside God's chosen nation.

Just as vessels were ceremonially cleansed for use in the Temple, so believers are spiritually cleansed to be holy to the Lord as saints.

And the saints living in Lydda had heard the Gospel in travels to Jerusalem or from Philip when he preached in this region.

As in other regions, Peter went to train those believers & preach Jesus.

As verse 31 said, the church was being strengthened & also growing in numbers & Peter's itinerant ministry aided that.

Peter was a representative of Jesus sent out as an Apostle to teach in this time when the NT had not yet been written.

In that context, further confirmation of Christ's messengers may not have been necessary.

Everyone who heard of Jesus heard of *His* miracles & of the miracles when the Spirit came & further miracles by Peter & the Apostles.

And from what we covered last week, we know it had been at least 3 years since Jesus had ascended & the church had begun.

So if the preaching of Jesus was merely to reach Jews & Samaritans, then at this point no more miraculous signs would have been needed.

But the Gospel was going to the Gentiles & God was preparing Peter by continuing his miracles as he traveled further.

Read verse 33 to see the opportunity Peter found. [READ]

It's not clear whether this man Aeneas was a believer or not.

Since Peter went to the saints at Lydda, some assume he was; but he was not described as one like Tabitha in verse 35 & others elsewhere.

Calling him *a certain man* may indicate he was not a believer.

We cannot be certain, but what is certain is that Aeneas was lying down on his mat or pallet or bed as paralyzed or disabled.

One possible translation is that this was his condition from 8 years old, but more likely he was in this condition for 8 years.

Either way, it was a long time & he had no remedy or cure or fix.

No amount of rest or therapy or orthotic devices could help.

This was not an injury that needed a splint or cast or time to heal.

This was a real, incurable problem, an organic, unfixable loss.

This was far beyond claims of healing & prosperity from today.

I say that to distinguish what Peter did as a miraculous sign.

To be clear, God can & still does heal people today, often in answer to prayer, & yet that is distinct from what Peter did.

What Peter did was instantaneous & not over time or with any means.

What Peter did was with a word only, not any treatment.

And what Peter did was to exalt Jesus Christ as the Gospel was proven through Peter as the Apostolic messenger in that transitional time.

Read verse 34 to see all that. [READ]

Aeneas did not seek Peter as it seems Peter initiated this encounter.

Peter simply said, "*Aeneas, Jesus Christ is healing you.*"

Peter pointed to Jesus Christ as the origin & source of this cure to restore the man & make his body fully functional again.

And at this point, the title Christ was attached to Jesus without an article—it was Jesus Christ, not Jesus the Christ.

That was not because Christ was Jesus' last name—it was because to know this Jesus required knowing Him as the Christ.

His title Christ was given because He was the Anointed One, the Promised Messiah, the long-awaited King.

So Peter was exalting Jesus by proclaiming the authority of Jesus Christ over disease & disability to heal this man Aeneas.

And after stating the healing, Peter added a command to Aeneas literally to rise and prepare or spread for himself.

Preparing or spreading for yourself could refer to cleaning up the mat or bed he was lying on or even preparing to eat.

Either way, Peter commanded him to prove he was healed by doing something that he could not do if he was paralyzed.

Peter was speaking with the power to heal & the proof of it commanded like Jesus had done in Mark 2:11 & Luke 5:24.

Verse 34 adds the clear confirmation—*immediately he got up*.

Imagine that!—Have you ever seen anything like that?

Aeneas obeyed the command because Jesus Christ had healed him.

And Peter was clear that Jesus Christ did the healing, just as he emphasized with the healing of the man born lame in Acts 3.

And just as Peter had healed many times before around Jerusalem, God was continuing miracles to exalt Jesus further out from Jerusalem.

You think that geographically is no big deal, but it was.

Jesus had power both to heal & to save further from Jerusalem as we read the saving results in verse 35. [READ]

This might more literally read—and they saw him, all who were living in Lydda & the Sharon, being the ones who turned to the Lord.

So it's not that every person dwelling there turned to the Lord.

But the wording does include those dwelling in the town of Lydda & the coastal plain of Sharon.

The Sharon plain included towns like Joppa on the coast, which was 10 miles northwest of Lydda, & north to Caesarea.

Since it included north-south & east-west trade routes & access to the sea, news could spread along this plain of Sharon quickly.

Many saw Aeneas was healed & repented & turned to the Lord.

That's a fitting response to God's miraculous works through Peter.

Today we can still marvel at this healing to bolster our faith in the message Peter preached of Jesus as Lord & Christ.

We can read this & be encouraged to trust the NT revelation of Peter & the Apostles as proven witnesses of Jesus.

And since Jesus is the Lord & Christ—since He is God the Son who came to reconcile sinners to Himself, we can turn to Him.

As we read of all who saw Aeneas turning to the Lord, let me urge you to respond to what Jesus has done & turn to the Lord.

Seek the blessing that Jesus told to Thomas in John 20:29 when he believed after seeing Jesus—Jesus said, *Blessed are they who did not see, & yet believed*.

If you are blessed like that & can ponder God preparing Peter like this, can you think of ways God may be preparing you for further ministry?

Is he continuing to use your spiritual gifts to exalt Jesus?

It's not that you or I have miraculous gifts as Apostles of Christ, but we have gifts spiritual gifts to serve & share & worship Christ.

Perhaps this text can prod us to ask God to continue using the spiritual gifts He's given us to encourage us for what's ahead.

That's not the main point of this narrative, but it can help us pause & praise God for His work in our lives even as we see His work in Peter.

We've seen how God prepared Peter for further ministry, (1<sup>st</sup>, point #1), by continuing his miracles to exalt Jesus.

But the greater miracle of new birth occurred in the hearts of many.

In this area of mixed population of Jews & Gentiles, God was preparing Peter for the continued spread of the church.

Then God further prepared Peter with an even greater healing recorded next that we can describe with a 2<sup>nd</sup> point today.

We've said that God prepared Peter for further ministry (1<sup>st</sup>) by continuing his miracles to exalt Jesus; & then (2<sup>nd</sup>ly) by confirming his motives to follow Jesus.

More could be said & the 1<sup>st</sup> point applies to the 2<sup>nd</sup> story also, but my outline seeks to walk us through the stories & it could have just been miracle #1 & miracle #2, so know that I'm trying to help us connect it.

So 2<sup>nd</sup>ly note how God prepared Peter for further ministry by confirming his motives to follow Jesus.

Peter followed Jesus not only in his preaching, but also in the way he depended on Jesus & obeyed & mimicked Jesus' methods in healing.

He continued seeking to exalt Jesus, but this next section also shows how Peter followed Jesus in prayer & action.

That's a bit of what I mean by confirming his motives to follow Jesus.

Read verse 36 as we move on. [READ]

Clearly, this lady was a believer—a disciple who was full of good works and merciful gifts which was regularly doing.

Her name was Tabitha in Aramaic or Dorcas in Greek, both of which mean gazelle.

She was in Joppa, a coastal city now called Jaffa, near the modern airport & capital city of Tel Aviv.

But read what happened in verse 37. [READ]

In those days soon after Peter healed Aeneas, it happened after this dear Christian sister had been sick that she died.

But after washing her body, they laid her in an upper room rather than burying her immediately.

Verse 38 implies that was in hope for Peter to help—read it. [READ]

Since the disciples there had heard that Peter was in the city of Lydda nearby, only 3 hours walk to Joppa, they sent for help.

The two men they sent were urging Peter not to hesitate to come.

Peter sensed the urgency as we read in verse 39. [READ]

Peter undoubtedly had seen their demeanor like others had in coming to Jesus for healing & even to the Apostles in Jerusalem.

So after getting up, he did not delay to accompany them.

And as he arrived, they were ready to lead him up into that upper room where the grief over this loss was on dramatic display.

When Dorcas was alive with them, she had been making inner garments & outer clothing to provide for the needs of widows.

So all the widows approached Peter, crying & showing many clothes.

Dorcas must have been a model of what Proverbs 31:10 & 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 5:16 say about ladies caring for the needs of others.

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 5:16 says, *“If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.”*

That kind of faithful lady who was abundantly generous & kindly serving would have been a huge loss to the church.

There was no welfare or Medicaid or other system for support & Acts 6 indicated that the church in Jerusalem had numerous widows.

Apparently Joppa also had many Christian widows & it was terribly sad & unsettling to lose the support of dear Dorcas.

But Peter did not have power within himself & he was not there to be praised by the crowd if God chose to heal through him.

So he followed what Jesus had done when faced with a similar need to raise the daughter of a synagogue official Jairus that is recorded in Matthew 9, Mark 5 & Luke 8.

Read verse 40 to see how Peter followed Jesus. [READ]

Peter did what Jesus did by sending the mourners all out.

That’s part of what I mean in highlighting Peter’s motives to follow Jesus, to do what Jesus had taught him by example & precept.

But Peter also knew that he was not equal with Jesus & so he followed Jesus in another way by bending his knees to pray.

As Elijah & Elisha in 1 Kings 17 & 2 Kings 4, Peter prayed.

Peter knew how Jesus had raised Jairus’s daughter, but he prostrated himself in dependence on Jesus to seek Him.

Then turning to her body, Peter uttered words like Jesus had said.

Jesus had spoken to a little girl—Talitha—and Peter spoke this name, Tabitha.

And Peter commanded her to arise like Jesus had done.

And amazing!—just as God had continued Peter’s miracles of healing, God granted Peter this miracle of restoring one to life.

Of course, like Jairus’s daughter & like Lazarus, Dorcas would later die again because she was not yet raised like Jesus into a new body.

But she opened her eyes, & seeing Peter, she sat up like the widow’s son had in Luke 7:15 after Jesus raised him.

Then read verse 41 as Peter again followed Jesus’ example. [READ]

As Matthew 9:25 says Jesus had done with the girl, Peter gave his hand to the one who was alive again & raised her up.

Then as Jesus had done with the widow’s son in Luke 7:15, he presented her to the saints & grieving widows after calling them—and all that mourning was turned into joy!

The believers are called saints again here & these widows were likely among those saints & not a separate group.

Yet news of this miracle was not kept only among the Christians.

Read verse 42 for the news spreading & its result. [READ]

Throughout the whole of Joppa, likely the city & surrounding areas, many believed in the Lord.

This time that result is framed as the companion of turning in repentance, which is faith—believing or trusting in the Lord.

To believe is to trust, to rely on, to have faith in, to bank on & rest in.

So becoming a Christian is turning away from every other trust & security & hope to find that only in Jesus as Lord.

That was a fitting response to the news of Dorcas being raised to life.

And it is still a fitting response—you & I should marvel at this & trust in the power of Jesus as Lord over life & death.

We should give up on hoping that anyone or anything else will give us real life as it should be lived now & forever—we should eagerly be assured & anchored in Jesus as the Lord.

Since we know that death is coming for all of us & that heaven & heaven are real—we should trust the One who not only raised others, but also Himself rose in victory to conquer death.

It only makes sense to trust Jesus to raise you to new life spiritually.

And it only makes sense to trust the witness of Peter as sent out with Jesus' powerful confirmation.

God had confirmed Peter by these miraculous signs even as He also confirmed Peter's motives to follow Jesus that were evident.

As in Acts 3, Peter had not acted by his own power or for his own glory—he had acted for the glory of his Lord Jesus Christ.

And his example bids us to pray for motives to follow Jesus with dependence & obedience.

We should want to fall on our faces asking God to work to exalt Jesus & to lead others to Him as Lord & Christ.

We should want to follow Jesus' example & teaching, not because we can raise the dead or heal paralysis, but because we want to serve Him.

God does not need Apostles confirmed by miraculous signs to add more to His inspired Scriptures, but He still can use us.

He may use us to raise spiritually dead souls to life in Christ & He may use us to restore the fruitful function of others.

I've prayed for God to do that as we study His work in Peter.

If you are dead today—repent & trust Christ & be made alive.

And if you are languishing in stagnant spiritual paralysis, get up & get to work serving the Savior who can heal & help you.

We want Him to do as He wishes through us for His glory & we want Him to confirm those motives in us as He does.

So we can pray for that as we ask Him to prepare us for whatever further ministry He has ahead of us.

We want Christ to be known and not our own name.

We want to follow Jesus, even if it is uncomfortable.

Read verse 43 to see what Peter did next. [READ]

Since tanners worked with dead animal skins, which were not ceremonially clean, this may have been different for Peter.

Yet as God prepared Peter to understand Jesus' declaring all things clean in Luke 11:41, He had Peter stay with a tanner.

And he stayed many days in Joppa, the town which Jonah fled to when he did not want to preach to the Gentile Ninevites.

But from here at Joppa in Acts 10, Peter would go preach to Gentiles.

God was preparing Peter for that further ministry.

God would show Peter more to make it unmistakable that he was to go to those who would defile his ceremonial cleanness.

But Peter was prepared for that further ministry.

As we've seen, God had prepared Peter by continuing Peter's miracles to exalt Jesus & by confirming Peter's motives to follow Jesus.

And I pray that our study of this text today has prepared you for the further ministry that God has ahead for you.

It's not always easy to make quick applications of a narrative like this, but I pray you are amazed at God's miraculous proof of Peter as Jesus' trustworthy witness & you trust what's written in the NT.

And I pray that you turn to Jesus as the true Lord & trust Him as your Lord & Savior to cleanse you & give you new life.

If we can pray for you, please let us know & we'd be glad to help you.

Now let's all pray for God to use what we've studied from His Word to lead us to trust & follow Jesus more faithfully.