

ACTS 9:32-43

INTRODUCTION

In this final part of chapter 9 the scene shifts from Paul to Peter who will again be the central figure in the narrative for the next three chapters. Paul has been converted and has boldly proclaimed his newfound faith both in Damascus and in Jerusalem. His preaching so aggravated his opponents that first in Damascus and then in Jerusalem they sought to kill him.

He has now fled Jerusalem for his home city of Tarsus. Paul's ministry will dominate the rest of Acts from chapter 13 onwards but for now we need to focus again on Peter. In many ways these chapters (9:32-12) are a bridge between the work of Peter and the work of Paul.

These verses that we are looking at today tell us that Peter travels to Joppa and why, this is where God needs him to be so that Cornelius can make contact with him in chapter 10.

1. PETER WAS INVOLVED WITH PEOPLE (vs. 32-33)

Now the continued expansion of the church outside Jerusalem assisted of course by persecution meant that Peter had to move too. As he travelled around seeking to minister to various churches he came to visit the saints in Lydda, which was about 25 miles from Jerusalem.

He no doubt wanted to help the church at Lydda and instruct them in the things of God but when Peter arrived there he found Aeneas a man who was crippled and bed ridden for 8 years. The use of the word "a man" to talk about Aeneas whereas Dorcas is called a "disciple" at least suggests to us that this man was not a unbeliever.

He faced a very bleak future for without ability to walk he had no means of providing for himself and with no social services he was left in a hopeless situation or at least left depending on others to care for him. But God leads Peter to his man, because it seems clear that Peter had a desire and was consistently involved with people, he wanted to minister and help people and it is true that God seems to use those who are involved with people to help those in need.

But of course Peter had no secret powers but Jesus whom he served was God and could heal and that is what happens here (vs. 34-35).

Peter understood his role perfectly it was not to draw attention to himself but to point people to Jesus Christ who is able to meet us at the point of our needs. Jesus heals Aeneas instantly and all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon, which was the surrounding area, turned to the Lord (v 35).

You see my dear friends because Peter was willing to be involved with people and genuinely wanted to minister to them and go where God needed him to go then God brought physical healing to this man and spiritual healing to many more. You simply do not know how the Lord will use you or what He will do through you once you begin to become involved with people.

Once you have a heart to help people then God may chose you to be His instrument in bringing grace and help to many especially in bringing salvation to many. But that is only possible because Peter wanted to help others and was prepared to travel to Lydda in order to visit the saints there. Are you and I involved with people?

It is so easy as Christians to close ourselves off to people, to give the impression that we are private people and do not want to be disturbed. That may be as a result of our own personalities but it is important that we have time for people and should God lead us we must be willing to go

and help them when needed. Sometimes it might be inconvenient, sometimes we might be very busy with our own lives, but it is important if we are going to be used by God to ask Him to give us a heart for people.

A heart that desires to minister to people wherever they are and a heart to be used by God are vital if we are going to be God's instrument in meeting the needs of others. That might mean that God has to break and change our selfish hearts, even as Christians we can be so self-focused so that all that drives and moves us is our own little concerns and all that we can really care about is our own little world.

But if we have a true heart for people then I think we will be surprised at the many and varied areas of life that God uses us in order to help reach out to people.

But it was also only possible for Peter to be used by God because Peter's only desire it seems was to exalt the Lord Jesus not to exalt himself among the people. He makes this clear by telling Aeneas that "Jesus Christ heals" him. He made it clear that he could not heal him but he knew someone who could. Peter's desire was that Jesus Christ might receive the praise as a result of this miracle. Now that is the sort of person God uses the person whose only desire is that God might be given the praise. It is so easy to be involved with people because of what we get out of it.

It's easy to enjoy the friendship and company of others or the praise that we receive when we help others. There is a buzz in serving God and in serving people and that buzz might well be the reason why we do it. But that is not the right reason. We must serve God and be involved with people so that God will be glorified through our lives and ministry.

You know very often it is the unseen work that tells us if we are involved with people for our own benefit or for God's glory. It's easy to be involved with people when it is seen by others, so you can be involved in some of the works that go on within the church and everyone knows about it. But it's the unseen work that tells us if our hearts are truly concerned for others.

Going to visit someone or phoning someone or doing some practical task that no one else knows about. It's the quiet work of tidying up or repairing the building that no one sees that will reveal something of our true heart condition in our involvement with people.

As we come back to the text it is interesting that the Greek word used for "turned to the Lord" is a word that means to turn around. It describes a complete change of direction. Conversion is an about turn from one belief and behaviour to a completely opposite behaviour and belief. Conversion is not a change of religion but a change of direction. It's about following Jesus Christ instead of following sin and self.

The ultimate goal in getting involved with people is that they might be converted because there is nothing that brings honour and praise to God more than the conversion of sinners to Jesus Christ. Although Peter did not heal Aeneas it was as a result of his involvement with him and with those surrounding him that God chose to heal him and many people turned to the Lord as a result.

The Lord displayed his power in the situation both in healing the man and in saving people. But that power was only displayed because of Peter's willing involvement with people. My dear friends God will display his power in the saving of His people but the instruments He uses to do so is normal people like you and me. If we were more involved with people and if we had willing hearts to be involved then who knows how many people God would reach out to in grace and save?

Therefore let us learn this one great lesson to be involved with people and to do so for the right reasons, which is to bring glory to our great God.

2. PETER WAS AVAILABLE FOR PEOPLE (vs.36-39)

Peter's availability led to an even more astounding opportunity than Aeneas being healed for Dorcas was raised from the dead. While Peter was at Lydda tragedy struck the church at nearby Joppa? One of the most beloved members Tabitha more commonly known by her Greek name Dorcas died. This lady was a disciple of Jesus who was known for the fact that she was always doing good and consistently helped the poor.

She did this by making clothes for them (v 39). Now by using the name "disciple" Luke is not thinking of the strict 12 disciples who were Jesus closest friends but it is being used here in a general way of being a follower of Jesus Christ. Now when she fell ill and died it was a massive blow to the church at Joppa.

They prepared her body for burial but instead of burying her immediately as was normal practise they laid her body in an upper room. Evidently they had something else in mind and that becomes clear. Lydda was near to Joppa and when the disciples heard that Peter was at Lydda and no doubt the healing of Aeneas encouraged them, they invite Peter to come to them.

They sent two men to urge Peter not to delay and come at once and Peter went with them. Once again we see that Peter has time for people even though he was involved with proclaiming Christ and no doubt the healing of Aeneas gave him increased opportunities yet he leaves that place and goes to Joppa because there are some there who need to be ministered to.

Peter was never too busy for people, he made himself available for them and he went where people needed him. Peter is brought to the upper room where Dorcas's body was laid out. Peter saw firsthand what a loss Dorcas was to the church for there were widows there who were weeping and showing the clothes that Dorcas had made for them.

Dorcas had cared for these widows whose employment opportunities were zero and without a husband to care for them they were literally left destitute. Dorcas like Peter was available and involved with Peter and her commitment to others is clearly seen in the mourning that is going on at her death. The loss of Dorcas must have been a serious blow to the church and a serious blow to these widows.

However Peter sent everyone out (v 40) for he was not going to put on a display for the crowds and then he began to pray. Peter was an apostle he had been involved in countless healings before therefore you would think that he would simply command Dorcas to rise and she would come back to life. But Peter did not presume that he knew the will of God in this matter.

He needed to know the Lord's power and will in this situation that after all he did not seek, but found himself involved with and therefore he turns to the Lord in prayer (v 41). My dear friends the secret to be available for people and in serving God is prayer. Prayer acknowledges dependence on God it realises that God alone is able, it also reminds us that we are weak and powerless and need God's power by his Spirit to enable us to serve him effectively. No doubt Peter had learnt the importance of prayer from the Lord Jesus having seen and heard Him pray on many occasions (Luke 6:12-13). If we are available to help people then we must be people of prayer.

First we must pray that the Lord will lead us to the right people, people that we can help and minister to. Then we must pray for guidance concerning how we can help those that we are involved with. We must not assume that we have all the answers to life's problems. There are many perplexing problems and difficulties in life that we do not have answers to.

But we know that the Lord does and therefore a humble seeking after his will and purpose in every situation that we find ourselves in is vital if our help is to be useful and God honouring.

Having finished praying Peter tells Dorcas to get up and immediately she opened her eyes and got up and Peter called the disciples and the widows to come and he presented Dorcas alive to them (v 41)

The result was that many believed in the Lord (v 42) You see God's greater purpose for raising Dorcas now becomes clear as word of her return to life became known all over Joppa. God used miracles as confirming signs that the gospel is true. He also used them to authenticate the apostles as his messengers. God used the raising of Dorcas as a spark for people to seek and turn to the Lord.

Once again it's as God's people make themselves available to people that God uses them to bring salvation to sinners. One act towards another person might have an incredible impact on others and might be used by the Lord to bring many to salvation. But it is all about availability to others and ultimately to the Lord.

Peter then stays in Joppa with a tanner called Simon, which is a bridge between this passage and what happens next when Cornelius is converted. God needs him in Joppa and so all these events are part of God's great purpose of making sure that Peter is in Joppa so that Cornelius can contact him. Through Peter's contact Cornelius will receive the gift of salvation from God.

Also Peter will learn an invaluable lesson that God saves Gentiles as well as Jews through Cornelius salvation. An unthinkable thought as far as Peter was concerned.

So as I conclude we need to remember that God is behind everything that happens in our lives. It means that if we are available and involved with people then God will lead us to various people and various situations and circumstances for purposes that are much deeper than we might expect. He will bring people across our path in order to save them from their sin.

He will bring people across our path in order that we might be able to help them and guide them. But He also might bring us into contact with people who have friends and family that God knows will need our help in the coming days. It might be that God has purposes not to save the people that we are involved in helping but those who are associated with them.

Finally we must remember that God brings us into contact with people because He has many lessons that He wants us to learn. We do not know what those lessons are just as Peter did not know but we must always be prepared to learn from others as well as seeking to serve others. God's purposes are always much deeper and fuller than any of us can ever imagine.

Therefore let us be available and involved with people wherever we are and let us do so prayerfully depending totally upon God to use our feeble efforts for his great name. Let us seek to humbly learn from others whatever lessons God has in store for us.

Amen