

Series: **The Original**

Today's Title: **"God's Power Changing Lives"**

August 29, 2021 – Acts 9:32-43

Objective: To encourage everyone that the power of God can change lives.

Opening prayer

In Acts **chapter 2**, we see the birth of the Church on the Day of Pentecost.

Then from **chapter 2** thru **chapter 5**, Luke writes about the Apostle's early ministry - the earliest days of the 'Original' Church. Thousands of their fellow Jews put their faith in Jesus - and get baptized.

Peter - the leader of the Apostles - is the prominent person in these chapters.

Then in **chapter 6** we read of 7 men chosen to help with the ministry of the church. Among them are Stephen and Philip. Stephen is arrested, and in **chapter 7** he gives a sermon in his defense to the high priest and the Sanhedrin.

At the end of **chapter 7** he becomes the first martyr as he is stoned to death - and at the end of the chapter we're introduced to a guy named Saul.

Chapter 8 opens with Saul leading a great, savage persecution against the followers of Jesus - and Luke says Saul is "ravaging the church" (8:3).

While this persecution is happening, Luke writes of the ministry of Philip - one of the 7 chosen in **chapter 6** - and

Philip's evangelistic work in Samaria, and then in Gaza as he shares the Gospel with an Ethiopian official - who believes in Christ - and is baptized.

Philip then makes his way up the Mediterranean coast - "preaching the Gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea." (8:40).

In **chapter 9**, Luke takes us back to the work of Saul - as he is now tracking down followers of Jesus in towns and cities far away from Jerusalem - to arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial - and maybe even execution.

However, on the road to Damascus - with arrest papers in hand - Saul sees the risen Jesus - gets saved and baptized - and begins proving in many synagogues that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.

This leads to threats on his life - and the Apostles send him to Tarsus for his safety - where he continues to proclaim Jesus and plants churches in Cilicia and Syria.

That's where we ended last week - at **9:31** - and that is the last mention of Saul until **11:25**.

Turn to Acts 9:32-43 (p. 918)

In our passage today - Luke brings us back to Peter - and he will follow Peter's work through **11:18**.

At this point in the 'life' of the Original Church - God is now moving to bring the Gospel to the Gentile world.

Up until now it's been primarily to Jewish audiences that the Apostles and others have brought the Gospel.

The Gentile world has had a few 'random' exposures to the Gospel - but now God is moving the Apostles (and others) ***to conquer the idea of Jewish exclusiveness.***

The Church - the Apostles and followers of Christ (mostly Jewish at this point) must make the difficult but necessary move to include all Gentiles into the family of God.

Saul - who Luke will refer to as Paul starting in **13:9** - will be the primary person God uses to reach the larger Gentile world - but it's Peter - ***the lead Apostle*** - who God uses to open that door wide open in the first place.

Peter's ministry brings the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles. vs. 32-35

The persecution started by Saul caused the Church to expand into the regions around Jerusalem - in what's called Judea - but also further - to the regions referred to as Samaria - to the north of Jerusalem.

This is where we find Peter - *ministering* - making his way to different clusters of Jesus followers - and spending time with them - teaching them about Jesus.

Read vs. 32-35

Lydda was a small town (map) - with a long history dating back hundreds of years before Peter's visit.

It was in an area called the 'Plain of Sharon' - which is a strip of land running North and South - along the Mediterranean coast - and inland to the general area where Lydda was located.

Around this time in the 1st century, Lydda was mainly Jewish - but it had a good % of Gentiles who lived and worked there.

During Saul's intense persecution of Christ-followers, many of them fled Jerusalem to the surrounding areas - and Lydda was one of the towns many of them resettled. Of course, once they resettled there, they told others about Jesus and more people believed and were baptized.

This is why Peter came to Lydda - to spend time with the "saints" (*hagios*) - the believers in this town.

While he was ministering there, he became aware of a paralyzed man named "Aeneas" who was "bedridden for eight years".

It's been 8 years - so we know he wasn't born with this disability. We might assume his condition is a result of an illness or an accident.

He's been in his bed - paralyzed - unable to walk - for the last 8 years.

vs. 34 - Was this the first interaction between Peter and Aeneas? We don't know. It really doesn't matter.

We can assume Aeneas is a believer in Jesus because there is no mention of his faith - or him putting his faith

in Jesus - but Luke does mention the new faith of many “residents of Lydda and Sharon...”.

Notice Peter doesn't take credit for the healing.

He makes it very clear this is not him - this is “Jesus Christ” who is doing the healing.

It's important - when you're doing ministry - that the credit goes to Jesus.

Don't stand in the spotlight that Jesus alone deserves!

Peter tells him to “rise and make your bed.”

Does that sound weird?

At first it does... *‘And while you're at it do the dishes, vacuum - and the washing machine has been making a funny noise.’*

But it's really an exciting thing for Aeneas.

He hasn't been able to make his bed for the past 8 years!

A paralyzed person never can make their bed - because he needed his bed 24/7.

$365 \times 8 \text{ (yrs)} = 2,920$ days of lying in his bed.

He is healed “immediately”.

How exciting it must have been to stand on his own 2 feet - the muscles in his legs immediately restored and strengthened - and he can now make his bed because he doesn't need it until later when he will use it to go to sleep!

The result:

1. Aeneas is restored to full health - he can walk - earn a living - walk to a friend's house.
2. Many people who lived in this town and the surrounding area "turned to the Lord".

As a result of this display of power - power credited to Jesus Christ - many people put their faith in Jesus.

God continues stretching Peter to bring the Gospel to a Gentile town. vs. 36-43

Let's step back from our text for a moment and look at the big picture of what God had been doing throughout history - which will lead us to what He is doing here in today's text.

One of the biggest early obstacles and obstructions to the bringing the Gospel to the "ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) was this idea of *Jewish exclusiveness* and *Jewish exceptionalism*.

It's true that God had chosen the Jewish people out of all the other nations on the earth.

Israel is God's chosen nation - His chosen people.

But He ***did not*** choose them because they were better than the other nations.

He didn't choose them so they could have something the other nations didn't have.

- He chose them out of His grace.
- He chose them despite their sinfulness.

- He chose them to be an example to the nations of what the true God is like.
- He chose them to bring God's love, grace, and truth to the nations - so the nations could be redeemed.

Instead, they became prideful - they had spiritual arrogance - they thought they were better than the other nations - better than the Gentiles...*exclusive*.

As a result, they closed themselves off to the world - and they kept God for themselves.

But God does not allow Himself to be 'kept' or 'owned' by anyone. *Nobody has 'exclusive rights' on God.*

Throughout human history, God has reached out in various ways - through various people - to the nations. God was not rendered helpless by Israel's refusal to love the nations and share His truth with them.

Israel did miss out on the privilege - and the blessing of being used by God in this way.

In fact, the culmination of God reaching out to the nations was the birth of the Church.

We read in **Romans 9-11** how the Church has been 'grafted in' - temporarily taking Israel's place as the people / vehicle God uses to reach the nations and redeem them to Himself.

Israel is still God's chosen people - His chosen nation.

One day God will bring them back into the place He ordained for them.

But for now - the Church stands in Israel's shoes.

This is why Jesus gave His Church - His followers the Great Commission - the mission of God - to take the Gospel to all nations - baptizing them - teaching them the truths about Jesus.

This is what we find Peter busy doing.

He has been in an area (Lydda) that is populated by Jews and Gentiles - maybe more Jews than Gentiles - but at this time it's an ethnically mixed region.

God is moving Peter - who is a devoted, proud Jew - to a new place - to give him a new perspective toward Gentiles (non-Jews).

God is moving Peter to see Gentiles as equals.

He is moving Peter to love Gentiles as He loves them.

We know that this is an area that Peter struggles with.

There will be a few times in the N.T. that we see him playing favorites to the Jews - and turning his back on Gentile believers.

So, we know this is an area that does not come easy to Peter.

His deeply seated prejudices will not leave without a fight.

But note this: Peter is letting God move him in this direction.

It's one thing to *say* you see other people - different people as equal.

It's one thing to *say* you love them.

But do your actions reflect your words?

In **vs. 36-43** we see God leading Peter to a largely Gentile city - the port city of Joppa.

Joppa is located on the Mediterranean coast.

It's a beautiful location.

Today, Joppa (Joffa) is a suburb just to the south of the modern Israeli city of Tel Aviv.

Pics of Joppa (3)

Read vs. 36-38

Tabitha was a believer in Jesus - “a disciple named Tabitha”.

She was a wonderful, kind, and generous person who did so much for so many.

Because of this many people were impacted directly - personally by her death.

Normal 1st century practice in Israel was when someone would die, they would wash the body - this would have been more ceremonial than hygienic.

Then, on the same day - they would bury the body.

They didn't embalm the body - so burial was quick - normally the same day.

But here they wash her body - but then place it in an upper room.

Why?

Because they heard Peter was in Lydda - not very far away. They send 2 men to hurry to Lydda - find Peter - and ask if he will come to Joppa because of Tabitha's death.

Read vs. 39-43

The power for this miracle was the same as the previous - Jesus Christ.

This not only was a great encouragement for the many people Tabitha ministered to - but (vs. 42) it was also a powerful testimony to many who lived in Joppa - and “many believed in the Lord.”

Peter stays in Joppa “for many days” - once again - a vague time reference from Luke.

The exact duration's not important for us.

What is important is what I would call the greater miracle that is in process here with Peter.

A “tanner” was someone who worked with dead animal skins.

For the Jews this was an unclean occupation. Some ancient Jewish writers referred to it as a *‘despised trade’*

(Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Acts, by Darrel L. Bock, p. 379).

For Peter to stay with Simon gives us some insight into Peter's view on certain Jewish rules and regulations at this point in his life.

In **chapter 10** God is going to stretch him to the unthinkable - to a point Peter is unwilling to go - but God will help him along - we'll see that over the next 3 Sundays.

Peter's struggle with Jew and Gentile equality in the eyes of God will be an ongoing battle in his life.

A few years down the road - the Apostle Paul will confront Peter publicly about his preferential treatment of Jews over Gentiles in Antioch (**Galatians 2:11-14**).

Apply it...

In these verses we see the power of God in 3 things.

- 1) We see the power of God heal Aeneas after he was paralyzed and bedridden for 8 years.
- 2) We see the power of God raise Tabitha from the dead.
- 3) We see the power of God starting to change the heart and mind of Peter. This is the most significant miracle. Peter's Jewish bias - his prejudice toward Gentiles - must be challenged - and repented from.

So, here are 2 applications from these verses today.

God's power can change your life - any life!

Don't underestimate the power of God in your life.

Don't think He doesn't care - or is unable to work in your life - or the life of someone you know and love.

He can heal - raise the dead - He is sovereign over all things - and people.

What is in your heart that needs to change?

Bitterness? Prejudice? Lust?

Anger? Jealousy? Envy? Uncertainty?

Gossip? Unforgiveness? Fear? Hatred? Frustration?

Some change is quick - almost immediate.

Sometimes change is a much longer process.

I don't say this to give an excuse or give some sort of justification - but it's simply the reality.

Notice...God didn't wait for Peter to get this right.

God moves him into a place where his sin is challenged and confronted.

God didn't wait for Peter to get things right before He used him - but He did expect Peter to follow His lead and love the Gentiles God put in his path.

Who is God putting in your path?

What is God challenging you with that requires His power to change?

Let God's power change your life!!!

Close in prayer