

Peter in Lydda and Joppa Acts 9:32-43

Introduction

Although we hate to admit it, most of us have a tendency to only see what we expect to see and we block out or just overlook anything that is outside of our pre-conceived expectations

Gorilla on the x-ray

The tendency to let expectation be our guide can cause even those of us who are intelligent, experienced, and well-trained to overlook some startlingly obvious things.

One recent study asked a group of 24 radiologists to examine a series of chest x-rays, just as they would if looking for lung cancer.

Unknown to the radiologists, though, the researchers had inserted into the x-rays a picture of something no professional would ever expect to see: a gorilla.

The picture of the gorilla wasn't tiny; it was about 48 times the size of the average cancerous lung nodule – or about the size of a matchbook in your lung.

How many of the radiologists spotted the gorilla? Very few, actually.

Twenty of the twenty-four radiologists missed the gorilla – even though eye-tracking showed that most of them had looked right at it.

Do you think you would have seen the gorilla?

[Show lung.jpg]

Slides

I have a few other slides that I want you to look at and I'll let you tell me what you see first

[Slide 1] Old or young woman?

[Slide 2] Rabbit or duck?

[Slide 3] Old man or young girl?

[Slide 4] Bearded man or chicken?

Speaking of chickens; what do you see in this next slide?

[Slide 5] Do you see the fried chicken? Or do you see puppies?

[Slide 6] Muffins or Chihuahuas?

Sometimes we see what we expect to see and it can be hard to see what is right in front of our eyes

Peter's Vision Problem

Peter suffered from that condition, a kind of spiritual myopia, and he needed to have his "vision" corrected

In spite of being present for the Lord's teaching on the subject and in spite of being familiar with the Old Testament, Peter just couldn't see the place of the Gentiles in God's plan of redemption

We can't be too harsh in judging Peter though because his brand of "eye trouble" was common among the Jewish people who had a strong tradition of prejudice against the Gentiles

Jesus had commissioned his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel and in his final words to them he instructed them to be his witnesses in "Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth"

But after those instructions went through Peter's *Jewish filter* he missed the point that the Gentiles were included in God's offer of redemption and therefore should be included in his scope of witness

It seems likely that he understood Jesus to mean they were to go to the Jews wherever they might be found
Peter had to have this matter clarified and so God took steps to show him in no uncertain terms what his expectations were

Where we are headed

This morning we are going to see God's first step in bringing Peter around to seeing things as they actually are

This passage should also serve to inform us as to how we should view the people around us and show us our ability to be a conduit for miracles just as great as those God did through Peter

This morning we are going to first look at **The People** involved in the accounts and **Their Conditions**

Second, we will take a look at **The Physical "Healings"**

And then we will see **The Spiritual Healings** that God brought about as a result

Acts 9:32-43

Follow along with me as I read **Acts 9:32-43**

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

There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed.

And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose.

And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

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

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."

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.

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.

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

And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

About six (6) years have elapsed since Pentecost and Peter is involved in itinerant ministry around the region of Judea

In the course of his travels he headed up to the northwest of Jerusalem about 25 miles to the city of Lydda

The citizenry of Lydda was largely Jewish but there was a distinct and dominant Gentile presence there as Lydda was a commercial center that lay at the intersection of **two major highways** used as trade routes

The north-south road ran between Egypt and Syria and the other between Jerusalem and Joppa on the coast

The **purpose** of Peter's trip to Lydda was to visit the "saints" who lived there so we know that the gospel had already travelled that far – perhaps as a result of Philip's ministry – and the church was gathering there

This is the first time in the book of Acts that we find the designation "**saints**" which means "**set-apart ones**"

As we saw last week, believers are to be different and the difference should be evident and clearly these Christ-followers were living differently within their community to the degree that they were known as “set-apart ones”

I. The People and Their Conditions

In these accounts we are introduced to two people by name – first a man named **Aeneas** and then a woman named **Tabitha**

A. Aeneas (uh-NEE-us)

All we know for certain about Aeneas is found in **verse 33** – and it’s not much but we can deduce some details

Aeneas was most likely a Hellenistic Jew and even though we aren’t told he was a Christ-follower it seems to follow that he was a believer since Peter found him while visiting the saints

What we are told directly is that Aeneas had been paralyzed and bed-ridden for eight years

We aren’t told what caused his paralysis – whether it was from disease or injury – or the extent of it but we know that it had to have affected at least his legs as he was unable to move from his bed

B. Tabitha

Then, moving down to **verse 36**, we are introduced to Tabitha or Dorcas and we are told a bit more about her

First, we don’t need to speculate as to whether she was a believe as Luke tells us she was a “disciple”

He also tells us that she was “full of good works and acts of charity”

Tabitha lived up to her name which means “gazelle or deer” – she was apparently filled with grace and lived a beautiful life of service as she continually and faithfully labored for the less fortunate

We are told that her particular gift was as a seamstress in **verse 39** as the widows who were mourning her showed Peter the garments Tabitha had made for them

C. Helpless

On the surface the cases of these two people seem to be quite different – one is paralyzed and the other is dead

But there are also similarities that tie them together

First, both Aeneas and Tabitha are completely **helpless** – they are unable to help themselves

Aeneas couldn’t summon enough will-power to get up out of his bed and no one is able to reanimate themselves once they have passed on

Both were lying in a completely helpless state

D. Hopeless

Both of them were also **hopeless**

There was no natural means known to man by which their conditions could be reversed

After eight years Aeneas’ paralysis was a permanent condition that no one would expect him to recover from

Even today, after some 2,000 years of advancement in medical knowledge and ability, paralysis lasting eight years would most likely be considered permanent – all his friends and family could do was care for him

And we see that Tabitha’s friends had done everything they could for her considering her condition

They had prepared her body for burial according to Jewish custom and they had laid her in state as they mourned her loss

If they could have I’m sure they would have done most anything to bring her back to life

Mankind's natural state

Aeneas and Tabitha were helpless and hopeless when Peter found them

And that's the natural state of every person on this earth before they come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ

There is no one who is able to help themselves – no one by force of will or determination of action can restore their relationship to God on their own

There is no way conceived of by mankind that can remove the stain of sin because we are sinners in our very nature – it's in our DNA so to speak

In our unredeemed state we are helpless and our situation is hopeless – that is until God steps in

Because just as with physical conditions, we find that our vision is limited concerning our spiritual state if we only see what we think is naturally possible

Let's look at what happened to bring about physical healing for Aeneas and Tabitha

II. The Physical "Healings"

In **verse 34** we see that Peter gives Aeneas the verbal command to "rise and make [his] bed"

And our text tells us that he rose "immediately"

Aeneas was completely healed in an instant

He didn't need to convalesce for some period of time or go through physical therapy – he got up

Then in **verse 40** we see Peter give Tabitha the verbal command to "arise"

And our text tells us that Tabitha "opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up"

In this description we see the thoroughness of a medical man as Luke just naturally describes the steps we know that a person would take when "awaking from sleep" – which is in a sense what Tabitha did here as she awoke from the sleep of death

Only then did Peter reach out to her as he offered his hand to help her get to her feet

Both Aeneas and Tabitha were completely and instantaneously healed without Peter intervening in any real way

A. By God's Power

They were healed because God intervened

Notice that both of these "healings" were **by God's power** – not by anything Peter did

Looking back at **verse 34** again we see that Peter invoked the name of Jesus Christ in telling Aeneas the source of his healing – he told him, "Jesus Christ heals you..."

Peter had no ability to reverse paralysis and he knew it

But he also knew that Jesus could – after all, he had seen him do almost exactly the same thing with the paralytic who was lowered down through the roof as we heard in our Scripture reading earlier

And it's amazing how closely both of these accounts parallel the accounts of Jesus' healings that we saw in our Scripture readings

In the case of Tabitha, Peter first sends everyone out of the room – just as Jesus did in the case of the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue

Then, when he was alone, Peter "knelt and prayed"

And only after praying did he turn to the body and issue the command to arise

God did the healing; Peter was the instrument

God was the cause of both of these healings; Peter was only the human instrument God used

In **Matthew 10:8** Jesus had sent his twelve apostles out to “heal the sick” and “raise the dead” so Peter clearly knew that God would work through him to provide these miracles – he had likely done so before

And Peter had the example of Jesus in almost identical circumstances to follow

Again, it’s amazing how closely Peter follows the Lord’s example

In the case of Aeneas about the only difference is that Aeneas was already at home so he didn’t need to carry his bed away so instead of telling him to “pick up [his] bed and go home” he just told him to tidy up his bed

And in the case of Tabitha his command to her varied by only one letter in the Aramaic language

Look with me at **Mark 5:41** where we see that Jesus told the girl “*Talitha cumi*” or “little girl, arise”

So if Peter was speaking in Aramaic, which is likely, he would have said, “*Tabitha cumi*” or “Tabitha arise”

You can’t get much closer than that to following Jesus’ example!

Peter couldn’t heal either of these folks; he had to rely on God’s power for these healings

B. To the Praise and Glory of Jesus

Apparently Peter made everyone aware of the source of the healings because Luke doesn’t record any credit or accolades going Peter’s way

Unlike the false faith healer of today we see no evidence that Peter tried to use these miracles of healing in any way to bolster his reputation

He didn’t look at the ability to heal as a profit center as we saw Simon the Sorcerer did with the ability to bestow the Holy Spirit back in Acts 8

Clearly Jesus is still at work in the world just as he was during his earthly ministry only now he works through his disciples just as we saw implied in **Acts 1:1** when Luke wrote that in his gospel he had “dealt with all Jesus ***began*** to do and teach”

Peter’ miracles are really the Lord’s miracles and that is demonstrated in how closely they mimic the Lord’s

All Peter did he did in the power of Jesus and he didn’t rely on himself at all

Consequently, the people gave Jesus the credit

And we will see this more clearly as we next look at what happened as a result of the healings

III. The Spiritual Healings

It isn’t every day that men who have been paralyzed for eight years and women who have died present themselves as whole and healthy

So when Aeneas and Tabitha were healed people took notice

In Aeneas’ case the news went far and wide as we’re told in **verse 35** that not only were the residents of Lydda affected but also people from the countryside in the plain of Sharon that extended from Lydda to the coast

And Peter himself presented Tabitha alive to her friends in the church and the news of her resuscitation became known throughout the city of Joppa (**Acts 9:42**)

It’s hard to keep a thing like that quiet!

And I’m sure that the news spread like wildfire and that people flocked around to gawk at Aeneas and Tabitha

A. People “Believed in the Lord”

But that’s not the remarkable part – it’s exactly what we would expect would happen given the circumstances

Notice what Luke tells us in the latter half of **verse 42** – “and many believed in the Lord”

Luke doesn’t mean that the people believed that Jesus can bring people back from the dead – although they certainly believed that

To believe in this instance means to believe *effectively* – in other words, people trusted in Jesus for salvation

As a result of seeing Tabitha standing before them people saw Jesus for who he is and they put their complete trust in him for their salvation

Saving faith, saving belief, requires complete trust and reliance on Christ and that’s what many people demonstrated as a result of Tabitha’s healing

B. People “Turned to the Lord”

Then, in **verse 35**, Luke shows us another facet of the spiritual healing that resulted from the miracle of physical healing

In the case of Aeneas Luke reports that “All the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and **turned to the Lord**”

Logic tells us when we turn *to* something we must necessarily turn *from* something else

And when a person turns to the Lord that means they have turned from **themselves**, from **their own efforts**, from their life of **slavery to sin**, from the **things that gave them significance** that is to say from **false gods**

Turning to the Lord implies a complete reorientation – a clean break with the past

And that’s what happened here as a result of the healing of Aeneas

Fire insurance

Far too many people have tried to accept Christ as Savior without surrendering to him as Lord

But as we saw last week true belief will result in a changed life

Jesus isn’t in the business of selling fire insurance he is seeking disciples

He is looking for those who are willing to be “set apart ones” for his sake and partners with the Holy Spirit in the process of becoming more like Christ

And in these two cases we see that the miracles served as the catalyst to get people to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and the changed lives that result from true belief

Change in Peter’s thinking

We also begin to see God’s working to change Peter’s vision taking root as we read in **verse 43** that Peter does something pretty unexpected for someone like him

We read –

And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner

The significance of the fact that Peter even entered a tanner’s home let alone stayed there is easily lost on us

We need to understand that tanners were considered to be unclean as a result of their occupation requiring them to handle the carcasses of ceremonially unclean animals as we see in **Leviticus 11:24**

So by this action, we have evidence that Peter is softening up a bit in his Jewishness

He was slowly beginning to become less concerned with what he had known and practiced all his life

First, although he was still ministering primarily to Jews he was doing so apart from Jerusalem in cities that had a strong Gentile influence

Then, he stays in the house of a man, who though Jewish, was engaged in a trade that made him unclean – and therefore made Peter unclean as well

God is working a change in Peter as he gradually expands his vision in preparation for a grand revelation which we will see next as we look at the account of Cornelius in chapter 10

Conclusion

We also need to consider how well we see – just how clear is our vision?

Peter had a blind spot when it came to Gentiles and we likely have blind spots for other people groups

If we're honest we have to admit that there are folks who we have a hard time seeing as worthy of God's grace and we need to have our eyes adjusted

We'll get into that more next week

Our abilities

But we also have eye trouble when it comes to seeing our abilities and our role in the redemptive plan of God and we find ourselves pining and wishing for gifts that we don't have thinking that they are somehow better

The Greater Miracle

Which miracle would you say is greater?

Do we think it's better to see someone who has been miraculously healed physically as Aeneas and Tabitha were or to see someone who has been healed spiritually?

Physical healings are impressive to be sure but so are the changed lives of those who have truly believed because their belief will result in turning to the Lord that is in many ways even more impressive

While God may not choose to use us as he did Peter in bringing about miraculous physical healings he does use us to bring about spiritual healings

God's Word

And God has given us something more powerful to change lives than even Peter had

His complete Holy Word

And God's Word has the power to change lives permanently

Tabitha wasn't resurrected as Jesus was never to die again

She was resuscitated and she did eventually breathe her last

We don't know what happened to Aeneas after his healing but we do know that he too eventually succumbed to the fate of all mankind and his physical life came to an end

But when the Holy Spirit reaches a person through the witness of a believer and the words of the Bible to bring about salvation that person is changed forever

I believe that both Aeneas and Tabitha were born to eternal life and that they are awaiting the resurrection of their bodies even now in heaven

While they were no doubt very grateful for their physical healings I would be willing to bet that they are more grateful for their spiritual healing as they enjoy their time in the presence of the Lord

While miraculous physical healings are impressive and command a lot of attention we need to ask God to open our eyes, and correct our vision to see that we are meant to be his instruments of even greater healing to all those we encounter

Let's pray