

“The Cure Effect”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 10/25/2020
Text: Acts 9:32-43 at FBC of Newport, NH

//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.//

—Acts 9:40-42 (NIV)

As Peter travels around spreading the Good News about Jesus, God gives him the gift to accompany that preaching with a selection of people who are healed at his command. I say “selection” because it doesn’t seem every single sick or injured person was healed, nor that every *dead* person was raised! There seems to be a selective process worked out by both Peter and the Spirit. There’s also probably a selection going on with how much of this Luke records. I’m sure we’d hear if *everyone* was healed and raised. But I’m not sure these two examples in this passage are necessarily the only cases at that time. There could well have been others. These however are what God has selected for us in Luke’s historic record here.

What I would like for us to note about the healing of Aeneas and the raising of Dorcas is what Luke himself notes about them. After each event, not only were the individuals miraculously blessed with health and life itself, but many, many others were blessed with belief. And that latter blessing is even greater than the former. For even though the bodies of all these people—including the one’s healed—were still subject to decay and death that comes to us all, those who believe in Jesus are granted new life in Christ, forgiveness of sin, the gift of the Holy Spirit and an eternal place in the family of God. These miracle cures are not the end-point of Peter’s mission in Lydda and Joppa. They are the means to an even greater end. The effect of these cures was faith, belief and a following of Christ. “All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him [i.e. the bedridden man healed] and turned to the Lord.” (Acts 9:35) “This [raising of Dorcas] became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.” (Acts 9:42)

I am especially impressed with the second account, not just because it’s a raising of the dead, but because it shows an advance in the public’s ‘active vocabulary’ for the power of Jesus’ healing.

Remember when Lazarus died? His sisters called upon Jesus to come and heal him. But when Jesus delayed (deliberately, by the way) and Lazarus was in his fourth day of deadness, both Martha and Mary, upon meeting Jesus at

the tomb, expressed understandable disappointment that Jesus had not arrived earlier. For then, they said, their brother Lazarus would not have died, he would have been healed. These women, like most everyone else, did not have it in their active vocabulary that the idea of healing could include a resurrection, other than on the last Day, when everyone, great and small, godly or godless will be raised. Jesus deliberately taught, and then demonstrated by raising Lazarus from the dead, that *he* was “the resurrection and the life.” Then not long after that God raised Jesus from the dead, never to die again. Resurrection is very much to be an active part of our thinking when it comes to our facing what ails us.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is even greater than we expect. Greater than a man who can heal, greater than a man who can raise the dead even though they’ll die again Jesus has conquered sin and death at the cross and empty tomb and he invites everyone to be a part of that—by believing in him.

The people in Joppa have gotten this Good News! When this beloved disciple Tabitha (whose Greek name is Dorcas; how Tabitha and Dorcas can be the same name I have no idea) became sick and died, the fellow believers there called out for Peter. He was in the nearby town of Lydda having healed Aeneas. But they didn’t call Peter to heal Tabitha quickly before she died. They called him even *after* she had died—in order that he would raise her from the dead! These people have got the Good News! And they’ve got their faith fully placed in it.

Indeed, Peter answers the call. He comes to Joppa. He comes to the house; goes upstairs; the widows are crying and the body of Tabitha is washed and prepared for her burial. Peter then sends everyone out of the room, and so it is just Peter and this dead woman. Just think of all that could be going around in Peter’s mind there in that room. All that he has seen with his own eyes and heard with his own ears of Jesus, and yet, all that he also had trouble believing—especially about the centrality of the cross and resurrection in the Gospel of Christ. But all that Christ has led him through is more than enough for equipping him for that moment in that room. This woman’s death is no match for the power of Jesus’ life and the commissioning of Peter to act in Jesus’ name.

And so, with faith Peter gets on his knees and prays in that Name. Then he turns to the dead woman and speaks to her. “Tabitha, get up,” he says. And she does. Her eyes open, both she and Peter get to their feet, and they walk out of that room together.

Is it any wonder many people all over Joppa came to believe in the Lord Jesus after that?

Well, actually, one could wonder about just how those people in Joppa came to believe in Jesus and this resurrection. After all, none of them saw it happen. I’ll bet a lot of them didn’t see Tabitha die or attend her wake at the house. So how did they come to believe Tabitha was raised to life by Peter and come to believe in Jesus and follow him?

The answer is simple: witnesses. First there would be Tabitha herself. Pretty good witness there. Then there were family and friends who knew Tabitha; they knew her illness, her death and then knew her to be alive again. These people would be witnesses and they would extend this miracle of Peter beyond just Peter and Tabitha. Then there would be people who knew these witnesses and trusted them. They would believe this too. Then there would be those who didn't know Tabitha nor the family and friends. But they might hear this news and check it out with an open mind. They see evidence that goes beyond a hoax; it rings with the very Spirit of truth and is believed. In this way this miracle (and faith in Jesus) extended to nearly the whole town.

However, at a certain point people would hear about this news, not from witnesses, but from rumor mills and strangers. Perhaps the story would get twisted, or it just seemed too far fetched and remote to make a difference in the listeners life. The miracle is still true, but its effect is hindered by a lack of witnesses.

This is the natural fate of most all miracles. They just aren't big enough, grand enough and lasting enough for there to be enough witnesses. This is true all through the Bible. The whole history of Israel is one of stubbornness and short-sightedness after God miraculously blesses and guides them time and time again. From David and the prophets to the Exodus from Egypt after those dramatic ten plagues. Even after the great Flood, life seemed to just go back to normal, sinful business as usual. Hey, EVEN ADAM and EVE, responded poorly to the miracle of creation itself as they failed to demonstrate faith in God's word over their own thoughts and desires.

I think most everybody thinks the best (and maybe only) way to believe in God is for us to directly witness a miracle. But it seems there's no miracle great enough to get that job done, let alone witnesses qualified to pass it on to the whole world. That's how it seemed.

That is, until the coming of Jesus.

That miraculous way would be God himself in Jesus. God's Son would walk among us. He would live the human life as it had never been lived before—perfectly! But that's not even the greatest part. Jesus would indeed do a miracle greater than all other miracles. One that would be available to all the world. One that would be lasting through all time. And one that would make witnesses out of everyone who came to have their soul cured of sin and their hearts filled with the Spirit of God.

You might be thinking that that miracle would be the resurrection of Jesus. And you would be half right. Much like with Peter and Tabitha, though, no one was privy to actually see the resurrection of Jesus. Even those who saw Jesus alive were mostly those who had already believed in him in the first place. That's because there's another part to this miracle of the resurrection of Jesus. There's the cross of Jesus.

It is actually the cross of Jesus that God has held up to the world for everyone to see. At least to see without a lot of faith. It's dark, painful, humiliating and shameful, but at the same time there's a glory to it. God is in there. He's on that cross. Those, and only those, who will look at the cross, see it for what it truly is, and see themselves for who they really are, will be able to also have eyes that can see the resurrection for what it truly is. Here is the cure of the human soul. And the effect of it is to believe in the living God in a way that is everlasting.

Those who would look at the death of Jesus and judge him as a failure would themselves fail to see much beyond that dark day. But those who would look at that terrible sight and sense their own sin and their own need for humility and healing—would see a miracle of miracles, a healing within their very soul. Listen to these familiar, and unfamiliar, words from John 3:14, 15 and 16.

14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. —John 3:14-16

The snake Moses lifted up was God's ordained cure for the Israelites who had sinned and were laying around dying after having been bitten by vipers. Now though, all they had to do was lift up their heads and look at the bronze snake Moses had erected and they would be healed.

True healing and its true effect of believing in God through Christ as Lord and Savior starts at the foot of the cross where one need only to look up and see Jesus. Here the humble truth of Christ will not blind us or burn us. Here it brings healing and the light of faith. That belief and faith then persists through to the resurrection. And it bears witness to all the world, so others may come and see for themselves this miracle of miracles.

Don't forget what Jesus said just prior to Pentecost: "... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) He did not say you will be my miracle workers in all these places, though miracles indeed play a key role. But the role he emphasized for all of us was to be his witnesses, witnesses to the cure that brings hearts to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior.