

“Many Believed in the Lord”
(Acts 9:32-43)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. This morning, we went on a small tangent to consider what really goes on behind the scenes in the conversion of a lost soul to Christ:
 - a. This is helpful for us to understand because there are so few today who realize how completely dependent they are on the Lord for their salvation:
 - (i) For His electing mercy from all eternity.
 - (ii) For His gracious sending of His Son to live and to die.
 - (iii) For His getting the Gospel to them: there are many places it hasn't reached.
 - (iv) For the quickening power of His Spirit to work through the Gospel to give them life, spiritual life.
 - (v) For the gift of faith.
 - (vi) For the gift of salvation in its entirety.
 - (vii) So many have been told – by well-meaning Christians – that at any time they can pray “the prayer” and savingly come to Christ.
 - (viii) However, this encourages them to put it off until a convenient time that may never come, or if it does, it makes them think that faith is something they can exercise in the last moments of life and enter into heaven – God may grant faith at that moment, but He may not.
 - (ix) So many today are also told that they may come to Christ, never experience any change in their lives and still go to heaven.
 - (x) These need to be told that unless they trust in Christ alone and repent of their sins – which includes turning into the path of perfect obedience – they will not be saved.
 - (xi) They also need to understand that it is not in their power to do these things, so that they might look to Christ for His mercy to give them the gift of faith, so that they won't perish.
 - b. There are so few in the church who understand these things:
 - (i) Many believe they saw their need for Christ, took hold of Him by faith themselves, not realizing that this was a gift of God's mercy.
 - (ii) Whenever we give ourselves the credit for anything God has done, we take away from His glory.
 - (iii) We need to thank Him that He not only began our salvation in eternity, but worked it out in time – it is from first to last of Him.
2. The reason we explored this theme was to make sense out of Saul's experience.
 - a. Of how one who hated Christ so much could become His primary instrument to evangelize the Gentiles.

- b. He wasn't overpowered and forced into the kingdom of God: the Lord changed his heart, opened his eyes to see Christ's glory, and then he embraced Christ because he wanted to.
- c. The Lord did the same for us:
 - (i) We were all in the same condition when the Lord came to us:
 - (ii) He may have restrained more of our sin than Saul's, but we had exactly the same nature and needed the same remedy:
 - (a) The Lord needed to stop us in our tracks through the Law.
 - (b) He needed to change our hearts by His Spirit by uniting us to Christ.
 - (c) He had to give us the gift of faith: including a holy love for Christ, so that we would look to Him, trust in Him, turn from our sins, and be saved.
 - (d) This is why we should give all glory and honor now to God.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, Luke's focus changes from Saul now to Peter.
 - a. Peter has been called God's apostle to the Jews, and he was.
 - b. But he was also called to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.
 - c. In order to move him, as it were, into position, the Lord puts it in his heart to visit the churches that have recently been planted throughout areas surrounding Jerusalem.
 - d. As he does so, the Lord continues to use him, first in the life of Aeneas and then in that of Tabitha.
 - e. By means of the miracles the Lord performs through Peter, even more are brought to Christ.
 - f. But as he is called to various places by the church to minister, the Lord moves him closer and closer to the Gentiles He is intending to bring into His kingdom: Cornelius and his household.
2. We have before us now the account of two miracles the Lord did through Peter as He moves him in this direction:
 - a. First, the healing of Aeneas.
 - b. And second, the raising of Tabitha from the dead.
 - c. As we read these accounts we need to remember that they are meant to confirm the truth of the Gospel.
 - d. So is the life of Tabitha – in her works of love and mercy – which proves the Gospel can transform lives.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, we see the healing of Aeneas, and the effects it had on many.
 1. The Lord put it in Peter's heart to go visit the churches that had recently been established. "Now as Peter was traveling through all *those regions*, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda" (v. 32).
 - a. At that time it was the apostles' responsibility to care for the churches:
 - (i) To strengthen them doctrinally.

- (ii) To lay hands on them that they might receive the gift of the Spirit, as we saw in Samaria.
 - (iii) Even to ordain men to church office.
 - (iv) The church was still headquartered in Jerusalem, but from there they cared for the churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.
 - b. As he traveled about, he came to the saints who lived at Lydda:
 - (i) Lydda was northwest of Jerusalem, down towards the plains next to the coast.
 - (ii) It was actually on the way to Joppa, where we next find him.
- 2. When he arrived, he found a man who had been bedridden for eight years, because he paralyzed (v. 33).
 - a. After eight years, Aeneas, as well as those caring for him, had probably given up any hope that he would ever recover.
 - (i) The Lord often chose people in a hopeless condition to heal, since they would be more desperate to be healed, and when they were healed it would be all the more amazing to those who saw it.
 - (ii) Our Lord healed a man who had been blind from birth (John 9), and another man who had been sick for thirty-eight years (John 5:1-8).
 - (iii) He also used Peter and John to heal a man that had been lame from birth (Acts 3:1-10).
 - b. Aeneas was a fit candidate to be healed:
 - (i) And so Peter said to him, “‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.’ Immediately he got up” (v. 34).
 - (ii) Notice that Peter doesn’t allow those who see him healed to think he did it.
 - (a) He said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you”: It was Christ’s authority and power, not Peter’s. He gets all the glory.
 - (b) And when he said this, Aeneas immediately got up.
 - (c) These miracles Jesus did were so immediate and obvious, not like the warm tingly feeling or absence of pain or convulsing that those who receive so-called healings experience today.
 - (iii) Notice too that Aeneas had faith: he had to believe the word spoken and respond to it – not unlike saving faith, where we are called to trust in Christ for our salvation and then get up and begin to labor for His glory.
- 3. And what was the result? “All who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord” (v. 35).
 - a. Notice the evidential power of this miracle and the blessing the Lord gave through it: “All who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord” (v. 35).
 - b. Not each and every individual, but many Jews did. Many were awakened and began to follow the Lord (perhaps as Simon), and many were converted.

- c. These miracles were powerful: they stopped traffic and the Lord brought many to faith in Christ, not like what we see today.

B. Second, we see the account of another miracle the Lord did through Peter to confirm the Gospel: the raising of Tabitha from the dead, and the effects it had on many.

1. First, Luke tells us something about this woman (v. 36):

- a. She lived at Joppa, a town located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It's the same town that Jonah booked passage to go to Tarshish (Jonah 1:3).
- b. Her name in Aramaic was Tabitha and in Greek, Dorcas, which means gazelle or deer.
- c. She was a disciple: one who had embraced Christ and had been baptized.
- d. This wasn't the only way we can see that she was a disciple, she also showed that she was by her life:

(i) She was well known for her acts of love and mercy:

- (a) James tells us faith without works is dead (James 2:26).
- (b) She showed by her life that she had a living and active faith.

(ii) She had continually been looking for ways to serve and to show kindness to others.

(iii) Her love for others was more than in word only, it was also in deeds.

- (a) She was full of acts of kindness (full of good works) and in giving money to the poor (charity).
- (b) Notice that even if we don't have much in the way of money, we can still do something – we can give with our hands when we can't with our wallets – to those in need.
- (c) The Bible tells us that good intentions are not enough – it is the actual doing that the Lord is concerned with.
- (d) James writes, “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?” (2:15-16).
- (e) Tabitha didn't stop with intentions, she ministered to their needs.

(iv) She was a true disciple and this should be the character of all disciples:

Jesus said, “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8).

e. This was the one who lately had become sick and died (v. 37).

- (i) Death will come to every one of us, no matter how devoted we are to the Lord.
- (ii) But this was a mercy to her, not a judgment – even though those who knew her missed her dearly and the kindness and mercy she showed to them.

f. Her friends didn't bury her right away, perhaps because they knew Peter was close by and might come and raise her to life again.

- (i) So they washed her body according to the custom, so that if she was really alive, it might revive her. If not, she was really dead.
 - (ii) And they laid her in an upper room which Lightfoot believed was most likely a public meeting place for the believers of that town, so that if Peter came, he might raise her more solemnly in that place.
2. The next thing they did was send for Peter. “Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, ‘Do not delay in coming to us’” (v. 38).
- a. Joppa was a little more than 10 miles away from Lydda. The disciples undoubtedly heard that Peter was there and that he had healed Aeneas.
 - b. And so they sent men to him urging him to come that he might pray for Tabitha and raise her to life again: Jesus said that those who believed in Him would do what He did – He raised Lazarus and the son of the widow of Nain.
3. Third, Peter listened and came.
- a. We should always be ready to do good when we are needed and when we can.
 - (i) But we do need to be careful:
 - (ii) John Wesley once told his disciples not to go simply to those who need you, but to those who need you the most.
 - (iii) There will always be needs around us, and we can’t meet them all.
 - (iv) But we can do something, especially for those who have the greatest needs.
 - b. When Peter arrived, they brought him to the upper room (v. 39).
 - (i) There were widows there mourning her death, who began to show Peter the tunics and garments she made while she was with them, not to flatter Tabitha or for any other wrong reason, but to show Peter what the Lord had done through this daughter of His.
 - (ii) These weren’t pieces of clothing she made which weren’t handed out yet, but probably those she made for the widows who were mourning her.
 - (a) Hopefully, by God’s grace, there will be those who will miss us and mourn us when we’re gone.
 - (b) It would be tragic if we lived our lives in such a way that there wasn’t.
 - (iii) Now it would be wrong for us to draw attention to ourselves. But it isn’t necessarily wrong for those who have received that kindness.
 - (a) Tabitha didn’t praise herself, but those she ministered to did.
 - (b) They saw in her the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31, “She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor, and she stretches out her hands to the needy” (vv. 19-20).
 - (c) And they were mourning her loss: not so much for her, for she was now at rest and receiving the comfort of the Lord, but for themselves, since they would now be deprived of the blessing of her love and charity.

- (d) The charitable know that the poor they will always have with them; but the poor mourn when the charitable are taken away.
4. But the Lord used Peter to take away their sadness. “But Peter sent them all out 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; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive” (vv. 40-41).
- a. Peter raised her privately.
 - (i) She was in the upper room – possibly a meeting place, as we’ve seen.
 - (ii) But Peter put them all out (it’s possible that family members or heads of the church were present).
 - (iii) He didn’t do this to perform any secret rites, but didn’t want to make a show of it – the evidence of Tabitha being raised to life again would be enough.
 - b. It was there in private that he poured out his soul to the Lord in prayer, and when he was done, he turned to the body and said Tabitha arise.
 - (i) Immediately the Lord brought life back into her body: she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Peter reached out his hand and helped her up.
 - (ii) Then he called for the saints and widows and presented her to them alive that they might see and know that Jesus has the power to raise the dead to life.
5. Finally, we see the effects of this miracle: “It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner *named* Simon” (vv. 42-43).
- a. The word quickly spread throughout Joppa that Peter had raised Tabitha to life with the result that many believed the Gospel – again this is the point of the miracle: to confirm the Word.
 - (i) The fact that Joppa was a port might have helped the word to get out more quickly from there to other countries.
 - (ii) Because of this Peter had the opportunity to stay in Joppa and to minister the Word (v. 43).
 - b. The Lord has ways of showing us where he wants us to go: one of the ways is by opening a door of opportunity.
 - (i) He didn’t stay with Tabitha, whom some believe was wealthy, but with a common tradesman, Simon the tanner.
 - (ii) He didn’t want anyone to think he had done the miracle for his own gain, but he preferred to live in humble circumstances.
 - (iii) And he stayed here until the Lord called him to go elsewhere, which we will see next time when he is called to go about 35 miles North to Caesarea to bring the Gospel to the Gentile Cornelius. Amen.