

32. The Lord Worked Through the Ministry of Others

In our last topic, we saw that the Lord allowed the early church to experience persecution so that it would spread out and multiply. We saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example the importance of letting Him work throughout lives as the Lord builds His church. In our topic today, we will see how the Lord worked through the lives of many believers to build His church.

Acts 9:32-35 says, “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.” The city of Lydda was near a place where two roads crossed. One road went from Syria to Egypt and the other road went from the city of Jerusalem to the city of Joppa. Lydda was only about ten miles from Joppa.

Peter was visiting the followers of Christ that lived in the various towns and cities in that area. As a result, he came to visit the saints that lived in the town of Lydda. A certain man by the name of Aeneas lived in that town. He was paralyzed and had been forced to stay in bed for about eight years. Peter met this man when he came to the town of Lydda. We saw in Acts 4:15-16 that the Lord had used Peter to heal all that came to him in the city of Jerusalem. Here, we see that Peter told Aeneas, “Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” Aeneas had been paralyzed for eight years and had not been able to get out of bed by himself for eight years. However, he believed the words that Peter spoke and immediately got out of bed.’

The Lord used that miracle in a mighty way. Lydda is the name of the town and Sharon is the name of the whole surrounding area. When the people heard what had happened to Aeneas we see that all of the people in the town as well as the people in the surrounding area turned to the Lord. Here, we see a large response to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. Acts 11:21 says, “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” These examples show us that at times the Lord chooses to draw whole groups of people to Himself from extended families, people groups or even people from throughout an area.

We go on to read in Acts 9:36-38, “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.” Joppa was a town about ten miles from the town of Lydda. There were also disciples living in that town. One of those disciples was a woman by the name of Tabitha. The Greek translation of that name is “Dorcas”.

We read several things about this woman. We see that she was full of good works. The word translated “good” means *good in its character and beneficial in its effects*. Such works should be

a characteristic of the life of every Christian. Galatians 6:10 says, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” As followers of Christ, we should be looking for opportunities to do good to all people and especially to other Christians. Here, we see that Dorcas was full of these good works that were helpful to other people.

We also see that Dorcas was full of charitable deeds. The word translated “charitable deeds” means *acts of mercy or pity* and spoke especially of acts that were done to help the poor and the needy. Dorcas had been a woman who continually looked for opportunities to help the poor and needy. Dorcas had a special concern for those who were widows. The last part of verse 39 says, “And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.” Here, we see that Dorcas had helped many widows by sewing clothing for those widows and their children.

Dorcas gives us an example for our own lives. Years later, as Paul spoke to the elders in Ephesus, he said in Acts 20:33-35, “I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” As Christians it should also be our desire to look for opportunities to minister to those who are in need. James 1:27 says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” James said that we should have a special concern for the orphans and widows.

However, Dorcas became sick and died. Instead of burying her immediately as was commonly done, the people washed her body and laid the body in an upstairs room. We mentioned earlier that Joppa was only about ten miles from Lydda. As a result, the other followers of Christ sent two men to Lydda to get Peter and told the men to beg Peter to come immediately because they knew that Peter was in that town. Peter responded and returned with them to Joppa.

We read what happened when he got to Joppa in Acts 9:39-43 which says, “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.” When Peter arrived at Joppa he was immediately taken to the upstairs room where the body of Dorcas had been placed.

That room was filled with widows who were in great sorrow. They stood by Peter and told him about the kind deeds that Dorcas had done to help them. These widows showed Peter some of the clothing that Dorcas had made to help them and their families. Peter had been in a similar situation a few years earlier with Jesus when the daughter of Jairus died. Luke 8:50-54 says, “But when

Jesus heard *it*, He answered him, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well.’ When He came into the house, He permitted no one to go in except Peter, James, and John, and the father and mother of the girl. Now all wept and mourned for her; but He said, ‘Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping.’ And they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead. But He put them all outside, took her by the hand and called, saying, ‘Little girl, arise.’” Peter had seen that Jesus had raised the girl back to life.

Now, we see that Peter did the same thing with Dorcas. Peter put everyone out of the room. Then, he knelt down and prayed to the Lord. After he had finished his prayer, he turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, arise.” The Lord worked in answer to the prayer of Peter. We see that Dorcas immediately opened her eyes. When she saw that Peter was kneeling beside her, she immediately sat up. Peter then gave Dorcas his hand and helped her get up. Here, we see that in addition to being raised from the dead she immediately had strength to stand. When the Lord healed a person, we see that there was complete healing.

Peter then called the widows and the other saints back into the room and presented Dorcas to them. Word of this miracle quickly spread throughout the town of Joppa. As a result, many of the people in this town also believed in Christ. In this case, we see that the Lord used these two miracles of healing in these two towns to draw many people to Christ. This is a reminder to us that the Lord can choose to work in many different ways to draw people to Himself.

Peter knew that these new followers of Christ would also need help in their spiritual growth. As a result, we see that Peter stayed for many days in the town of Joppa to help them get started in their spiritual growth. Peter stayed with a man by the name of Simon, the tanner. He was called “the tanner” because his occupation was the tanning of the skins of animals. This was an occupation that most Jews hated and so they probably avoided this man. Here, we see that Peter chose to stay in his home for an extended period of days. This was important because it showed that followers of Christ are to reach out to those who have occupations that many people reject. Christ came to save all people regardless of their background or occupation.

We learn several important lessons that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand from these verses. Peter took time to minister to the physical needs of people and the Lord worked through that ministry to draw many people to Himself in both Lydda and Joppa. Peter saw every situation as an opportunity to share the good news about the death and resurrection of Christ. Peter was very willing to change his schedule to meet the needs of others. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children various ways to minister to others.