

Message Date: 11-15-20

To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 5: What Only God Can Do

Message Title: Week 3, The Power of New Life

✠ Transitions...

- *Last week mentioned my best friend in high school... we loved rock music. Almost everything we did had a classic rock soundtrack... and our favorite band.. was RUSH.*
- *One of Rush's biggest hits was TOM SAWYER.*
- *Tell you that story for the main line in the song: "Changes aren't permanent, but change is"*

- *BUT WE DON'T LIKE THAT! We want things to be permanent, to stay the way they are- as least the things that we like the way they are. There's a reason traditions are so hard to let go of. We like things to stay the same.*

- *As Christians, we like to point to scripture and say.. things should stay the same, because GOD NEVER CHANGES. Hebrews 13:8 says "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*

- *THAT IS TRUE... but it's also true that scripture is full of TRANSITIONS. God, in his nature and identity, doesn't change, but He loves to work through change.*

- *When we started ACTS, we discussed how Acts, throughout, is a story of transitions. One of these is the transition of the GOSPEL moving from the Jews, from Israel, to the GENTILES- the rest of the world. This is a..*
 - *Geographic transition- Israel to surrounding world*
 - *Ethnic transition- Jewish to many ethnicities*
 - *Theological- As the gospel expands from the focus of Repentance, Forgiveness, and Jesus as the promised messiah, to the fuller teaching of God's grace, the distinctions between the OC and NC, and Jesus as life itself.*

- *Throughout our story thus far, we've seen God working STRATEGICALLY to carry out this transition.*
 - *When Gospel first leaves Jerusalem, moves to Judea and SAMARIA. Samaritans weren't Jewish, but they shared a common heritage with the Jews.*
 - *Then, Ethiopian Eunuch. Takes Gospel to a gentile country, even though we hear nothing about this through the rest of Acts. Isolated event.*
 - *Then we have Saul's conversion. And while Saul will be the Apostle to the Gentiles, the full revelation that the gospel will be for ALL PEOPLE won't come through Saul, it will come through PETER, the leader of the church in Jerusalem.*

- *Think about how God has worked here! The church has now spread out of Jerusalem, through all of Israel, and outside of Israel. The CONTEXT, MOVING FORCE behind all of this? PERSECUTION. SUFFERING. UNCERTAINTY.*
- *THEN, Saul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus, and everything changes. The persecution lessens, and Peter is able to travel out of Jerusalem to teach and strengthen these new believers throughout Israel.*

- *THIS IS WHERE WE'RE PICKING UP OUR STORY, as the SPIRIT leads Peter thru encounters with three people. These experiences will set the stage for God's revelation to Peter that will fully open the door for the gospel to move into the Gentile world.*

– **THAT will happen in Acts 10, BUT TODAY we are completing Acts chapter 9- and we are doing so on SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15th, 2020. WELCOME TO TRINITY ONLINE.**

– **Our three people today are Aeneas, Tabitha, and Simon. In each encounter there is a very real need... and through Peter, God is going to meet these needs. Even more, we see the Spirit working to do what God always does when people experience the reality of life in Christ- and that is to bring FREEDOM. (2 Cor 3:17... where Spirit/Freedom)**

– **START WITH AENEAS**

✠ Peter and Aeneas

³² As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda.

– **Where is Lydda? Real quick, Look at the MAP**

³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years.

³⁴ "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

– **We don't know anything about Aeneas other than his malady. He likely was a believer, because we're told that Peter went to Lydda to visit the 'Lords' people'. In any case, his paralysis resulted in his being confined to his bed for eight years. This is a horrible situation. Even today, the effect of a person being bedridden for eight years would be catastrophic.**

– **But what's really interesting isn't just what Peter says, but how he says it: "Aeneas... "Jesus Christ Heals you"... it's a statement of present and ongoing activity. You could also translate this, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ is at this very moment healing you." Peter doesn't ask Jesus to heal him, he informs Aeneas of what Jesus is already doing.**

– **Aeneas' bed, as would have been common at that time, wasn't a permanent piece of furniture, but rather a mat that would be rolled up and put away when not in use.**

– **"AENEAS! Jesus, the Christ, is here, he knows you, he is present to you, and he is healing you! So get up out of that bed, and put it away, you don't need it any more!"**

– **AND SO, Aeneas got up. News of this spread through the town and the coastal region of Sharon, and many people turned to the Lord.**

– **FIRST PHYSICAL MIRACLE WE SEE HERE...**

- **Aeneas received freedom from PARALYSIS**

✠ Peter and Tabitha

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them (**probably wearing them**).

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.

⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

- *Tabitha is a believer. Not only that, she was known for her character, her kindness, good works, and mercy. The context here suggests that she was wealthy, and very generous.*
- *Tabitha becomes sick and dies, and her body is prepared for burial and place in an upper room. Luke doesn't tell us this, but possible she was not immediately buried because her friends were praying for her. There is some evidence that at times bodies were kept three days before being buried, because of a traditional belief that it took three days for the soul to leave the body.*
- *In any case, there is no doubt in the account that Tabitha is dead, and when her friends heard that Peter was not far away, they sent for him in the clear hope that God might work a miracle through him.*
- *IMPORTANT to note the emphasis Luke puts on the widows Tabitha had served (showed their clothes). Tabitha is DEAD, but the sense here is that the greatest need is not Tabitha. She was with the Lord! Rather, Luke describes the needs of the widows who had been so blessed by Tabitha's generosity.*
- *Peter empties the room- most likely so that the attention was not upon him- Peter gets down on his knees and prays. THE POWER OF PRAYER is something Luke emphasizes. In fact, we see the WORK OF GOD associated with prayer over thirty different times in Acts.*
- *THEN, after praying, Peter says "Tabitha, get up". Speculation, but we can imagine that as Peter spoke those words, he was remembering a time not many years earlier, when he had entered a room with Jesus, John, and James. In Luke 8 we see this story, and in the room was a 12 year old girl who had died. With the mourners outside the room, Jesus took the girl by the hand and said "my child, get up!". And just like that girl, Tabitha opened her eyes, and sat up.*
- *Just as Jesus had healed the young girl, we see here Jesus continuing to do what ONLY GOD CAN DO, now through the presence and prayer of Peter.*
- *Peter helps Tabitha to her feet, and presented her to her friends whom she had served with so much love. Again, the word of this spread, and many people came to faith in Christ.*
- *AND SO WE SEE THAT TABITHA as well was set free. But she didn't just receive freedom from death- in fact, In Christ, death had no power over her. By restoring her physical life, God had set her free to continue her life of generosity. In her resurrection...*

- Tabitha received the freedom to be a SERVANT

✠ Peter and Simon

⁴³ *Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.*

- *Why significant? We only know two things about Simon. First, he was hospitable. He opened his home. But second, we know he was a TANNER. In other words, his trade was to remove and treat the skin of dead animals. Now, Peter is not a Pharisee, he is a fisherman who knew hard work... but he is also an observant Jew, and Simon's profession would have been considered decidedly UNCLEAN. One commentator said it was a 'despised trade', and therefore Simon himself, and his house, would be unclean, avoided, and likely looked down upon by a self-respecting Jewish man such as Peter.*
- *And yet, Simon extends hospitality, and going against the tradition and purity laws of his own people, Peter accepts. In doing so, Peter is led by the Spirit to bring freedom to Simon as well...*

- Simon received freedom from STIGMA

- *Simon would have experienced the stigma of his profession for his entire life, as its probable his father was a tanner as well. But he wasn't rejected by Peter. One day in heaven, I want to find Simon and ask him to describe just what it meant when Peter chose to enter his home and stay with him, as a friend. It probably changed his life.*
- **SO! THOSE ARE THE STORIES! Miraculous. But church, here's something we can't miss..**

✠ Reality! Aeneas' physical healing and Tabitha's resurrection were both miracles- something only God could do. And yet, these changes were both EXTERNAL and TEMPORARY.

- *Physical health is important, and can impact all of life. BUT, even now our society is coming to grips with the even greater importance of mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Just physical health alone does not give fullness of life. EVEN MORE, both Aeneas and Tabitha continued to age, and there came a time for both of them when the frailty of physical life came to an end. These healings, while miraculous, did not address a person's greatest need.*

In contrast, the power of *New Life In Christ* is focused on the INTERNAL and ETERNAL.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

In the realm of the unseen and eternal, (realm of FAITH, greater SPIRITUAL reality we all are part of) these stories reveal... power of God that speaks to us today.

✠ The Power to be free from our own PARALYSIS (cue from RC Sproul)

- *When it comes to our sin, our fallen old human nature (flesh), CHRIST accomplished a DOUBLE CURE. First, we are forgiven, THROUGH CROSS God has taken our guilt and placed it upon himself.*
- *But Jesus doesn't stop there. By the work of the Spirit in our life, God is at work to bring us from spiritual infancy to maturity, from a forgiven life still centered on self to a life that increasingly flows from Christ, his nature, his presence in us.*
- **THAT IS A JOURNEY, and along that road we are all at different places. None of us have yet been made perfect, and we all still have our own places of SPIRITUAL/EMOTIONAL PARALYSIS.**
 - *Temptation we succumb... anger, jealousy, wounds from a past hurt.*
 - *Fear. Anxiety. Something in our life where we are STUCK, disconnected from our HEAD*
 - *Most common source of spiritual paralysis... PRIDE.*
 - **THINGS THAT GRIP US AND PARALYZE US FROM BEING AND EXPERIENCING THE LIFE AND FREEDOM CHRIST DESIRES FOR US.**
- *Think of Aeneas' mat. It had its place in its life, but he wasn't meant to live there. Christ healed him, but that wasn't everything. Aeneas had to stand, take that mat that had been his source of survival all those years, and he had to put it aside and take the next step.*
- **IF WE HAVE PLACED FAITH IN CHRIST, then Peter's words to Aeneas speak to us. RIGHT NOW, JESUS CHRIST IS HEALING YOU. He is at work in that place of paralysis, where you are stuck... and he calls you to take your bedroll- whatever it is you've been holding onto, put it aside, and GET UP. Take the next step.**

† Story of Tabitha... **The power of KINDNESS**

- *In the light of Eternity, the greatest power in Tabitha's life was not that she was raised from the dead. It is the love, compassion, kindness, and generosity she showed to the poor, the widows, the less than.*
- *Christian culture today has incredible resources and in many places great affluence. It can be easy for us to get so caught up in our activities, our performance, that we forget the essentials of following Christ that scripture so clearly proclaims, and that Tabitha lived out.*
- *In James 1:27, God makes this pretty clear...*

James 1:27 *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world*

- *Sounds like what Jesus himself said when asked "what is the greatest commandment in the law". If you boil down His response from Luke 10, it is this: LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD with all of who you are. And then, express your love of God by loving people. When those around him asked "what kind of people are we supposed to love"... he answered with a parable... Good Samaritan.*
- *The story of Tabitha proclaims a truth we can't ignore. Even more powerful that the restoration of physical life, is the love and kindness that may lead people to eternal life.*

† The powerful testimony of a **CHANGED** life

- *When people observed the miracles of Aeneas and Tabitha, it led to many across the entire region coming to faith in Christ.*
- *WHY? Because few things communicate the authenticity of WHO JESUS IS, and the TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL, than how CHRIST brings change into our own lives.*
- *Have you ever asked "GOD! How do I show those around me the truth of who you are? How do I show this to my friends, co-workers, my own family?" One of the greatest ways is by allowing Christ to bring real change into your life. You don't have to be healed of a disease or even saved from physical death. You just have to surrender and allow God to do what only he can do - in your MIND, WILL, AND EMOTIONS... how you think, feel, and ACT in relationship to yourself and those around you.*
- *(BY THE WAY, just as life changed by Jesus is a powerful testimony.... The flipside is true. When we claim to follow Christ and our life has no evidence, it turns people away...)*

† The power to see through **BARRIERS**

- *The Spirit gave Peter the ability to see through the stigma of Simon's 'unclean' profession.*
- *In Christ, as we allow him to strip away our pride, our prejudices, our biases... God will give us the ability to see through walls... through barriers that separate us.*
 - *Barrier of personal discomfort. Of our own selfishness.*
 - *Barrier of religious or traditional pride. If you care more about being 'right' than you care about being in relationship, this may be an area God wants to work.*
- *IN CHRIST, we are FREE TO LOVE through the barriers that so easily separate. So much more could be said here, and is a theme we find throughout scripture.*
- *CLOSE WITH THIS. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And yet, Jesus loves to work through transition.*

† Reality! God loves transition because He is all about **TRANSFORMATION**

- *What is your paralysis? How is Jesus working to set you free?*

- *How is God leading you into greater kindness, compassion, mercy?*
- *What are the barriers God will work through you to break down?*
- *How will God use YOUR STORY- the transformation He is calling you to experience- how will he use your story to reveal himself, his goodness, his truth, to someone around you.*
- *GOD IS AT WORK in these ways. And when we surrender, when we allow him to do so, the results are nothing less than a miracle.*