

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

AENEAS AND DORCAS OR MIRACLES USED TO LEAD MEN TO CHRIST

(Acts 9:32-43)

OUTLINE

1. Peter visits the churches (32).
2. The objects of preaching (31).
 - A. To convince men that Jesus is their Lord and Saviour.
 - B. To build them up in the faith.

We are told of Peter's activity in the former paragraph - they were multiplied. Later we are told he edified those at Caesarea.

3. Miracles win men to Christ. "**Many believed on the Lord**" (35, 42).
4. Why cannot we raise men from the dead? Such miracles not needed today. Men better as they are.
5. Those who are saints.
6. Exemplifying the Christian faith.
7. Comfort in bereavement.
8. It is important how we live rather than where we live.
9. Those who are missed from a community.
10. The blessing of health.
11. It is Christ who makes us whole.

Our attention is now turned from Saul to Peter. After the record of the conversion and first missionary work of Saul we are told that the church had peace and that it was edified, comforted and multiplied. Saul had been the leader of the persecution, but three years had passed since his conversion. Persecution had not ceased at once when Saul was no longer the leader for he had been persecuted almost to the death. The historians tell us that there was perhaps another reason why peace prevailed at Jerusalem at this time. It is thought that this was the year thirty-nine A.D. when Caius Caesar (Caligula) was on the throne. It is said by Josephus that he claimed divine honors and ordered Petronius to set up his statue in the Temple at Jerusalem.

This aroused such opposition in Jerusalem and Judaea, that in their desire to prevent the defilement of the Temple the Jews lost interest in the persecution of the Christians. Later, when through the efforts of Herod Agrippa the command of Caligula was reversed and Claudius had come to the throne the persecution broke out again.

PETER VISITS THE CHURCHES

The period of peace in Palestine gave Peter an opportunity to visit the churches. He had remained at Jerusalem during the persecution when others, except the apostles, had fled. He, with John, had gone to Samaria at the direction of the apostles to assist Philip. That is the last time John appears in the book. Peter had preached in many villages of Samaria. Now he continues his mission to all the churches: **“And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda”** (9:32). We are told in this passage of two of the important events which occurred as Peter was passing throughout all parts. We are told first of his activity at Lydda and then at Joppa. At Lydda he healed Aeneas, who had suffered of the palsy for eight years. At Joppa he restored to life Dorcas who had been dead. He remained at Joppa for many days with Simon a tanner.

Lydda was located about twenty-one miles and Joppa thirty miles north-west of Jerusalem. Joppa, which is now called Jaffa, was, and still is, a sea-port. Both of these towns were on the road from Azotus to Caesarea and were evidently places where Philip had preached. Peter had visited the disciples who had been won to Christ by Philip at Samaria, and now he is visiting those, some of whom we suppose had been won by Philip, at Lydda and Joppa.

THE OBJECTS OF PREACHING

There are two general objects of preaching. One of these is to convince men that Jesus is their Lord and Saviour; the other is to build them up in the faith. This was what was going on in the church. It was multiplied and edified: **“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied”** (9:31). In this passage we are not told how Peter edified them, but we are told how he caused them to multiply. It is evident that during the “many days” at Joppa he did edify them. In the following chapter we are told how Peter edified those at Caesarea. Here we are told how he accomplished the first object of preaching, namely that of winning men to Christ.

MIRACLES WIN MEN TO Christ

The main facts that are emphasized in this passage are not that there was a man healed and a woman raised from the dead. The main fact is that in each place: **“many believed on the Lord”**: **“And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord . . . And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord”** (9:35, 42). This makes nine times through these nine chapters that we are told that many were added to the church or believed on the Lord.

The miracles were helpful in themselves. A man was restored to health and a good woman was restored to her friends. If the miracles had been wrought primarily for the sake of helping men and women physically Peter would have spent the most of his time working miracles. There were many lepers in Israel at the time of Elisha but he healed none except Naaman the Syrian. Of the many who were sick at the time Christ was on earth he healed only a few. As far as our record goes He restored but three, who had died, to life again. The object of Christ was not to heal, all whom He could reach, physically. His object was to convince men that He was the Christ and to heal them spiritually. The object of Peter was to convince men that Jesus was the true MESSIAH and that He was still speaking and working through His disciples. He healed Aeneas in the name of Christ. He raised Dorcas through prayer to Christ. In each instance he wanted to show men the power and love of Christ. No human power could heal a chronic paralytic. No human power could raise a dead person to life. Peter wanted to convince men in and about Lydda and Joppa that Jesus was the Christ, and he was enabled to do so by the performance of miracles in the name of Christ. It proved them that Jesus Christ was not an imposter; that He had really risen from the dead; that He was the Son of God and that He was working mightily through his servant Peter. It led them also to believe what Peter taught and they were the more edified. In all probability other miracles were performed in other cities which Peter visited.

Dorcas had a part in this. She had her place in helping win many to the Lord. It was because of her loving heart and willing hands that Peter had been urged to come to Joppa. It was because she was so loved and mourned for that Peter raised her from the dead. Had Dorcas not lived and died at Joppa Peter would not have been there just at this time and therefore would not have performed the miracle which led many to believe on the Lord. The miracle had its part and so had the good deeds of a Godly woman in drawing men to Christ.

WHY CAN NOT WE RAISE MEN FROM THE DEAD

If these miracles were important then, in convincing men that Jesus was the Christ, why are they not important today for the same reason? Why are not we enabled, in the name of Christ, to heal the chronic paralytic and to raise the dead? Christ performed miracles, and enabled His immediate disciples to perform miracles, because it was a transition period. A law of sacrifice had been given of God. Men had no right to give up that law except by the command of God. There was no one who could be a perfect sacrifice except the Son of God. God testified to men by signs and wonders and miracles that Jesus was His Son; that the perfect sacrifice had been offered and that the ceremonial law had been fulfilled. When those facts had been witnessed to in a manner which gave complete evidence to the first generation of the Christian Church, and when those facts were recorded in an unimpeachable record, there was no longer need for the performance of miracles. As Abraham is represented as saying to Dives (the rich man of Luke 16), if men on earth will not believe the evidence which they now have they will not be convinced though one should rise from the dead.

Death is not the worst thing that can come to the Christian. To fall asleep in Jesus is one of the most blessed events in the life of the Christian. It is not God's purpose to raise the dead now. He will raise them all one day. He raised a few to prove to the world that He lives and that He has power to raise the dead whenever He shall choose so to do.

It would take away a large measure of the happiness of good men to bring them back and keep them in this world rather than to allow them to remain asleep in Jesus. Death is a blessed thing for the living and a blessed thing for the dead who have died in Christ. The dead are happier with Christ and the living are happier because the earth would be over populated if all the dead were still here on earth. There are many things concerning death and miracles which we are unable to explain and yet we are told enough to make all sufficiently clear and to satisfy our reason.

THOSE WHO ARE SAINTS

The word, "saints," is used with reference to both the Christians at Lydda and at Joppa. It has been used once before in this chapter of the "saints" at Jerusalem: "**Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem**" (9:13). It is worthwhile to ask ourselves, who are the saints of God? There has been, and is, a great deal of difference of opinion among men as to who are the saints.

It is manifest from a casual reading of the Word that saints are not men who have had special honors conferred upon them by the church. These people who are called saints were ordinary disciples. When Ananias spoke of the saints at Jerusalem he evidently meant the disciples at Jerusalem. One of the qualifications is evidently that a saint shall be a good man, a disciple of Christ. These men had been transformed by, and were guided by, the Spirit of God. A saint must be one who believes on Christ, who is guided by Christ and who is filled with the Spirit of Christ.

Men were called saints in the Romish church because of some special office or honor which had been conferred upon them. In some versions of our Bible we have remnants of that idea in the names which we apply to certain books, as St. Luke and St. John. The real and proper titles of these books is simply, Luke and John. We have just as much reason to say St. Abraham or St. David as we have to say St. Mark or St. Luke. A man may be an unknown disciple and yet be a saint of God. Our saintship depends upon our relationship to Christ, and not upon the offices and dignity which men can confer upon us. The important thing for us is that we may be saints, not that we may be called saints.

EXEMPLIFYING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Dorcas was well known as a disciple of Christ because of her good works and almsdeeds which she did. As the widows wept they showed the coats and garments which Dorcas had made. Dorcas evidently had some money to give but there is no evidence that she was a wealthy woman. Dorcas had, in all probability, been converted by Philip when he passed through Joppa and preached there. Philip was a deacon, a practical disciple. He had been chosen of the church especially to help widows who had been neglected. Dorcas also became a practical Christian. She was exemplifying the love of Christ in her everyday life. The widows had come to love her and we may well suppose that many through her had been led to love the Lord Jesus. She was not one who, at the last day, would be cast out because she had not clothed the naked and fed the hungry.

She will be among those to whom Jesus will say, **“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”** (Matthew 25:34). In feeding and clothing other disciples she had ministered to Jesus. There can be little doubt that Dorcas did her good works in the name of Jesus. If it had not been so, when she was raised from the dead, they would have flocked back to her in place of believing on the Lord.

The example of Dorcas in the history of the early church has done much to teach the church to do works of charity. Where the church of Christ has not gone charity is scarcely known. Charity has developed in a marvelous manner until all over the civilized world there are orphanages, homes for the aged, hospitals and charitable organizations. The relief given every year mounts into the millions. These institutions have done a work that can scarcely be measured in bringing relief to the poor and the suffering. Such institutions are either directly or indirectly a result of Christian love and sympathy.

And yet even here there are dangers. There is a danger that this work shall be turned over to hired social workers who are not Christians and who do not do their work in the name of Christ. There is another danger in that we may depend entirely upon institutions to relieve the needy and that we shall fail to do any of it with our own hands. If Dorcas was able to give she still did work with her own hands and so should we. With all that institutions are doing there are still those who need help. And we need to do some of this work for our own sakes. It is well for the development of our own sympathy and love that we have the poor with us always.

The tendency of men, as they become financially independent, is to lose sympathy with those of their fellowmen who are less fortunate. In order that a callous feeling may not develop within them they need to come into personal contact with the poor who are sick and who are hungry and who are lacking clothing. One thing that draws us nearer to the late Hon. Wm. E. Gladstone in his personal compassion upon, and aid of, the poor. We are told that once when he “was facing one of the greatest crises of his political life, he sat writing one morning at two o’clock the speech with which he hoped to win a great political victory in the House of Commons the next day. At that hour there came to the door the mother of a poor, friendless, dying cripple, and besought him to come and bring some message of hope and cheer to the hopeless boy.

Without hesitation the great Commoner left the preparation of his speech, spent the night leading the child to Christ, staying till morning light, closed the eyes of the dead, went back to his home and faced his day with a smile of confidence, peace and power. In that hour he said to a friend, ‘I am the happiest man in the world today.’ He had been able to serve a little child in a tenement house in the name of the Master. Later he made the greatest speech of his life in the House, carrying his cause to a triumphant success.”

It is a sad day for any man or woman when they become too proud or too hardened to be willing to help the needy and the aged with their own hands. We need to do it for our own sake and we need to do it for Christ’s sake. Missionaries are not able to perform miracles today but they can win men in other ways. The medical missionary can open the door to receive a sympathetic hearing almost as well as if he could perform miracles.

To the heathen the wonders of medicine appear like miracles. Dr. Harvey J. Howard, in his book, *“Ten Weeks with Chinese Bandits,”* tells how his knowledge of medicine and his ability, even with the simplest remedies, to relieve suffering and heal the wounded brought him into favor with those most hardened of men, professional bandits. The practice of medicine has a large place in missions today, but the missionary should remember that all his work ought to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The body is relieved and healed in order that others seeing their good works may glorify the Father which is in Heaven. Whether serving Christ at home or abroad our healing and our charity ought to be in the name of the Lord with the object of turning men to the Lord.

We should, therefore, not spend our time worrying or sighing because we cannot perform miracles today. We should use the gifts which God gives us as Dorcas did and He will bless them. Even a cup of water given by a disciple in the name of Christ shall not lose its reward. The Gospel shows the power of miracles. A new performance of them is not needed. The exemplification of a practical Christian life and faith is always needed and it always has its effect upon the world.

COMFORT IN BEREAVEMENT

In the hour of sickness or bereavement the sorrowing friends find comfort in Christ. The friends of Dorcas sent for Peter. They may have thought he might raise her from the dead. They knew that he would be able to bring comfort to them in their sorrow. He who had passed through sorrow and suffering himself and who knew Christ so well could bring comfort to all other disciples of Christ when they wept or when they suffered. Peter had heard the words of Jesus, **“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted”** (5:4). He knew far more about that comfort at this time than he did when he first heard them spoken by the Lord. The disciples at Joppa were wise in sending messengers and urging Peter to come. It would be well today if Christians would send for a minister or elder or other godly person as soon as they send for a physician. The comfort of the soul is as important, yes more important, than the comfort of the body.

Dr. George F. Pentecost tells of going to see a member of his church who was in deep affliction. He found her embroidering a sofa pillow cover. He asked her to let him take it in his hand. He purposely turned in on the wrong side, and then remarked to her that it did not seem beautiful to him, and that he wondered why she should be wasting her time upon it. “Why, Mr. Pentecost,” she replied, “you are looking at the wrong side! Turn it over.” “That is just what you are doing,” he replied, “you are looking at the wrong side of God’s working with you. Down here we are looking at the tangled side of God’s providence; but He has a plan - here a stitch and there a movement of the shuttle - and in the end a beautiful work.”

“O, cast thy every care on him,
Thou weary burdened one,
And raise to heaven the trusting prayer,
Thy will, not mine, be done.

So, when the toil and care shall cease,
With Jesus thou'lt be blest:
When, folding in his loving arms,
The weary are at rest.”

NOT WHERE BUT HOW WE LIVE

It is important how we live rather than where we live. One of the important facts set before us in this passage is that Peter “**tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner**” (9:43). From the fact that Simon was a tanner he would be one of the most despised in and about Joppa. He would not be allowed to engage in his trade within the city limits, but must have lived at a definite distance defined by law, from the city.

Despised by the Jews though Simon may have been he was evidently an earnest disciple of Christ. He was ready to furnish an abode for Peter for a prolonged period while he was preaching in Joppa. Peter was still with Simon when he saw the vision which called him to Caesarea. Peter had evidently learned before he had received that vision the lesson, in part, that ceremonial defilement no longer defiled a man. He found in Simon a brother, rather than a man who was unclean by reason of his trade. Peter had seen Jesus eat with publicans and sinners and knew that he was not defiled thereby.

It would be well if we could all end in this a new impression of the fact that the house or community in which we dwell does not make the man. That the inside of the cup and the platter are cleansed is far more important than the cleansing of the outside. It is better to seek out godly companions rather than wealthy friends. It is better to find our associates among pious men and women, regardless of their location in the city, rather than with those who seek the pinnacle of society.

THOSE WHO ARE MISSED FROM A COMMUNITY

The one who is missed from a community when called away by death is not the famous actor, nor the politician whose name is known throughout the nation, not the man whose wealth is figured in missions, but the kind, loving, charitable Christian. Dorcas lived and was loved. She died and was still loved. The one whom you miss is the loving friend who drops in often to see you and who lends a hand in sickness and rejoices with you in your joy.

The home of Lazarus had perhaps been the most hospitable which Jesus had known on earth. When Lazarus was called away Jesus missed him greatly, and so far as we know he was the only man for whom Jesus wept while on earth. Why did He weep? He loved him. Why did the friends of Dorcas weep? Not merely because she would not be able to make more clothes for them. They wept because they loved her.

Absalom reared a monument for himself. It was the only way he could get a monument built to his honor. If you want to build a monument for yourself build it in the hearts of men by your deeds of Christian love.

If you want to perpetuate your name when you are gone, perpetuate it by words of kindness and acts of helpfulness to your fellow men. The name written on the stone is cold and unattractive, but the name which is indelibly impressed upon immortal souls will live forever.

THE BLESSING OF HEALTH

Men are glad to be cured of a disease but they forget to thank God when they are kept well and free from disease. It manifested the power of God over disease and death when Aeneas was healed and Dorcas was restored to life. It is also a manifestation of God's power over disease when He enables us to live year after year in the enjoyment of health. Every day there are battles going on within the body with germs of disease. God has so prepared the blood and other organs of the body that in the great majority of cases the battle against disease is won. We may live year after year and not be conscious of any such struggle of nature with the germs of disease. But what is nature? What enables nature to make a struggle? Is it not after all the blessing of God which enables nature to win and gives us the blessing of continued health. We ought to rejoice more because of continued health than because of recovery from disease. The blessing of God is as surely manifest in the former as in the latter. We, then, who are well have every reason to rejoice in God that Aeneas had when he was cured.

IT IS CHRIST WHO MAKES US WHOLE

Peter said to Aeneas: "**Jesus Christ maketh thee whole**" (9:34). Jesus said to another paralytic: "**Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee**" (Matthew 9:2). There were those who objected and called Jesus a blasphemer. Jesus replied: "**that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house**" (Matthew 9:6-7). Jesus had power to heal the body and he had power to heal the soul.

What a blessed thing it is to know, and to know beyond any shadow of a doubt, that Jesus Christ can cleanse us of all sin. How blessed to know that He can take the sinner who is paralyzed with sin and can make him a new man! He can remove the paralysis from the soul that is bound by sin as easily as He can remove the paralysis from the muscles and nerves. Sinner will you not look to Jesus and be saved! There is none other to whom you can go!

You need not fear to come to Him because of the cost, for He saves without money and without price. You need not delay because the way is too difficult, for you can look unto Him and be saved. You need not think that because you have been long in sin that it is impossible for Jesus to save you for He is able to save all who come unto God by Him.

Seek Him today while He may be found, for how shall you escape if you neglect salvation through Him? Will you not say, as did David long ago: "**For thy names sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great**" (Psalm 25:11), and if you do this in sincerity you may be sure that Christ will answer, "**Thy sins be forgiven thee.**"

Henry Moorhouse, the well-known English evangelist, while a guest of some friends had the following experience: "One evening while he was preparing his sermon, a child of the household came into the room where he was sitting, and said, 'Mr. Moorhouse, I want to be a Christian.' 'Well,' he said, 'You may be, for it is very easy.' He asked her to turn to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and to read the fourth and fifth verses, making them personal where the pronouns 'we' and 'our' occur. She did so, and read them this way, 'Surely He hath born my grief's, and carried my sorrows yet I did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was wounded for my transgressions, He was bruised for my iniquities; the chastisement of my peace was upon Him, and with His stripes,' - and as she came to this part she suddenly stopped, her eyes filled with tears, and Mr. Moorhouse said, 'Read on.' Then she read, 'I am healed.' 'It is just as easy as that,' said the evangelist, and the child went away believing."

As we read of the work of Christ in Aeneas and Dorcas may we likewise believe.

QUESTIONS (Acts 9:32-43)

1. To what leader in the church is our attention turned in this passage?
2. In addition to the conversion of Saul what reason does secular history give for the cessation of persecution at this time?
3. How was Peter occupying himself?
4. What two important events are recorded during this itinerary?
5. What are the two important objects of preaching?
6. How did Peter exemplify these?
7. Did the miracles wrought lead men to believe in Christ?
8. Do they still have that effect upon men?
9. Would the Gospel be about as good with miracles left out?
10. Why cannot we raise men from the dead? Why could not men be deceived concerning these two miracles? Could experts have been more certain?
11. Who are the saints?
12. How did Dorcas exemplify the Christian faith?
13. Who had likely been her first teacher? How does this seem to have affected her life?
14. What lesson has this concerning medical missions?
15. Who is the great comforter in bereavement? How do you know?
16. What in this passage shows that it is more important how we live rather than where we live?
17. What are the characteristics of those who are most keenly missed from a community?
18. Have we as much reason to thank God for health as did Aeneas?
19. Who is it who heals our souls?
20. How do you know?

~ end of chapter 18 ~

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