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Acts 9 "Peter"

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I'd like to have a word of prayer. "Father in Heaven, we are about to open Your Word. And Lord we know that this is a supernatural experience, and we are praying that You would be the One who teaches us. That You would send your Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts, to inform our minds, to inspire us, even to make it interesting. And Lord we are asking for angels to come into the auditorium and to flood this place with an atmosphere of Heaven. And we pray that Jesus will become real to all of us. Please be so powerful in our midst Lord that our lives will be affected and changed for eternity. We ask and we pray this in Jesus name, Amen."

We stood in the hospital room, Karen and her family. Her father Ed, lying on the bed unconscious. The doctor had been in earlier, had put a flash light and shown it down into his eyes. There was no response. Had taken his pen and poked the bottom of each of his feet, there was no response. In fact, we had been called and told and that he would be dead within an hour or two. The whole family needed to get there right away. He'd been suffering for sometime with leukemia. And so, we didn't doubt what the doctor had to say.

Someone, I don't remember who had called the local Pastor. His name was Gary. And Gary came, saw the family there and saw Ed lying there on the bed. And he did the normal gracious smiles and hand shakes, and hellos to all of us. Gary and my father in law were good friends. They worked a lot together in the church. And after Gary visited with us a little bit as we were chatting, he said: "Well, I'd like to have a word of prayer with Ed." So he leaned over, clasped Ed's hand, and very close to his face, he offered a prayer. And at the end of the prayer he said: "Goodbye Ed!" And my father in law said, "Goodbye!"

Now, he was unconscious prior to the prayer. But he eventually sat up, recognized all of us in the room, and could converse with us. We had him for another six weeks, maybe two months at the most. But I asked my wife this week, "What is one of the greatest miracles in your life?" And she said that. And the reason that was so miraculous to her, even though her father did not live beyond the two months, it was as if God was saying: "See, I can do this anytime I choose to." And we know that He has chosen to do this at the resurrection.

Great miracles! God is about miracles! And today, I would like to study some great miracles with you in the Word of God. We'll be in Acts chapter 9 as we continue our series in the Book of Acts. Acts chapter 9, the focus is going to turn away from Saul and come back to Peter. Most of the Book of Acts in the initial stages is about Peter. And we are in chapter 9. Peter will be written about for the next three chapters. He'll be mentioned one more time in Acts 15 and then we are not going to have any more mention of him. So we are back to Peter and we begin reading in verse 32.

Acts 9 verse 32: "Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Then he arose immediately. So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord."

“At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put 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.”

“Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.”

Those two stories combined, that’s what we are going to study today; several miracles there, great miracles in that story. But to get a background for those stories, we need to back up one verse. In chapter 9 verse 31 it says: “Then the churches...” “Then...!” Well, something has happened prior to this, and what has happened prior to this is the conversion of Saul. And as you know, Saul preached in Damascus, then he went to Arabia for three years, came back, preached in Damascus. Then he came to Jerusalem for fifteen days, and there was such a ruckus that was created. They, the church, asked him to go up to Tarsus. So he left. And it says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.”

It’s in that context that Peter took his journey to visit the believers. Now, I want to submit to you brothers and sisters that chapter 9 verse 31, that verse is probably the best definition of Christianity that I’ve ever found in a single verse in the Bible. Notice what it says. “There is peace, there is walking in the fear of the Lord, and there is comfort in the Holy Spirit.” That is Christianity in its norm; having peace, walking in the fear of God, and being comforted in encouraged by the Holy Spirit. Now, keep that thought in mind and hold your hand here, and then turn to Numbers chapter 6. In numbers chapter 6 verse 22 it says: “And the Lord spoke to Moses saying...” So what we’ll follow will be the words of God himself. God says this to Moses, verse 23: “Speak to Aaron and his sons saying, ‘This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them...’”

Now, Aaron is the high priest, his sons are the other priests. So this is how the ministry in Israel is supposed to bless the people. God says, “...say this...” verse 24: “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.” So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.” Now this is very important. Catch this point. Go back to chapter 9 verse 31. It says that “These people had peace; they were walking in the fear of Lord, and being comforted by the Holy Sprit.” That is the norm for Christianity. The blessings come from God. And we short-circuit that in our own manipulations and maneuverings. Let me explain what I mean.

It is only God that can bless. Pastors can not bless, churches can not bless, family can not bless. Now they can be a blessing to us. They can help us, they can encourage us, they can give us fortitude to move on. We read that last week with Barnabas being an encourager, that's what humanity can do. But it is only God that can bring peace to the heart. It is only God that we can walk with, and it is only God himself that brings comfort to the soul. And that's why we have to go to God. And unfortunately, we've become lazy about that. And so we run to each other. And we ask that each other will take the place of God, and we are not sensing peace. We are not walking with Him and we are not sensing His comfort and His abiding presence in our lives. You see, no human being can really bless you. Only God can really bless you. And so, right off, in the context of this story is this powerful idea that in Christianity we turn to God. There is a God in heaven, and that God in heaven is listening to your prayers. And that God in heaven is attentive to your needs. And we need to be focused on that God in heaven. Amen?

All right, now, that's a little bit of the background. So it's a time of peace. Verse 32: "And it came to pass as Peter went through all the parts of the country that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda." What is Peter doing? One author I read this week said: "Peter is like a General. He is going out to inspect the troops. And those that are rowdy, he pats them on the head, shakes their hand, salutes them and goes. And he finds some that are weak, and he bolsters them, strengthens them, finds those that may need special attention and care, and he spends time with them. And I think that is a wonderful illustration or analogy.

But I have one that I think is better. It is simply this. Peter remembers what Jesus asked him. Jesus asked him this three times. He said, "Peter do you love me?" And Peter said yes. And each time the Lord would say the same thing. "Feed my sheep." And that's what he is doing. He is going out to check on the flock of God, to see how they are doing, to encourage them, to bolster their hopes and to direct their ideas and thoughts towards God. And in his journey he will go to a town called Lydda. Now Lydda is 25 miles north-west of Jerusalem. And as he goes there, he comes to that city; and I can tell you about the town but basically it's an insignificant town. It was called "Ladd" in the Old Testament. After the Jewish war it became a center for rabbinical teaching. And then we don't know much about it. And even today, there are modern buildings all over it, and there has been no archeological dig, so it's Lydda. It's just an insignificant town, and he goes there. He goes there because there are people there. People he cares about.

In verse 33 it says: "He found a certain man Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed." So this man is paralyzed, for eight years he is on his bed and Peter will, in the name of Jesus, heal this man. It is interesting that the scholars debate among themselves whether Aeneas is a believer or not. Who cares; who cares? It's a great miracle either way. Are you with me on that? It's a great miracle either way. In verse 34 after the man is healed, he arose immediately. And then verse 35 it says: "And all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord."

So just so you have some background, Sharon was a costal plane that ran along the cost. And it ran from Lydda north, all the way up to Mount Carmel. And Sharon was famous for a certain flower. Do you remember what flower it was? A rose, that's right. It's mentioned one time in the scriptures in the Book of Solomon, Songs of Solomon where Solomon calls his lover, "The rose

of Sharon.” So it was famous for flowers, it’s in that region, he is there. Great miracle, great miracle took place.

The next one, we find Peter at Joppa; now Joppa is about eleven miles north-west of Lydda. They tell us in preaching classes that if you make a mistake every now and then you are easier to listen to. I hope you are enjoying it. (...laughter) So about another eleven miles away from Jerusalem is the town of Joppa. Joppa is a famous seaport. Today it’s called, TelAviv. TelAviv surrounds Joppa, and also the famous harbor that is there. Now Joppa is famous for children’s story. Now it’s an actual story, but I say it’s children’s story because it’s one of the favorite children’s stories in the Old Testament.

There is a man, and he is told by God to go to the city of Nineveh and to preach to the people there, and to bring repentance to them. But this man doesn’t want to go. Instead, he goes to Joppa. And he gets on a boat headed for Tarsus. Who is the man? (“Jonah”) Yes, there are some children with us. Jonah! Famous story of Jonah and how he was swallowed by that great fish, and was ultimately vomited out upon the land.

Well that’s where the story takes place. At Joppa there is a woman named Tabitha – translated, Dorcas or Gazelle. Now in the Greek, the root word for Dorcas is referring to an animal like a gazelle that has very keen eyes. A gazelle doesn’t have much of a defense mechanism, except its alertness. And so it pays careful attention. It’s always watching so that it will know when to flee. And it is in the Greek the name Dorcas that is given her, to liken to her as somebody who is always watching and quick to see what the needs of others were, and she would provide for their needs. This is an amazing individual here. And she is noted in the word of God for having such good works and charitable deeds.

And so Peter is told about her, asked to come. Verse 37: “But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.” And then verse 38, “Since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them.” Now when you read a story in the Bible, you have to try to get back into it, understand it. We are talking about a distance of eleven miles, so those two men would walk eleven miles to get up with Peter, and then they would walk back eleven miles.

Now that’s a short distance, it says. It is very likely that when the two men leave, Dorcas is ill. It’s very unlikely that she is dead already. And the reason for that is common sense. How many of you today, if a friend of yours called you and said: “Hey, my mother died. Would you come over and pray for her that she’ll come back to life?” Would you consider that strange? Would you call the local pastor and get some elders and go anoint mom and see if she’ll come back to life? We don’t do that. And it’s not likely that these people had that expectation either. But it is very likely that she was ill, and they left. They knew Peter was close. So they went down to get him, and in the process while they are gone, she dies. And it says that they washed her body and wrapped her body, and she was taken to an upper room.

Now back in those days in Israel when somebody died they would generally be buried the same day; especially if you lived in Jerusalem, it was required. So as you moved out away from

Jerusalem, we are thirty five, thirty six miles away from Jerusalem here at Joppa. They didn't follow the rules quite as carefully. And so it's very possible though that she died in the evening, and so the travel of Peter is at night. And he is working his way to be there. And it says in verse 39: "Peter rose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room, and all widows stood by weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them."

So Peter has them leave. Then, he has a word of prayer, he says: "Tabitha arise!" She opens her eyes. She sits up, Peter grabs her hand, he presents her alive. Then you come to the last verse. "And so it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon the Tanner." These are great miracles, several great miracles in this story. And I want to rate them in the order of their greatness. Now granted, this will be very subjective. If you happen to disagree with me, I want you to know, I will love you through the process until you come to the point where you agree with me. I have patience. I believe you will come around.

And I order the miracles in this order. Aeneas being paralyzed now walking; Jesus the Christ heals you, get up! That's a great miracle. I mean, you can only imagine eight years in bed. You can only begin to imagine what that must have felt like to that gentleman, to be lifted up from his bed of affliction. And it's almost comical to me the way that it happens. You know, Jesus the Christ says, "Rise, get up and make the bed too!" And so he does. That's a great miracle.

I think a greater miracle is Dorcas being raised to life. I really do. And consequently, I spent considerable time studying that miracle. What is it about that miracle that is so intriguing? It begins to unfold if you look at chapter 9 verse 40. "But Peter put them all out." So he puts them out of the upper room, "...and he knelt down and prayed." So Peter begins to pray. And when you look at the Book of Acts, I am going to show you five texts really quick, and I want you to follow with me. Look at Acts chapter 1 verse 14. It says, talking about followers of Christ, it says: "These all continued in one accord in prayer." Acts 1 verse 24, they are trying to find a replacement for Judas. "And they prayed and said, 'You o Lord, who knows the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen.'"

Acts 6 verse 4, you come to the appointment of the seven. And it says this in verse 4 regarding the ministry of the 12: "But we will give our selves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Acts 8 verse 14: "Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. Who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit." Acts 9 verse 11, God is speaking to Ananias: "So the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.'"

Do you catch how many times the church is empowered by God as a direct result of prayer? And I'll tell you brothers and sisters, we do not pray enough. Here is what happens to us. We have difficulties, we have pains, we have doubts, we have discouragements. And so we seek somebody to talk to. And there is nothing wrong with that. But we should seek God first. We should be with Him in prayer. God is the only one who can change things anyways, especially as regards to your children or other relationships, and things like that. There is so much power in

prayer. Now across town while people of God are praying, you have the enemies of God plotting how to destroy the people of God.

Let me share with you, that is a very human reaction to difficulty. We try to plan how to deal with it. And the number one thing God wants us to do is to pray. Because when we pray, it gives Him an opportunity to do things that won't happen if we don't pray. If you want to solve the problem, you are going to create a problem. It always works that way. But if you let God solve the problem, it will be of a nature that can only be from Him. I will give you an example.

We've pastored, Karen and I now, plus twenty five years. And almost every church we've been in, there have been a few people that you know, they are in the way. They are critical of leadership, they are a problem. So much time and energy consumed on them, and they create difficulties and stuff like this. And I learned fairly early in ministry that just maneuvering to get them out of office doesn't work because they still stay there. And any human's plans and devising to deal with this will not work. What we did learn though is if you pray God works. You see when we work, we work. When we pray, God works. And we began to pray, and it's a simple prayer: "Lord, if they can be fixed, give us the patience. If they can't be fixed, get them out of here." It's a simple prayer. Some of you may have had that prayer said on your behalf, I don't think so. But, it may have happened.

I'll give you an illustration. We were pastoring a church in a certain place, and there was a woman who said some very mean things to some African-American people who were members of our congregation. And she represented a small group of people in the church who felt the same way she did. And it was creating quite a problem in the church. Very uncomfortable for our African-American believers and very uncomfortable for me because how do you build a program in an environment like that? I got a phone call, I wasn't there when the incident took place, but that very day I met with the folks, couple of leaders from our church, and then those folks who had their concerns, and their pains. And we talked, and I shared, and I said: "Look, here is what we are going to do. We are going to pray for this individual. We are going to pray specifically for them. And here is what we are going to pray. We are going to pray, 'God, if she can be fixed, give us patience. If not, then we ask that You will remove her.'"

We went around the circle. I find a time out later. But before we said amen, she suffered a stroke. Now, I'll tell how gracious God is though. It got her out of office and it got that voice silent. But it was very unusual stroke in this way. It affected her mind in such a way that she was happy. In every situation she would smile, and she was happy. And she had never been that way all her life. And so she spent the rest of her days in the nursing home smiling. You go visit her, she was just so happy to see you. God responds to prayer brothers and sisters. Unfortunately what we do is manipulate and contrive and plan and do all we can, and we get in the way.

You know if your children are not serving God, you are not going to come up with a plan to get them to do it. You know, you can't do it! There is no methodology that saves somebody, it's a miracle. So we need to approach it on that level. And when to be praying people; and the people in the Word of God were great, praying people. God wants to bless us, but He only can bless us as a response to our prayers, not our manipulations and our contriving. Now, let's go back to this great miracle, a person raised from the dead. We come to Acts 9 verse 40. You know, what is

Peter is going to say? What is he going to do to raise somebody to life? And by the way, let me ask you. Was this woman raised to life because of the faith of Peter? If she was, what kind of faith do you have? Or, what kind of faith do I have? I'll tell you right now. Her coming to life had nothing to do with the faith of Peter, but had everything to do with the power of God. I'll show that to you.

Look at chapter 9 verse 40: "Peter put them all out." Okay, "You folks leave the room. Thank you, thank you. You showed me all the tunics and the garments, all the weeping and wailing is done, I need some silence." He knelt down and he prayed. He wants to be alone with God. What is he praying about? Is he saying: "What is the right formula? We don't have it in our pastor's manual yet about raising people from the dead. We know how to anoint people for healings and things like this. That's in the manual. But what do you do about somebody that's dead?" What is he praying about? He is praying a very simple prayer. But it is a most profound and powerful prayer he is praying this. "Lord, what is Your will? What do You want with this lady? If You tell me now that she is going to be dead until the resurrection, your people can receive that. That's okay. We can live with that. But You have some other plan, let me know and I'll respond accordingly."

And somehow in that prayer God communicated to him, "I want her to live!" That's why when Peter ends the prayer, he goes over and he says: "Tabitha arise!" It had nothing to do with him or his faith, but everything to do with God. But Peter humbled himself in the presence of God to hear what God wanted to happen. "Tabitha, arise!" Those are great miracles. Paralytic healed, woman raised from the dead, but I'll tell you in this story, neither of them are the greatest miracle. The greatest miracle in this story is Peter. And that's demonstrated in a couple of ways. And the first way that is demonstrated is in the verse 43 where it says: "So it was that Peter stayed many days in Joppa with Simon a tanner."

Now what we don't know if we are reading this for the first time is that Luke is transitioning us. You see, Peter, Peter the great leader of the Christian church in chapter 10 is going to end up in the home of a Gentile, leading that person to Christ. And this is a transition between that and where he is. Tanners! Peter is going to stay with the tanner. He is going to hang out there for several days. Do you realize that tanners were despised by the Jews? A tanner is somebody who would take the hides of animals and work it until you can make shoes, sandals, clothing, and other things like that. They worked with that stuff.

Now tanners were so despised that; well I'll just describe it this way. Ladies, in those days you had no rights at all except when it came to a tanner. And here is the one right that you had. If you married a man and found out later he was a tanner, it was legal for you to divorce him. That's how much they despised tanners. Now they despised them for a number of reasons. One, they suspected the tanners of being immoral because women worked as tanners. And men and women were working side by side in the same trade, that didn't happen back then. So they considered the men immoral. Also, the plain fact of it is the stench was repulsive. But here is what it will really boil down to; they felt that a tanner was continually, ritually unclean because of their work with dead animals. So they couldn't even go into the synagogue. Tanners were law lives, and Peter is hanging out with a tanner about ready to go in to Cornelius' home in the next chapter.

Now, let me continue this idea that the greatest miracle in this story is Peter himself. Let me refresh your mind of Peter in the Gospels. Now listen carefully to what I say. All through the Gospels we see Peter in his strength. All through the Gospels, we see Peter in his strength! We see him sinking in the water. We see him taking Jesus aside and rebuking him about the cross. We see him saying, "Shall I forgive seven times?" We see him committing Jesus to having to pay the Temple tax. We see him failing to stay awake and to pray, and the whole experience of denying Jesus outright. All through the Gospel, you see Peter in his strength.

When you come to the Book of Acts, Peter is the leader and you see him in his weakness. You see Peter in his weakness. He directs the replacing of Judas, he preaches at Pentecost; he heals the lame man, and is arrested. He confronts Ananias and Sapphira; he preaches to the Sanhedrin on behalf of the twelve, he confronts Simon Magus. This is Peter in his weakness. And Peter in his weakness is the greatest miracle in this story.

Maybe today you are paralyzed in some type of fear, pain, doubt or confusion. I have a simple sentence for you. Jesus heals you, get up. Or maybe you are dead spiritually? "Tabitha arise!" Maybe you are not accepted by others? God will dwell with you. But I'll tell you today brothers and sisters, the greatest miracle you'll ever see is what God does for you in your weakness. For when you are weak, you are strong because you will hold on to Him! The greatest miracle you'll ever see is what God does for you in your weakness. And so today I am wondering if there are any here who would like to step away from their strength and admit fully and honestly to God. We've got nothing to offer, we manipulate, we connive, we plan, we do all that stuff; we don't pray enough, we haven't been seeking Your blessings God. You know, we are trying to this to some degree higher or lower, depending on what kind of week you had, in our own strength wisdom and understanding. And the truth is brothers and sisters, you do it on your own you'll get what your own can provide. The single, greatest miracle we'll ever experience is what God can do through us in our weakness!

Today, would you like to say to God, "I am weak Lord, be a miracle in my life." If you would like to say that, then I am going to ask you to stand. "Father in Heaven, we ask You to bless us. We ask You to cause Your face to shine upon us. We ask You Lord to work a great miracle in our lives. Show us what You can do in our weakness. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen."