

Kingdom Power Precedes Kingdom Advancement

Acts: The Spirit Moving / Acts 9:32-43 / August 31, 2025

Introduction:

Our next section of Acts, from Acts 9:32-12:24, transitions us into the next phase of the gospel spreading according to Jesus' promise. In Acts 1:8, Jesus told the apostles, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." In verse 31 of chapter 9, we saw how the church multiplied throughout all Judea and Samaria. In Acts 12:25, Luke's focus will shift from Peter's ministry to the Paul's missionary endeavors that spread the gospel to the Gentile world. From 9:32-12:24, Luke lays the groundwork for that by showing how Peter came to know, as he will say in Acts 11:18, "to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." Chapters 10 and 11 relay how God revealed this to Peter, and our passage today prepares our hearts through a pair of miraculous vignettes. These stories should be treated a pair because of their similarities and differences. Consider three prominent similarities. First, both recipients of the miracles are named, which is uncommon in miracle accounts. Second, God's people are called saints in both stories, which is a rarely used designation for believers in Acts. Third, the command to rise is found in each story. Yet, there are also differences to note. The character in the first story is a man, while the second is a woman. The first story is more concise, where the second is filled with details. The first involves a healing, while the second involves resurrection. This pairing, with the second building upon the first, reveals Luke is communicating one main point. A point which propels us into chapter 10 by showing how kingdom power precedes kingdom advancement. Let's consider each vignette closely to see this. In the first vignette, we see,

Many Turn to the Lord After Seeing the Lame Are Still Healed

Pay attention to how Luke transitions the narrative. Look at verse 32, "Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda (Lid-a)." "Now" signals a progression in the narrative, and the first thing we see is Peter moving freely among them all. Who is "them all"? In the narrative flow, this is the church throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria. Think of the change from the chapter 8 where the apostles stayed in Jerusalem and only came out of Jerusalem to confirm reports of Samaritan salvations. What changed? Verse 31 told us the church was experiencing peace. Because of that peace, Peter now feels a freedom to regularly go out to strengthen the faith of others. And Luke tells us he came to Lydda, a town twenty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem. Notice what happens in verses 33-35, "There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.' And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord." Aeneas appears to be a believer because verse 32 placed Peter among the saints. So, this healing is for someone already following Christ. Note how concise Luke is. Peter finds Aeneas, who had been bedridden and paralyzed for eight years there and speaks directly to him. The tenses in the Greek reads "in this moment Jesus heals you," followed by a command to rise and make his bed. Charles Swindoll humorously comments, "This was really power! Some of us for years have been saying, 'Arise and make your bed,' to our teenagers with no result!" Joking aside, think with me. Does this story sound familiar to you? It echoes the story of Jesus healing the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12. That was when Jesus proclaimed His authority to forgive sins and listen to Jesus' response when questioned about that proclamation. In Mark 2:9-11, Jesus said, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." In Mark's gospel, the paralytic immediately rose up and everyone was amazed. In a similar fashion, Aeneas immediately rose but the response of others is even greater. Luke says, "all who saw him turned to the Lord." Note the connection to repentance and forgiveness, as the term "turn" speaks in the language of repentance. As the healing in Mark 2 was proof of Jesus' authority to forgive sins, and this healing is proof for forgiveness. Before moving on, observe one major difference in our story.

Where Jesus spoke through His own authority, Peter says Jesus Christ heals you. Christ Jesus is the one who healed, and He is also the one who gave forgiveness to those who turned to the Lord after seeing the lame are still healed. Jesus extended His healing power, forgiveness, and restoration through Peter. Kingdom power preceded kingdom advancement. In the second vignette, we see,

Many Believe in the Lord After Hearing the Dead Are Still Raised

Notice again how the word “now” progresses the narrative forward. Look at verses 36-38, “Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, ‘Please come to us without delay.’” The amount of details given to describe Tabitha immediately stands out. Luke tells us she is a disciple, where he merely alluded to Aeneas as one. He shares her Aramaic and Greek name, speaks of her character and actions, and details her sickness, death, preparations for burial, and the place she was laid. All of this highlights her significance. The “upper room” is the same term to describe where the disciples of Jesus gathered for worship in Acts 1-3. Likely her home, this suggests the church in Joppa met there. So, Tabitha, or Dorcas, was important part of the church. Luke tells us the disciples hear Peter is in Lydda, which was 10 miles away from Joppa, and urge Peter to come after her death. Note an interesting detail absent from this story. There is no mention of her body being anointed for burial. Could this indicate they thought she might be raised from the dead? Notice how the story continues in verse 39, “So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.” As Peter arrives and is taken to the upper room, we’re given a special glimpse into the charitable acts of Dorcas involved providing clothing for widows. Consider the significance of this. She is walking forward in the sacrificial care we have seen all over Acts so far. She loved well, gave sacrificially, and provided for many needs in the church. Continue in verses 40-41, “But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up.” Pause there. Think with me again. Does this sound like a moment from Jesus’ ministry? This echoes the story of Jarius’ daughter in Mark 5. Like our story, Jarius urged Jesus to come when his daughter was close to death. And listen to Mark’s description of what happened when Jesus arrived in Mark 5:40-41, “But he [Jesus] put them all outside and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, ‘Talitha cumi,’ which means, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise.’” Peter is doing what he saw Jesus do. In fact, if Peter spoke in Aramaic as some believe, he would have said “Tabitha, cumi,” with only one letter different from the very words of Jesus. Both stories are a foretaste of the resurrection Jesus provides to all who trust in Him. Even when recording Peter “raised her up,” Luke uses Greek that often related to the resurrection. Now, notice the conclusion to this miracle in verses 41-42, “Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.” Peter presents her alive to the saint and widows, word spreads through out Joppa, and what is the result? Many believed in the Lord after hearing the dead are still raised. Once again, kingdom power preceded kingdom advancement. Yet, strangely Luke is not finished with the story. Look at verse 43, “And he [Peter] stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.” We may think Luke is just describing how Peter remained in Joppa and distinguishing this Simon from Peter. But I think there is more to this detail. Tanners dealt with the hides of dead animals. Because of this, they were considered unclean and despised in rabbinic tradition. According to the Mishnah, a woman could divorce her husband if he entered an unclean trade like a tanner, and a betrothed woman could break off her engagement because of it. Chapter 10 will reveal how God breaks the apostles’ prejudice against Gentiles to advance His kingdom to the ends of the earth. And the story centers on the idea of Gentiles being unclean.

Here, we are seeing how the gospel had already broken some prejudice, with Peter staying in the home of a Jewish tanner, but it wasn't complete. Peter still needed to understand the Gentiles would be made clean as well. He will come to discover that just as forgiveness and resurrection come to the Jews, kingdom power will come to the Gentiles as well. So, not only do these vignettes show kingdom power preceding kingdom advancement in Lydda and Joppa, the kingdom power on display also preceded the kingdom advancement to the Gentiles. In light of these stories, I see two questions to ask our hearts. First,

1) Do We Long for Kingdom Advancement to All Peoples?

One of Luke's purposes is to have these stories prepare our hearts for what God is about to do in taking the gospel to all peoples. Jesus commissioned His disciples in Matthew 28:19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." He told them again in Acts 1:8, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Their commission was to for the global advancement of Christ's glory and kingdom, making disciples of every nation, tongue, and tribe. To this point, the apostles were still only witnessing primarily to Israel. But God was about to demolish their understanding of who belongs to His chosen people and receives His covenant promises. Church, do we really long for the global advancement of God's kingdom? It is well known that the most churches missions' funds are given to local or well reached areas of the world, with the average church spending less than 1% on efforts that send the gospel to unreached peoples. This is justified by pointing to the needs around us. I am not saying those aren't real needs, but how much funding is spent of efforts to reach Lodi in comparison to filling the whole earth with God's glory. When God, in His sovereignty, brings the nations to our doorsteps as transplants or refugees, do we seize the opportunity to reach them with the greatest truth they could ever hear, or complain about them being in our country? This is not a political statement on policies; it's a statement about how our hearts should view things through a gospel lens. Family, the disparity in access to gospel witness and blessings between the US and other parts of the world is astounding. Yet, we continue to live in that disparity as though it is ok. God calls His people to long for His kingdom to spread to all peoples, seeing men and women from all backgrounds find the freedom and joy we have in Christ. Consider this from another angle. Do you desire for Christ to return and make all things new? Christ told us when that would happen. In Matthew 24:14, Jesus says, "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." It is estimated that 7,400 of the worlds 17,400 people groups are unreached, meaning they have limited or no access to the Gospel message. We don't need to spend our time studying and searching for the signs of the times. We need to get busy proclaiming the good news of Christ's kingdom to the world. So, the first question is whether we will have these stories, and the story to come, draw our hearts towards longing for kingdom advancement to all peoples. The second question is,

2) Do We Expect Kingdom Power to Continue that Advancement?

These vignettes also show Jesus's power extending through His people. While on this earth, Jesus healed sickness and disease. He displayed dominion over the demonic realm and the power to forgive. He gave resurrection life, victory over sin, and transformed people to live sacrificially. These things are evidence of the kingdom of God. Do we expect for Christ to continue exercising this power? When defending His authority and kingdom, Jesus said in Matthew 12:28, "if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." Listen to what He is saying. Christ's activity, by the Spirit, proved the kingdom of God has come upon us. This means His kingdom has been active from that moment and His power continuing through the early church, by the Spirit, shows it remained active after His ascension. Family, kingdom power is still active. In one sense, we are not waiting for Christ's kingdom. It will be consummated and fully realized when He returns, but it is also here now with God granting us foretastes of its fullness. When defending His ministry to the church in Corinth, Paul says in, "my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

Then, in 1 Corinthians 4:20, he says, “the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.” Kingdom power is part of Christ’s kingdom reign, exercised to help our faith rest in God’s power. It came through Peter, will come through Paul, and has continued throughout church history. Healing still happens in Jesus’ name. Miracles are still experienced through His power. He still conquers hard hearts, forgives all who come to Him, restores broken marriages, provides for our needs, and radically transforms lives. Yet, I wonder how often we fail to expect seeing that kingdom power. Church, we trust too much in the work of our hands and our plans. Far too often, we turn first to things man can do, when God has said, “ask and you will receive.” Don’t hear me wrong. I am not saying God doesn’t work through natural means. The same God who heals miraculously, heals through doctors. The same God who guides by His Spirit, guides through wisdom of others. However, I do wonder if we fail to see kingdom power because we don’t ask for it. Now, in saying that, we also need to ask with the right motivation. James 4:3 says, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” Consider the main purpose of the kingdom power we saw in these stories. Certainly, Aeneas and Dorcas received healing and resurrection, but the main purpose was to advance the kingdom. They were healed and restored to life so that many would turn to the Lord and believe. Do we ask for healing, peace, comfort, growth, and transformation to spend it on our passions? Or do we long for kingdom power to make much of our King?

Conclusion:

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of reflection and response, a final question is what is God calling you to believe, desire, or do in light of these vignettes? If you are not following Christ our King, consider His power on display. Turn from your sin and to Him. Believe in His life, death, and resurrection. Trust in His power to forgive your sin, transform your life, and transfer you from the domain of darkness and to His kingdom. If you are following Christ, let this passage mold and shape your life. Look at what He did through the early church and ask God to do that through us. Long for Christ’s kingdom to advance and raise your expectations for kingdom power to continue that advancement. As you respond to the Word today, you are welcome to come and kneel before God in prayer or receive pray from our prayer team who will be worshipping on the front rows with lanyards on. I am also available if you would like to talk or receive prayer. Pray with me as we respond together.