

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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HOW GOD PREPARED PETER'S HEART

Acts 9:32-43

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My three points today are:

- God provided Christian connections for Peter.
- God provided miracles to help the church grow.
- God provided through an unlikely source.

INTRODUCTION: In our study through the book of Acts, we have seen the empowering of the apostles and newer disciples through the Holy Spirit. We have read about the creation and persecution of the church, and we just finished discussing the conversion and call of the former persecutor, Saul. The last time we read about Peter, he had just gotten out of prison. After Saul's conversion, the Bible tells us that there was a short time of peace for believers (9:31). It was during this time that Peter decided to take a trip.

1-GOD PROVIDED CHRISTIAN CONNECTIONS FOR PETER

The apostles had been in Jerusalem, but Peter decided to strike out on his own. For some reason, this doesn't surprise me. After all, Peter was always impulsive. When the disciples were with Jesus before the crucifixion, he was the one who often spoke without thinking and the one who got out of the boat when the others stayed in it. I'm sure you remember how Peter cut the guy's ear off when they came to take Jesus. Over time, the negative side of his impulsiveness gave way to a more mature believer. However, it's pretty clear that Peter was not one to sit around. He enjoyed a little drama. Maybe, when things settled down in Jerusalem, he got bored, antsy, restless. Whatever his reason, Peter decided to take a trip.

SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:32-35

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.

EXPLANATION: It almost appears from verse 32 that Peter was just kind of wandering around when he made his way to Lydda, a large market city about a day’s journey from Jerusalem. Lydda may seem like an unusual place for Peter to stop and visit because Lydda was the seat of the Sanhedrin. If you remember, Peter and John had appeared before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4. The Sanhedrin were the ones who had commanded the disciples to no longer speak to anyone about Jesus. So, Lydda could have been a scary place for Peter, but God led him there anyway.

Once there, Peter did not stay alone. Verse 32 tells us that he visited the Lord’s people. Perhaps he realized that the peace the church was experiencing would be short-lived and that these believers would be in the hot seat because of their proximity to the Sanhedrin. We aren’t given the details of Peter’s visit with this group of believers, but we can imagine that he encouraged them in their faith. Then, Peter came across paralyzed Aeneas, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, he healed him. Word traveled fast, and it wasn’t long after that the believers in Joppa tracked Peter down.

ILLUSTRATION: A friend of mine was once in Walmart returning clothing. The cashier who waited on her that day was a different age and race. The two women had never met and seemingly had little in common, but somehow in the course of their brief conversation, they realized that they both were Christians. Whatever the conversation, it was meaningful enough that as my friend said good-bye and started to push her cart away, the woman behind the counter quickly came around, and the two embraced like old friends.

“I still remember the unexpected joy of that connection in Christ,” said my friend. She never saw that Walmart worker again, but she looks forward to getting to know her better in eternity.

APPLICATION: Sometimes, like Peter, we think we are alone in our journeys. We may even take a certain measure of pride in our independence. Then, life gets hard, and we begin to believe that we are all alone, but we are not. A mutual love of

Christ attracts believers to one another because believers are not meant to do life or ministry alone. We are stronger, more faithful, and more productive together. Peter connected with other believers. So should we.

Christian community is very important. Recently, I spoke with a person who told me he had a situation that made him evaluate how he wanted to spend his future living in Christian community. Spending time with other believers in fellowship – talking, listening, sharing... all of this is very important and is central to the formation of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts.

2-GOD PROVIDED MIRACLES TO HELP THE CHURCH GROW

SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:36-42

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.

EXPLANATION: Aeneas was definitely crippled. He had been for 8 years. There was no way this was a trick. There would have been many witnesses during that time who could have testified of his paralysis. Tabitha was definitely dead. They had already washed her body and carried it to an upper room. Traditionally, the dead were buried very quickly and were seldom left unburied overnight. So, it’s actually a testament of faith that Tabitha’s friends didn’t go ahead and bury her. Instead, they made the journey to Joppa to get Peter. There and back would have probably taken about eight hours. By the time they returned, Tabitha would have been stiff and cold.

Yet, Aeneas was healed, and Tabitha was resurrected.

It may have appeared that Peter performed the miracles, but Peter was only an instrument in the Lord's hands. It was the power of God that healed the lame and brought the dead back to life. You've heard me say that Jesus' time with his disciples was to prepare them for his departure. For those of you who like to prepare Bible studies, a good one would be tracking the maturity of the twelve disciples from the beginning in the Gospels all the way through Acts.

A good leader will model the way it is to be done. Look how Jesus modeled healings to the disciples:

- When friends lowered a crippled man through the roof to where Jesus was teaching, Jesus forgave the man, healed him, and told him to pick up his mat and go home.
- When Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda, he told him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."
- When God healed the man at the temple, Peter said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

So, following the example of the Lord, as part of the healing, Peter told Aeneas "Get up and roll up your mat." When Tabitha was raised from the dead, he told her, "Tabitha, get up."

God supernaturally performed the miracles, but those involved had to do their natural parts. Peter played a role in the healing by praying and calling on the name of Jesus. Could God have healed Aeneas or Tabitha without Peter? Absolutely, but Peter and those who were with him would have missed the blessing. Could God have healed Aeneas and Tabitha regardless of whether they got up? Of course. But what would have happened to Aeneas if he had chosen not to get up and walk after he was healed? What good would have come from the resurrection of Tabitha if she chose to stay on her bed for the rest of her life? How would they have benefited from their healing? How would anyone else have ever known the power of the Lord at work in their lives? The benefit of the miracles was accomplished as a result of their obedience to Peter's command to "Get up!"

Even before the miracles, God had been at work in and through Tabitha. In verses 36 and 39, we read about those who benefitted from her generosity. Tabitha took the natural skills and resources that God had given her and used them to bless others. In the same way, God wants to do things in our lives that will not only be a blessing to us but will be a blessing to others.

ILLUSTRATION: I'll use a fictitious name for a man. I'll call him Emmet. He is a friend of a friend. He is also a recovered alcoholic. For years, alcohol consumed and ruined Emmet's life. He lost his family, his home, his job, his self-worth. At his lowest, he was homeless and living under a bridge. But God found Emmet, saved him, and helped turn his life around. Today, he is married, has a steady job and a nice home. He often helps others who are struggling with addiction because he understands the temptations they face. He relates to what they are going through and knows that the power of the Lord can release them from their sins. Just this month, he helped a homeless person move out of a chicken coop and into an apartment.

APPLICATION: God blessed and healed Emmet not only for his benefit but for the benefit of the kingdom.

Peter connected with other believers, and God performed miracles that helped the kingdom grow. God is at work in our lives, but we will never know it or benefit from it if we don't get up and do something with the gifts he has given us.

3-GOD PROVIDED THROUGH AN UNLIKELY SOURCE

EXPLANATION: Peter left Jerusalem and traveled about the country. Was he wandering aimlessly, or did God have a plan for this journey? When Peter picked up his bag and headed out, he probably had no idea how God was going to work in his life as well as in the lives of others. Let's look more closely at Tabitha's resurrection.

You probably noticed the dead woman in this passage was called by both Tabitha, a Hebrew name, and Dorcas, a Greek name. Did you wonder why? Both names mean the same thing—a gazelle or roe. So, what is the significance of using both? Maybe, it is an indication of the group of believers that Peter encountered there in Joppa.

It's very possible that individuals in that group referred to the woman by different names because they were from different language groups. It's possible that in Joppa, Peter met a more diverse group of Christians composed of both Hebrews and Greek, both Jews and Gentiles.

Verse 43 ends this narrative with a simple statement, "*Peter stayed in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.*" What started out as trip turned into an extended stay, and who did Peter stay with? A tanner!

There are a couple of things we can think about in relation to this. First, Simon tanned animal hides for a living. Of course, this means that Simon was around dead animals a lot. We don't know for certain, but it is very possible that this is an indication that Simon the Tanner was a Gentile. The name "Simon" is both a Hebrew and a Greek name, so we don't know exactly if he was a Jew or Gentile (unless I've overlooked it somewhere in Scripture) but he lived in a Gentile area.

Now listen to this: Because of Old Testament regulations regarding dead animals, many devout Jews would have never considered an occupation like this. It would have kept them in a constant state of spiritual uncleanness. Since most people of this day worked where they lived, we can safely assume that by living with Simon the Tanner, Peter was also putting himself in a situation that just a few months earlier would have been inconceivable. I stated that God provided through an unlikely source...it would have made sense for Jewish believers to take in Peter, but he lived with Simon the Tanner.

God was working on Peter – he was changing him. He was pushing the envelope in Peter's life to let go of the old Jewish ways, to realize that with Christ there was a new covenant.

Until this point in history, because the Israelites were God's chosen people, the only way you could join the family of faith was to convert to Judaism. And we have numerous examples of this in the Old Testament. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ provided a means of salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike, but the church was still predominantly composed of Jewish Christians. It was going to take a special revelation of Christ to help some believers, like Peter, to understand that

Christ died for all. But here he was away from home, eating, living, and worshipping with believers who looked and lived very differently from him.

APPLICATION: Sometimes God will put us in situations that are new to us. He will put us with people who are different from us. He will ask us to do things that are uncomfortable or unfamiliar. Peter connected with other believers. God performed miracles that helped the kingdom grow, and Peter stayed with Simon the Tanner. God was preparing Peter's heart for the next assignment. Peter was willing to be uncomfortable for Christ. He was willing to go to new people, a new area, to leave everything he was familiar with.

Comfort is important to all of us, but let's be open to God working on our lives, even if that brings discomfort to us.

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