

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Acts 9:32-43 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

ACTS 9:32-43 ESV

32 Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. 33 There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. 34 And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. 35 And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. 36 Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. 37 In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 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." 39 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. 40 But 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. 41 And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. 42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

STRUCTURE

- I. **Through Peter, Jesus raises Aeneas from his bed in Lydda (9:32-35)**
 - a. *Setting:* Peter's apostolic travels take him to the saints in Lydda (9:32)
 - b. *Healing:* Peter pronounces that Jesus has raised up the paralytic (9:33-34)
 - c. *Outcome:* The gospel spreads (9:35)
- II. **Through Peter, Jesus raises Dorcas from the dead in Joppa (9:36-43)**
 - a. *Setting:* Peter's reputation for healing draws him to the saints in Joppa (9:36-37)
 - i. Dorcas—a godly woman—dies and is placed in an upper room (9:36-37)
 - ii. Disciples send for Peter, and he travels to Joppa (9:38-39a)
 - b. *Healing:* Peter ministers the resurrection power of Jesus to Dorcas (9:39b-41)
 - i. Peter sends the mourners outside so he can pray (9:39b-40a)
 - ii. Peter commands Dorcas to rise and presents her alive (9:41)
 - c. *Outcome:* The gospel spreads (9:42-43)
 - i. Many believe in the Lord (9:42)
 - ii. Peter remains with Simon the tanner for continued ministry (9:43)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

This section abruptly shifts from Saul's conversion and early ministry to Peter's apostolic travels. The shift prepares us for Peter's ministry to the Gentiles in Acts 10-11, which is a huge development in the storyline. The reintroduction of Peter also prepares us for his Gentile ministry in other ways. First, his ministry transpires on the outer fringes of Jewish regions—Lydda and Joppa. Second, Peter ministers to two individuals with Roman/Greek names. Third, Dorcas receives a miracle on account of her generosity to the poor just like the Gentile Cornelius in Acts 10. Fourth, Luke seems to introduce the theme of ceremonial uncleanness by mentioning Simon the Tanner (see below), and this issue is central in the next chapter about "unclean" Gentiles. These literary clues indicate Luke's awareness that his narrative steers a big ship. Extending salvation to filthy Gentiles scandalized the Jewish mind.

Jesus doesn't mind a little scandal, though. Christ preached the gospel to the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame (cf. Luke 14:13, 21). He did not choose many who were "powerful... [or] of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what

is low and despised in the world, even the things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor. 1:26-29). Both the message and the people of the Cross are foolish (1:18, 26-29). What Paul wrote to the Corinthians; Luke narrated in Acts.

The stories are told as a couplet. Both occur in the same region; both have non-Jewish names; both "rise" through Peter's ministry; both lead to many salvations; both allude to Christ's earthly ministry. The latter point provides the central theme of the passage: ministry is not just working for Jesus; it is Jesus working through you. This explains why Peter's ministry so closely resembles Christ's.

To provide some examples (expanded on below), Peter's command to "rise and make your bed" mirrors Christ's command to the paralytic (Luke 5:24); Peter's removal of mourners from the room, prayer, and taking Dorcas by the hand parallels the raising of Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:40-56). In Mark's version, Peter's command "Tabitha, arise" (using Dorcas' Hebrew name), echoes Christ's Aramaic command, "Talitha cumi" (Mark 5:41)—meaning "little girl, arise." By these parallels, Luke intends not only to show how Peter ministers like Jesus but also that Jesus ministers through Peter. Jesus continues to perform the same miracles He did in His earthly ministry. We can confirm this conclusion by observing Peter's pronouncement in Acts 9:34: "Jesus Christ heals you." Again, ministry is not just working for Jesus; it is Jesus working through you.

In this case, Jesus works through resurrection power—raising Aeneas from his bed and raising Dorcas from the dead. Both stories employ the same Greek verb, *anistemi*, which often speaks of Christ's resurrection. Jesus rose from the dead, but His ministry of raising people up continues. He raises paralytics from their beds. He raises the dead from their graves. He raises the depressed from their despair. He raises the troubled from the rut they are stuck in.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

32 Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

—"Now": This same word (Gk: *de*) appears in 9:36 and signals a shift in the narrative in both cases. After relaying Saul's conversion, Luke "now" shifts to Peter—two miracle stories told as a complementary pair.

—Luke loves to tell stories in pairs—especially male/female pairs, as here. Luke's heart consistently zeroes in on the outcast. By pairing females with males (often prominent ones), he emphasizes that women are "fellow heirs of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7).

—Other examples in Luke-Acts of male/female pairs:

- *Prophetic announcement of Jesus' conception* – Zechariah (Luke 1:5-38), Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45)
- *Prophetic announcement of Jesus' birth* – Simeon (Luke 2:25-35), Anna (Luke 2:36-38)
- *Healing in Capernaum* – Possessed man (Luke 4:31-37), Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39)
- *Preparation of Jesus* – John the Baptist (Luke 7:18-35), Sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50)
- *Healing of long suffering* – Gerasene man (Luke 8:26-39), Woman with issue of blood (Luke 8:40-48)
- *Teaching the disciples* – Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42), Male disciples (Luke 11:1-13)
- *Healing on the Sabbath* – Crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17), Man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-4)
- *Parable on prayer* – Persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8), Tax collector (Luke 18:9-14)
- *Giving money* – Spies (Luke 20:20-26), Widow (Luke 21:1-4)
- *At the tomb* – Women (Luke 24:1-10), Peter (Luke 24:11-12)
- *Praying on Pentecost* – Male disciples (Acts 1:12-13), female disciples (Acts 1:14)
- *Deception* – Ananias (Acts 5:1-6), Sapphira (Acts 5:7-11)
- *Raising from the paralysis/death* – Aeneas (9:32-35), Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43)
- *Prophets* – Philip's daughters (Acts 21:8-9), Agabus (Acts 21:10-11)

—"went here and there among them all": after the persecution scattered the disciples (8:1-4), the apostles chose to remain in Jerusalem (8:1, 14), probably to support whoever remained of their flocks. Now that "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace" (9:31), Peter feels released to travel about for ministry. Travel is one hallmark of apostolic ministry. After all, the word "apostle" means "sent one."

—"saints who lived at Lydda":

- Lydda bordered the sea on the outskirts of Judea, as did the second healing story in this pair, which transpired in Joppa. The geographical extension reflects gospel expansion, preparing the reader for Peter's ministry among Gentiles.
- Saints already lived at Lydda. Luke never even tells us how the gospel took root there. Perhaps that's the point. The kingdom spread (and spreads!) not just by apostles but by disciples. God expands His kingdom on the lips and by the feet of everyday believers.
- The modern seeker movement encourages people to outsource evangelism to their pastor, who shares the gospel for them on Sunday mornings. Evangelists in the early church rather equipped believers to confidently bear witness to Christ themselves (Eph. 4:11-13). The church must return to this model of training and equipping. Note: I still love my siblings in Christ who attend and lead seeker-sensitive churches. However, I do not believe the model is biblical or effective in making disciples.
- "saints":
 - Means "holy ones."
 - Even as we are "being made holy" (Heb. 10:14), we are already holy. As Martin Luther famously said, "Simul justus et peccator," which translated means, "Simultaneously justified and sinner." Right now, I am a "holy one," made perfect by faith in Christ's blood; simultaneously, I sin. We all do.
 - Words for God's people in Acts:
 - "saints" (9:13, 32, 41)—emphasizes that we are set apart unto God
 - "brothers" (1:15; 6:3; etc.)—emphasizes that we are family
 - "disciples" (6:1, 2, 7; etc.)—emphasizes that we are followers who are always in "school" to learn from Jesus
 - "the church" (5:11; 8:3; etc.)—emphasizes that we are called out as an assembled people
 - "believer" (2:44; 4:32; etc.)—emphasizes that we have trusted in Jesus as Lord and Savior
 - "the Way" (9:2 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22)—emphasizes that our friendship with Jesus is a journey of growth and discovery
 - "Nazarenes" (24:5)—emphasizes that we identify with Jesus and His humble origins
 - "Christian" (11:26; 26:28)—emphasizes that we identify with Jesus and His royal origins ("Christ" means "anointed one" or "king")

33 There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. 34 And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. 35 And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

—"Aeneas": appears to be of Roman origin, which foreshadows Peter's Gentile mission in Acts 10-11.

—"bedridden for eight years": reminds us of another miracle by Peter in 3:1-10, where he heals a man crippled from birth. To have been "bedridden" for such a duration shows how desperate the situation was. It also highlights parallels with the resurrection of Dorcas. Both miracles "raise up" the sufferer. Just as God raised Jesus, the ascended Christ raises us up.

—"Jesus Christ heals you":

- We are reminded of Acts 1:1 where Jesus "began to do and teach" in His earthly ministry. He continues these activities through His Spirit-empowered church. In this case, the ascended Christ heals Aeneas.
- When I pray for healing, the ascended Christ heals through me. When I preach, Christ preaches through me. When I care for the orphan and widow, Jesus expresses compassion through me. Jesus' ministry did not cease on the Cross or even after those forty days when He rose from the dead and fellowshiped with His disciples. Jesus' ministry in the first century was just the beginning.
- In this passage, Peter pronounces healing. In the next, he will pray for it.

—"rise and make your bed":

- This parallels what Christ said in Luke 5:24: *"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home."*
 - I don't see any parallels with Luke 5 except the language, "Rise, pick up your bed..." So why the parallel?
 - In the least, Peter is a good disciple who ministers like his Teacher. But I believe there's more. Throughout this passage, we observe multiple parallels to the ministry of Jesus. Luke is not just showing how Peter's ministry resembles his Lord's but also—more than that!—that his Lord is the One ministering. Peter is involved, but this is really about the continued ministry of Jesus. This best explains both the parallels and Peter's statement, "Jesus Christ heals you."
- The same word for "rise" depicts resurrection elsewhere in Acts:
 - [Act 2:24, 32 ESV] 24 God **raised him up**, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ... 32 This Jesus God **raised up**, and of that we all are witnesses.
 - [Act 3:26 ESV] 26 God, **having raised up** his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."
 - [Act 13:33-34 ESV] 33 this he has fulfilled to us their children by **raising Jesus**, as also it is written in the second Psalm, "'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.' 34 And as for the fact that he **raised him from the dead**, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, "'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.'
 - [Act 17:31 ESV] 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by **raising him from the dead."**
- "And immediately he rose":
 - Some argue that since miracles aren't as convincing today, God has mostly withdrawn from the miracle business.
 - Here are some problems with this view:
 - This violates the thesis of Acts, set forth in 1:1, that Jesus continues "to do and teach" from the right hand of God through the Spirit-empowered church.
 - We find ample evidence of continued signs and wonders throughout church history.
 - God continues to perform immediate and perfect miracles today. Read Craig Keener's book, *Miracles Today*, or his two-volume set, *Miracles*. Both document many modern miracles such as these.
 - Not every New Testament healing is immediate and perfect. Some are healed gradually (Mark 8:22-26; Luke 17:14), and some are not healed at all (Matt. 13:58; Mark 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20).
 - Even if we grant that the early church enjoyed a special measure of power, that would not mean that God has mostly withdrawn from the miracle business. We observe ebbs and flows of miraculous power throughout the Old Testament (1 Sam. 3:1; Ps. 74:9), depending on many factors (especially whether the people are under judgment).
 - Even if we grant that miracles today are of a lesser quality, that proves nothing. We are not as good at evangelism as Peter, who led three thousand to Christ in a single day, but that does not mean that God has "mostly withdrawn" the gift of evangelism. Likewise, even if miracles are of a lesser quality (which I don't believe to be true, all things considered), that does not mean that God has withdrawn the gift of healing or that He has largely quit doing miracles.
 - Jesus performed more miracles than anyone could ever record (John 21:25). John likely included the highlights on his limited papyrus. Nobody can claim that all of Jesus' miracles (or the apostles' miracles) were perfect and instantaneous because we only possess a fraction of these countless miracle stories. Besides, as we've seen, even the "highlight reel" isn't all "perfect and instantaneous."

—“all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord”:

- Miracles open wide doors for evangelism. Jesus gave power to make the church witnesses (Acts 1:8). That plays out throughout the Book of Acts. Somewhere along the way, however, the church decided it didn't need power to win the lost. It just needed fun events with door prizes, celebrity converts, and comfortable church services.
- “Sharon”:
 - Lydda was the town; Sharon was the region.
 - It was a coastal region, extending from Joppa in the north (the town from the next narrative, 9:36-42) down to Caesarea Maritima in the south.
 - Some miracles spread good news across entire regions. O Lord, give us these kinds of miracles!
 - Some Old Testament prophecies seem relevant:
 - [Isa 35:1-2 ESV] 1 The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; 2 it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and **Sharon**. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.
 - [Isa 65:10 ESV] 10 **Sharon** shall become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me.
 - Isaiah 35 prophesies the coming of the Messiah, and the healing of Aeneas displays the fulfillment. That OT passage goes on to say that as a result of the Messiah's ministry, “the lame man [shall] leap like a deer” (v. 6).
 - Isaiah 65:10 appears in the context of God's promised new creation (65:17). Sharon had apparently been a place where pasturing the flocks proved impossible, akin to the Valley of Achor, which means Valley of Trouble (cf. Josh. 7:24-26). Through the Messiah's ministry, God would transform the troubled land to become like Eden. Isaiah's promise will be consummated at Christ's return, but the healing of Aeneas represents a foretaste of renewed creation.
- “turned to the Lord”: this phrase was used in OT times to speak of national repentance (Schreiner). Luke thus depicts this story as the continued restoration of Israel. This story takes place on the fringes of Judea.

36 Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. 38 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.”

—“Joppa”: the northernmost tip of the region of Sharon. Since people had come to the Lord from across Sharon, they had undoubtedly heard about Aeneas's healing in Joppa. This would have prompted them to reach out to Peter.

—If God pours out His Spirit on our church in a fresh way, we'd better all prepare ourselves to serve like crazy by praying for the sick. The whole world will travel on even the rumor of healing.

—“a disciple”: we came across “saints” in Lydda; here we have a “disciple” in Joppa. Luke will emphasize her faithfulness as a Christ-follower in these verses.

—“Tabitha... Dorcas”:

- The name means “gazelle.” Like gazelles leap with energy, the corpse of Dorcas will leap with resurrection power.
- Chrysostom: “It was not without purpose that the writer informed us of the woman's name, but to show that her character matched her name—she was active and wakeful as a gazelle.”
- Translating the name into Greek prepares us for Peter's Gentile mission. At the same time, his maintenance of the original “Tabitha” reminds us of another healing by Jesus. See my notes below under “Tabitha, arise” (v. 40).

—“full of good works and acts of charity”:

- In verse 39, we learn which particular “good works and acts of charity” Tabitha had engaged in. The weeping “widows” began “showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas had made while she was with them.” This implies that Dorcas employed her skill as a seamstress in providing for widows.

Furthermore, she did not just drop her clothes off at Goodwill (not saying that would have been bad, but Dorcas did more); v. 39 says she spent time with the widows.

- Luke often mentions one's righteousness in connection with divine encounters.
 - Luke 1:6: Zechariah/Elizabeth were "righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord."
 - Luke 1:26: Gabriel visits the "virgin" Mary
 - Luke 2:25: Simeon was "righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel" when he prophetically identified Christ.
 - Luke 2:36-37: Anna "did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day" when "at that very hour she began to give thanks" for the infant Christ, whom, as a "prophetess," she recognized.
 - I could keep moving through Luke/Acts to identify this same trend. In the context of Acts 9, the story of Dorcas—blessed for her devotion—prepares us for Acts 10, where God will send an angel and an apostle to the Gentile, Cornelius, whom Luke depicts as a "devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God" (10:2). Cornelius had worshiped the God of Israel, but he receives salvation when Peter introduces him to our Greater Israel—Jesus. Luke's point in mentioning his devotion is that God saw Cornelius as a seeker and thus sent him the gospel.
 - God can encounter anyone, even total rebels, like Saul on the road to Damascus. Nevertheless, Luke consistently portrays our quiet, faithful, lifestyle as directly correlative with our big, radical, encounters with God. If you want to experience more of God, your best bet is to walk with Him.
 - While Luke highlights many expressions of godly living, no New Testament author highlights compassionate ministry to the poor more than Luke.
- Schreiner: "They show Peter the robes and clothes Dorcas had made. Bede says they interceded for the dead woman, not with their voices but by means of her own works. She was active in spreading the life of Jesus to those who most needed help and was a beloved one of the community."

—"Lydda was near Joppa": about ten to twelve miles.

39 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. 40 But 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. 41 And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

—"So Peter rose and went with them": Peter did not let his own travel schedule and agenda interrupt God's work. God's servants must be willing to get interrupted.

—"upper room":

- Luke mentions multiple "upper rooms," each one of them significant. Like many ancient authors, Luke intended the physical location as a literary signpost. Here are the mentions of an upper room in Luke-Acts, in context:
 - The last supper / first communion (Luke 22:12)
 - Pentecost gathering (Acts 1:13)
 - Raising of Dorcas (Acts 9:37, 39)
 - Raising of Eutychus / communion (Acts 20:8)
- Here's what I said about upper rooms in Luke's writing on a previous Study Guide:
 - Two of the upper room narratives relate to communion. Three relate the power of the Spirit, and two of those, to resurrection.... it seems like there's a common thread: when God's people gather (upper room) with hearts centered on Christ (communion), the Spirit breaks out in power (Pentecost, resurrection).

- Schreiner: "Though this might seem simply like a factual marker, Luke likely intends a deeper meaning for a few reasons. First, the context is littered with spatial connotations. Jesus just ascended (1:9-11), they were on the Mount of Olives... and Jerusalem was on Mount Zion. Second, they wait for the Spirit who will be poured out on high, so they go to a 'high room.' In ancient cosmology mountains and high places were the meeting places between heaven and earth—the place of temples (Isa. 2:2-3; Mic. 4:1-2). God's presence will be dispersed on his people in homes and not be confined by temple walls... As Matson says, 'The mission of the church begins in a house (1:13; 2:2) and ends in a house (28:30).'"
- If houses represent a "new temple" where the people of God gather, the "upper room" is something like the "most holy place." There, the ascended Christ pours out His Spirit and breaks out in power. The temple authorities rejected Him, so Jesus goes where He is welcomed.

—"that Dorcas made": she normally goes by her Greek name, emphasizing her Gentile connections and preparing us for Peter's ministry to the Gentiles.

—"But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed":

- Jesus did this same thing with Jairus' daughter in Luke 8:49-56. I have emboldened and underlined correlations between the resurrection stories in Luke 8 and Acts 9:
 - [Luk 8:49-56 ESV] *49 While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more." 50 But Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well." 51 And when he came to the house, **he allowed no one to enter with him**, except Peter and John and James, and the father and mother of the child. 52 And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping." 53 And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. 54 But **taking her by the hand** he called, saying, "Child, arise." 55 And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. 56 And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.*
 - A notable difference is that Jesus commanded the parents to tell nobody about the resurrection (Luke 8:56), but Peter liberally permits the spread of good news (Acts 9:42). Why? There is some debate about this, but I think the best explanation is that Jesus was trying to prevent people from trying to crown Him as a national liberator (which they tried to do anyway), pacing Himself with the Father's schedule until the day of His exaltation—not to a throne but to a Cross.
 - Now that Jesus has completed His mission, ours begins. He sends us to the uttermost parts of the earth. He does not call us to keep the mission secretive but to proclaim it. Because of His work, the mission catapults outward.
- Did Peter "put them all outside" because their unbelief would interrupt the flow of the Spirit? Or because he needed privacy? We are not told. Practically, I can see the significance of "creating a faith environment." Environment matters. In His hometown, for instance, we learn that Jesus "could not do many miracles there because of their unbelief" (Mark 6:6).
- I honestly think that's why Peter sent them outside. This seems clear from the parallel in Luke 8, where the mourners laugh at Jesus, who came to resurrect a dead girl. Here is what Morrison says of that episode:
 - "It was not a caprice that when Jesus Christ was ridiculed, He turned the mockers out of the miracle-chamber. That is what the Almighty always does when men and women take themselves to mocking. He shuts the door on them, so that they cannot see the miracles with which the universe is teeming, and they miss the best, because in their blind folly they have laughed the Giver of the best to scorn."
 - If your life is surrounded by unbelief, you might need to send "the mockers out of the miracle-chamber." Have you surrounded yourself with faith-filled believers or sour skeptics?
- "knelt down and prayed":

- Rather than the confident pronouncement of 9:34, Peter humbly surrenders in kneeling prayer.
- Sometimes we pray; sometimes we command body parts to be healed; sometimes we pronounce someone is already healed. The Scripture presents all three options for healing ministry.
- I have not yet pronounced a healing. I think that would require an overwhelming prophetic sense, which I have not yet had in healing prayer.
- We should not confuse “pronouncing” a healing with “pretending” a healing exists where it doesn’t. The “Word of Faith” approach to healing has sometimes encouraged hurting people to claim they are healed, even when they clearly are not. Faith is confidence in God—not denying reality.
- Abraham “did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” (Rom. 4:19-21). In other words, faith enabled Abraham to see BOTH the reality of his almost-dead body AND the reality of God’s promise. Faith sees the wind and the waves, but it keeps them in the periphery. In the center, faith sees Jesus.
- John Wimber used to differentiate between praying *to* heaven (a request) and—as it were—praying *from* heaven (an authoritative command). In my experience, I have seen more healing from the latter. I don’t think precise words matter that much, but spiritual posture does. Knowing we have authority in Christ to command body parts to be healed matters. In my experience, people who only pray sheepish “if it be your will” and “guide the surgeon’s hand” prayers don’t see much healing. Authoritative commands are not willy-nilly, as if we are “little gods” like some teach. We root our commands in faith that He loves to move mountains on our behalf (Matt. 17:20).

—“Gave her his hand”: this would have made Peter unclean under the OT law. The theme of uncleanness prepares us (like many other details in the story) for Peter’s Gentile mission, where clean/unclean matters rise to the fore.

—“Tabitha, arise”:

- Schreiner says that this phrase “echoes the Markan, ‘Talitha cumi’ (Mark 5:41).” There are so many parallels that this must be the case. “Talitha cumi” means “little girl, I say to you, arise.” Just as Jesus put everyone outside, told her to rise, and took her by the hand, so does Peter. The parallel shows that Jesus is working through Peter.
- The story in Mark 5 is the same one relayed in Luke 8 about Jairus’ daughter. However, Mark alone quotes the Aramaic, “Talitha cumi.” Since Mark wrote his gospel first, Luke would have had access to that story when compiling his accounts.

—“calling the saints and widows...”: it would seem that some of the widows that Tabitha served were not saints. If the natural reading of this stands, Tabitha was a “servant evangelist.” She blessed hurting people who did not know God, which opened the door for them to come to know God. That’s exactly what happens, see verse 42.

42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

—Just as we saw with Aeneas, a miracle opened wide doors for the gospel.

—“stayed in Joppa for many days”: when God opens a door, we are wise to walk through it—even if that means adjusting our plans for “many days” like Peter. Peter’s willingness to move with the Spirit bodes well for the coming chapter about Cornelius and the Gentiles.

—“Simon, a tanner”: we know nothing about him. Some argue that his profession would have made him ceremonially unclean since it usually required him to touch dead things. If so, this too would prepare us for the coming episode where questions of “cleanness” rise to the surface.