



A Tale of Three Miracles

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 9:32-42

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Pastor Nick Shaffer

It may be that as you read the title for today's sermon, you thought maybe I had forgotten how to count. There are two obvious miracles that stand out in the text that we are looking at this morning. But there is also a third, a greater miracle that is not so obvious and that it is easy to overlook because in the book of Acts it is so commonplace. And that miracle is the miracle of salvation. The truth is that I think it is easy for us to forget the miracle that is salvation, but this passage this morning will not allow us to do so.

In this passage this morning, Luke turns his focus back to the Apostles and particularly to Peter. These miracles are important for a couple of reasons. First, in the case of Aeneas and in the case of Tabitha, both Christians, these miracles occur in the context of the church and so the first application, the first instruction to be gleaned from these miracles is the for the church and they teach two important spiritual truths to us who are followers of Christ and they lead to the salvation of a great number in Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa. But second, they reestablish and reaffirm Peter as the leading Apostle in the early church and that is going to be very important in light of the coming expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles through His ministry. For these reasons alone, this text is an important one. So let's take a look at these miracles that Christ performs through the hands of Peter and understand the greater spiritual significance that comes out as a result. First, let's look at the healing of Aeneas...

The Healing of Aeneas (32-34) Luke writes: "Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda." (Acts 9:32, ESV) The last that we know of Peter in the book of Acts is that he had come to Samaria and been the instrument through which the Samaritans had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. On that same trip he had had the encounter with Simon the Great which identified him as a false believer who had no lot with the Spirit and therefore no lot with the church.

Now, with the temporary peace that that the church was enjoying, Peter was out and about, in the regions where the Jewish Christians who had been driven out of Jerusalem, had taken up residence, preaching the gospel as they went. He is out doing pastoral ministry, visiting the saints, preaching and teaching the Word of God, strengthening them in their faith and encouraging them to faithfulness and perseverance. He's out caring for the saints. That word saint is an important one. It means "holy one." It speaks of someone that is set apart for sanctification to the Lord, set apart to God as his own peculiar possession by the blood of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. So Peter's ministry here begins with the saints.

So what might Peter have been preaching? No doubt, his preaching and exhortation would have been along the lines of his message to the elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. He would have been preaching to them something like: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:3–9, ESV) He would have been encouraging them, exhorting them "Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."" (1 Peter 1:13–16, ESV) He would have been teaching: "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;" (1 Peter 1:22–23, ESV) He would have been preaching to them: "So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:1–5, ESV)

And it is the context of this ministry that Peter comes across Aeneas. “There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed.” (Acts 9:33, ESV) There in the church, numbered among the saints, is this brother in Christ who though he believes in Christ and is saved, is suffering, having been bedridden for eight years. He’s a saved man but he is unable to serve, still crippled in his flesh. Spiritually he is whole, physically he is broken, but in a moment, He will be healed by Jesus Christ through Peter in order to teach an important spiritual lesson.

Look at this. “And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And immediately he rose.” (Acts 9:34, ESV) Now first, I want you to notice the humility of Peter and his obvious dependence upon Jesus Christ. He does not say, “In the name of Jesus Christ, I heal you.” That’s important. Peter is not seeking glory, not seeking fame, not seeking prominence; he is simply seeking to be obedient to Christ and to magnify His glory and His name. What is going to take place is all a work of Christ.

The second thing that we need to see here is not as obvious – it is the tense of what Peter says to Aeneas. Literally what Peter says to Aeneas is “Jesus is healing you, or continuing to heal you. Rise and make your bed.” The verbs are two distinctly different tenses. Now this is important because it helps us to understand the spiritual significance of this miracle and why Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would record it for us. For Aeneas, this miracle was a further outpouring of God’s grace upon him, a continuation of what Christ had done for him. He was already healed spiritually and that God would now heal him physically was grace upon grace. When he tells him to take up his bed, the idea is that he would not need it again, at least not as a paralytic. And this miracle consists of a declaration, a command and a response. Don’t miss that. There is a declaration: “Jesus Christ heals you.” There is a command: “Rise and make your bed.” And there is a response: “And immediately he rose.” His entire life had changed and now he was physically whole and would continue to grow in strength.

Why would the church need to be instructed by these miracles? Because they did not yet have a NT, which would explain the fullness of the work of the gospel. And so for now, they had to see it in pictures – these miracles. So what is the spiritual significance of this miracle for us? What is the spiritual lesson? Remember that Aeneas is a Christian, that’s important. The message of this miracle is for followers of Christ, first. So what is the message? Beloved, it is a picture of the power of Christ, the grace of God, the might of the gospel to sanctify us, to

deliver us from the power of the flesh, and to make us more and more conformed to the image of Christ, more and more to walk in the new life that we have in Jesus. The healing of this man, this believer, is a picture of the progressive spiritual healing that is taking place in all of us who are truly Christ's disciples. For us who are in Christ, Jesus really is healing us, progressively healing us from the life that we once had. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ and we are sanctified by grace through faith in Christ as well. This healing of this believer, after salvation, is a picture of the progressive nature of our own healing, our own sanctification in Christ. Just as in the case of Aeneas there is a declaration, a command and a response, so in the gospel, there is a declaration, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." (Romans 5:6–10, ESV) AND Romans 6:6: "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin." (Romans 6:6, ESV) There is a command: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:11–14, ESV) And there is a response that is expected – obedience, a presentation of ourselves to the Lord.

Look, no one when he or she is saved is fully sanctified. Sanctification takes time. We need Christ to be healing us. We need to rise and make our beds, to move out of the old condition we were once in before Christ saved us, but make no mistake we need to be sanctified by the grace of God in Christ. That is the real and true outworking of the power of the gospel in our present lives. Paul talked about it when he said: "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12–13, ESV) Sanctification is real, lasting, God-glorifying, Christ-magnifying, Spirit-energized life change. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers us as justified sinners from the pollution of sin, renewing our entire nature according to the moral image of God, and enables us to live lives pleasing to Him as we obey God's truth by faith and trust in Him for the power to do so. Sanctification is a synergistic work, a cooperative work between man and God. It requires a response – the response of faith and obedience. It is

a progressive work, by which, through the power of the Holy Spirit working through His Word and our grace empowered obedience, we are transformed evermore into the perfect image of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the outworking of salvation. Paul writes to the Thessalonian believers, But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2Th 2:13-14)

To think that Jesus lived and died and rose again only to provide justification and forgiveness of sins for His people, is missing a great part of the truth. We dishonor Christ by thinking that and we make Him only half a Savior. Not only has Christ died to pay the penalty and wrath which our sins deserved and to deliver us from the guilt of our sins through His atonement, He has died to deliver us from the dominion, from the power of sin. His power is able to do this...that is the point of the miracle.

The healing of this man is miraculous. It involves the healing of the cause of his paralysis, the creation of new muscle tissue, new tendons and ligaments, the strengthening of bones so that his legs can do, so that he can do, what he was created to do. God gives strength to what was previously dead and shriveled, what was deformed and atrophied. What a perfect picture of sanctification whereby God gives new desires, new affections, new longings, new motivations, new power so that we can do what we were created to do – walk in obedience and holiness in Christ, run the race faithfully, pursue righteousness, to pursue holiness, to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. So in this physical healing of Aeneas, of this believer in Christ, we see a picture of the greater, spiritual miracle of sanctification. From this picture, Luke takes us to Joppa and...

The Raising of Tabitha (36-41) Starting in verse 35, we read: “Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity.” (Acts 9:36, ESV) In contrast to the Aeneas who was bedridden and so unable to serve in the church, here we see the picture of a fully devoted and faithful servant of Christ. Here is this wonderful woman by the name of Tabitha, in Aramaic, or in Greek, the language of the nations, her name is Dorcas. I think I like that name Dorcas best. In fact in the interest of the nations and for their understanding, I’m going to start calling Tabby Shelor, Dorcas. I just think it has a nice ring to it.

Anyway, this sister is a faithful servant of Christ, a faithful servant of the church, a pillar of devotion, full of God's grace, laboring in love to minister to the needs of the widows and the body of Christ as a whole. Here she was, faithful in well-doing, obedient to the Lord and serving His church when Luke tells us: "In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay."" (Acts 9:37–38, ESV) Dorcas died. It was the practice that when someone died, their body would be washed and laid out for three days until being buried. But the disciples at Joppa heard that Peter was nearby in Lydda and so they sent for him, urging him to come quickly. What did they expect? Did they expect him to raise her from the dead? He had never been used by God for such a miracle before. I'm not sure what they were expecting, but God knows what he is going to use Peter for.

"So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them." (Acts 9:39, ESV) Who knows, maybe they wanted to testify to Dorcas' act of kindness and mercy, to her faithful life, to her devotion to Christ and His church. Maybe they just hoped to influence Peter to do something. Whatever the case, "...Peter put them all outside, 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. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive." (Acts 9:40–41, ESV)

Just as Christ had done when he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead, Peter cleared the room. But unlike Jesus, Peter first prayed before he said anything to Tabitha. He prayed to be certain of the will of God, and then confident of the Father's purpose he spoke to the body and said in Aramaic "Tabitha, kumi." Miraculously, her eyes opened and she was presented to the all of the saints and widows alive!

What is the message for us? For the church? For believers in Christ? The message is clear, after we have been faithful in our walking with Christ, after we have pursued Him and by His grace known the reality of sanctification, after we have walked in a manner worthy of the calling of Jesus Christ our Lord and we close our eyes in physical death, there is a resurrection coming. The power of the gospel guarantees the salvation of our souls and the resurrection of

our bodies. In fact I want you to see that the Greek verb that is used here in this account and translated as “raised her up” is the same word that is used throughout the NT for Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Dorcas would die again, but her resurrection by the power of God was a reminder to all believers that there is a resurrection coming. Sin and death have been defeated once and for all by Jesus Christ. That is one of our greatest hopes as Christians. There is a new heaven and new earth coming, new bodies coming to all who trust in Christ. This is the picture provided by Tabitha’s resurrection.

Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, the firstfruits of the resurrection, so we too shall be raised. Death has no power over us. “Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.” (1 Corinthians 15:20–24, ESV) This is the hope brought to mind by this resurrection of Tabitha, an amazing miracle. This is what we are living for Christ and dying for Christ for – eternal life, future resurrection, the kingdom of Christ and of God the Father. This is an amazing miracle. Both of them are, but the greatest miracle in this text is the

The Salvation of Many (35, 42) As amazing as both of these miracles are, they were actually the smaller works of God that led to the greater miracle of salvation. The response to Aeneas’ healing and Tabitha’s resurrection are told us in verses 35 and 42: “And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.” (Acts 9:35, ESV) and “And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.” (Acts 9:42, ESV) Beloved, here is the truth that we so often forget – the far more miraculous than the healing of paralyzed man or the raising of a woman from the dead is the work of God to save a human soul, to save a soul set against God, in rebellion to Him, a soul that deserves hell and death. These miracles that Aeneas and Tabitha experienced point to the greatest miracle in Scripture – that God saves His enemies to the uttermost through the blood of His Son, that He regenerates dead souls and draws them irresistibly to Christ, that He frees and transforms the will of a sinful man or woman and makes them turn away from sin and to the salvation that is in Christ, that He creates faith where once there was unbelief and makes rebels obedient and faithful sons and daughters of the Living God. It is a miracle that Christ would be delivered up and die for our trespasses and be raised from the dead three days later for our justification, that he would lay his life down for his sheep and take it up again. It is a miracle that by the pouring out of Christ’s blood, our sins, our stains, can be fully cleansed. It is a miracle that Christ’s blood is all our righteousness and

salvation and our only plea before the throne of God. And, wonder of wonders, it is a miracle that God would change a human heart and open blinded eyes to stop trusting in our own imagined goodness as our salvation and turn our hearts to God in Christ. It is as Charles Spurgeon said: "In the deepest sense, it is indeed a work (a miracle) to convert a soul. If Niagara could suddenly be made to leap upward instead of forever dashing downward from its rocky height, it were not such a miracle as to change the perverse will and raging passions of men. To wash the Ethiopian white, or remove the leopard's spots, is proverbially a difficulty, yet these are but surface works; to renew the very core of manhood, and tear sin from its hold upon man's heart, this is not alone the finger of God, but the bearing of his arm. Conversion is a work comparable to the making of a world. . . . It is a work indeed. The labors of Hercules were but trifles compared with this; to slay lions and hydras, and cleanse Augean stables-all this is child's play compared with renewing a right spirit in the fallen nature of man." Amen, there is no greater miracle, no greater display of the power of God than this.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8–10, ESV) And that salvation, that life in Christ, those good works that salvation produces in the life of all who are saved by Christ – they are nothing short of a miracle.

Here in this cluster of miracles at the end of chapter 9, we see the work of the gospel illustrated beautifully – the salvation of the lost through repentance and faith in Christ, the power of the gospel to progressively heal us from the ravages of sin – sanctification, and the eternal promise of life everlasting in a resurrected body. This and more is the power and the promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And this threefold picture of the gospel begs three important questions.

Three Important Questions

1) Have you turned from sin to Christ and placed your faith wholly in Christ for salvation? Do not just blow past this question. Is your hope exclusively in Christ? It is good question to consider no matter how long you have been in Christ. There is in each of us the remnants of our flesh and as a result a slow creep away from complete trust in Christ, to place our faith elsewhere...

2) Are you pursuing sanctification in Christ? Are you growing in godliness? Is there a real pattern of the character of Christ being formed in your life? Are you seeing the death of sin and the growth of godly character more and more in your life? This is the very real and necessary fruit of salvation in Christ. If you are not seeing a growth in godliness, if there is not a growing desire for righteousness in your soul, you have every reason according to Scripture to question your profession of faith in Christ. Charles Spurgeon says this of receiving Jesus Christ the Lord. "When we received Christ, we took him for all that we knew of him, and we found that he was much more than we then thought he was; but we did not pick and choose, and say, "We will have his pardon, but we will not have his sanctification." We took the many-sided Christ, the Christ of many glorious characters, the Christ of ten thousand times ten thousand beauties; we took Christ to teach us, Christ to lead us, Christ to feed us, Christ to cheer us, Christ for us to obey, and Christ for us to delight in; we took a whole Christ. And then we gave him our whole selves. We said, "Lord, take us, body, soul, and spirit;" we prayed that the sacrifice might be bound with cords to the horns of the altar forever. We made no bargains with him; we gave the freehold of our souls to Jesus, and of our bodies too, and we only asked that we might not have a pulse beating except for him, or our lungs heaving except as he was our very life."

A lifestyle of repentance, of personal examination, of renewing the mind with the Word of God, of active ministry, of positive righteousness, of walking as Christ walked, of good works which God prepared beforehand that we would walk in them – this is the undeniable fruit of the gospel as taught by Scripture and by this miracle with Aeneas. The Apostle John taught: "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." (1 John 2:3–6, ESV) John is insisting that salvific, personal, powerful knowledge of Christ -- saving faith -- has the capacity to create obedience. It changes us. That is the point. A true child of God must be like Christ. The unbroken pattern of sin and enmity with God cannot continue when a person is born again.

And that happens as we abide in Christ. Jesus said: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:4–5, ESV) We then are called to abide, to

remain, to make our home in Christ. We do that by doing those things make for gospel life with Him. We have been placed into Christ by the Holy Spirit, now we must pursue that relationship by the decisions we make, i.e., decisions to expose ourselves to his Word, pursuing Him in prayer, and to relate to other believers in body-life experiences -- that is -- bearing one another's burdens and confessing our sins to one another and sharing in fellowship with one another. These things are all included in "abiding in Him." Are you growing in Christ?

3) Are you living in light of the resurrection to come? Is that your hope? There is a distinctiveness to that kind of life – a courage, a consistency, a freedom from the enslaving fear of man and from the pursuit of the view of "life" that is so promoted in this culture, a life of service and selflessness for the sake of Christ and the gospel. Does our life bear that distinction?

This is a short text, but filled with truth that should lead us to really consider these questions as a result. May God give us grace to do so.

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