

Place: Lurgan Baptist Church 3:4:2007

Reading: Acts 9:31-43

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

19. PETER'S MIRACLE MINISTRY

“ Lord, make my life a miracle.” This prayer, voiced long ago by Thomas Kelly, is one God loves to answer. He savours turning our fear into courage and our hatred into love. He enjoys transforming us into new creations, evidences of His miraculous touch. Now Scripture displays one life that is surely one of God's most gratifying exhibits, Peter, the fisherman the Lord Jesus reeled in one day on the shores of Galilee. My ... far from a miracle at first, the Saviours catch was rough-edged and sometimes self-centred. Peter was even prone to failure, for on the night of Christ's arrest, he denied Him three times, for he said, *“ I know not the man.”*

(Matt 26:74) But Gods grace searched him out in his darkness and sparked in Peter a miracle. In Acts, we've already seen the results of that miracle.

It was Peter who preached at Pentecost, challenged the pompous Sanhedrin, and confronted church hypocrisy. And now in (Ch 9) as Luke closes the account of Saul's conversion, Peter once again showed his changed heart. For in this passage Luke reveals just

how miraculous Peters life had become. For now, with the Spirits power, he was the one performing the miracles. Here there is brought before us *Peters Miracle Ministry*. **Now what is a miracle ?** Is it a miracle when we pray to God to meet a financial need and the postman brings a check on precisely the day the money is needed ? Is it a miracle when a parking space opens up near the supermarket entrance right when you need one ? Is it a miracle when a mother senses something wrong in an adjoining room and investigates just in time to stop her baby from harming herself ?

Is it a miracle when something prompts a young lady to think of a friend she hasn't seen for a long time, and she phones to discover that she has called at just the moment her friend needed encouragement ? *We often call such events miracles, but they are more properly termed acts of providence.* They reveal Gods working in our daily lives and often come as answers to prayer, but they are not the kind of supernatural signs and wonders Scripture classifies as miracles. (2:22) *My ... a miracle is an extraordinary event wrought by God through human agency, an event that cannot be explained by natural forces.* Miracles always are designed to authenticate the human instrument God has chosen to declare a specific revelation to those who witness the miracle. Now did you know that most Biblical miracles happened in three relatively brief periods of Bible History ? In the days of Moses and Joshua, during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, and in the time of Christ and the apostles. None of those periods lasted more than an hundred years. Each of

them saw a proliferation of miracles unheard of in other eras. And these miracles authenticated the messengers of revelation. Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Christ and the apostles all had the ability to do frequent signs and wonders. (2:43) These were designed to convince people that God was with these men and that God was speaking through them. Well you say, “ ***Preacher, do you have the power to perform miracles like these men did ?***” No, I don’t and I’m not expected to have. Today, God does not work miracles through us like He did through Moses, the prophets, Christ or the apostles. Instead, we have something previously unavailable to help us discern whether Gods presence validates a ministry, we have the finished Word of God !

John Walvoord in his book The Holy Spirit says this, “ ***With the completion of the New Testament the need for further unusual display of miraculous works ceased. The preacher of today does not need the outward evidence of ability to heal to substantiate the validity of his gospel. Rather, the written Word speaks for itself, and is attended by the convicting power of the Spirit.***” We are not saying of course, that God does not perform miracles. Walvoord explains, “ ***It is not a question of the power of God to perform miracles but simply whether it is His purpose to continue the same form of manifestation of divine power as seen in the apostolic times.***” Now here in this section we see Peter’s miracle ministry. Indeed we find Peter participating in three miracles: he heals Aeneas, he raises Dorcas from the dead, and he brings the message of salvation to Cornelius and his

household. Which was the greatest miracle ? Some would say the healing of Aeneas, while others would vote for Dorcas, being raised from the dead. However I think the greatest miracle of all is the salvation of a lost sinner. Why ? Because salvation costs the greatest price: it produces the greatest results, and it brings the greatest glory to God. Now our section begins with one of Luke's summaries that he regularly drops into the book of Acts. (2:46-47 4:4 32, 5:12-14) You see the first thing we notice here is,

(1) AN IDEAL CHURCH

Look at (9:31) Now do you notice that the geographical locations here parallel those given in (1:8) ? Luke is telling us that the message was going out just as the Lord had commanded. Soon, the centre would be Antioch, not Jerusalem, and the key leader would be Paul not Peter, and the gospel would be taken to the uttermost part of the earth. But in telling us this, Luke gives us a most striking word picture of an ideal church. There are four characteristics of the ideal church mentioned in our text. Notice first of all,

(a) THERE WAS PEACE:

“ *Then had the churches rest,*” (9:31) Another translation renders this word, “ *peace,*” Now that word, “ *then,*” links us up with what had gone before. And what had gone before ? There had been bitter persecution in the churches. The ringleader of all the trouble had been Saul of Tarsus, who believing that he

was doing the will of God had cruelly treated the Christians. Then suddenly, miraculously, he had been converted, and he became a disciple of the One against whom he had been fighting. “ *Then had the churches rest*,” (9:31) The very one who had made the lives of those early believers almost unbearable became their greatest counsellor and friend. The persecution stopped, for the present at any rate, and they had rest peace. Is the first mark of an ideal church freedom from persecution ? By no means. My God’s greatest blessings often come through persecution and affliction. (8:1, 4) But this word “ *rest*,” literally means harmony and concord, and is this not the first mark of an ideal church ?

We all know what is meant by harmony in music. There may be two instruments playing together or there may be twenty two and as we listen we say, “ what perfect harmony there is.” What do we mean ? We mean there are no discords or discordant notes. My is this church like that ? We are all different, as different as the instruments in an orchestra, but are we all playing harmoniously together ? Do you recall the key phrase in the book of Acts ? “ *With one accord.*” How is it with each one of us ? Are we, are you “ *at rest*,” “ *at peace*,” with the other members of the fellowship ? (a) There was peace.

(b) *THERE WAS PROGRESS:*

“ *And were edified*,” (9:31) The word “ *edified*,” really means “ *built up, strengthened, consolidated.*” Here were believers becoming established in the Lord

and in His Word. My do you know something ? It is not sufficient for babies to be born, they must grow. How beautiful to go into a home where there is a lovely baby, but how sad to go back to that same home three years later and find the baby still a baby. Do you recall that Paul had that experience once in connection with the church at Corinth ? Do you remember what he says ? “ *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*” (1 Cor 3:1) The believers at Corinth did not have the capacity for the strong meat of the Word, they were still on a milk diet. I wonder if Paul would have to say the same if he came to our church or would he say, “ *the believers are growing daily and many of them are strong, they have a capacity for the deep things of God.*” Are you making progress in your spiritual experience ? Do you feed regularly on Gods Word ? Do you rest on His promises ? Bishop Taylor Smith used to say that David could claim to be a member of the Established Church, for in (Ps 40) he says that the Lord, “ *established his goings.*” In that sense we are all members of the Established Church but what is more important is this, are we established members of the church ? There was something else that marked this church. (a) (b)

(c) *THERE WAS PURITY:*

For they were “ *walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.*” (9:31) What does this mean ? Does it mean that these early believers were afraid of God ? Surely not for “ *perfect love casteth out fear*,” (1 Jn 4:18) My this was not the fear that

hath torment, it was a deep reverence for the Lord. One writer says, “ *godly fear is not a shrinking apprehension, it is love upon its knees.*” Abraham knew what it was to fear God. (Gen 22:12) Nehemiah knew what it was to fear God. (Neh 5:15) Job knew what it was to fear God. (Job 1:8) These early believers were not afraid of the Lord but they loved Him so much that they were afraid to disappoint or fail Him. Francis Dixon tells us that in his early teens he did not appreciate what a wonderful father he had. Then one day in the course of conversation, his aunt said to him, “ *You ought to be thankful for having such a fine father. Who wouldn't do anything for a father like your Father ?*” That made a tremendous impression on the preacher and he realised that his father with loving concern had studied his best interests all along.

Francis Dixon says, “ *from that moment on I would have done anything for my father, from then on I walked in the fear of my father, I was not afraid of him, but I was afraid to upset or disappoint him, and as a result I longed to please and obey him.*” My is it not the same in the spiritual realm ? For surely when we realise what a wonderful Heavenly Father and what a Loving Saviour we have, we begin to walk in His fear ? Because we love Him we long to keep His commandments ! My are you beginning to see the marks of an ideal church ? (a) (b) (c) But there was something else here.

(d) THERE WAS POWER:

“ *And walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.*” (9:31) In a word these churches were Holy Spirit-controlled. These believers were under the control and presidency of the Holy Spirit, and therefore its not surprising to read they “ *were multiplied.*” (9:31) My when there is love and concord in the church, when the members are growing in grace and becoming more and more like their Lord, when they are “ *walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost,*” is it any wonder that the outside world is reached and that men and women are won to the Lord ? You see the ideal church is the soul-saving church and my we are missing the mark if we are not bringing souls into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ ! (1)

(2) AN ITINERANT APOSTLE

You see Peter had been engaged in an itinerant ministry (8:25) when he found himself visiting the saints in Lydda, a large Gentile city about 25 miles from Jerusalem. Its possible that this area had been evangelised by people converted on the day of Pentecost: or perhaps by faithful believers who had been scattered far and wide during the great persecution. (8:1) No doubt Philip the evangelist had also ministered there. And now Peter takes time to minister to individuals. You see no matter how large their ministries may have been, Gods noblest servants have always taken time to minister to individuals. Do you recall that Moses nearly wore himself out doing just this ? (Ex 18:14) Indeed despite the crowds that

thronged Him constantly the Lord Jesus always had concern and time for individuals. (Matt 9:19-22)

Stephen had been engaged in the personal care of widows (6:1) Paul, though consumed with reaching cities and nations, endeared himself to people whose names are all through his letters. (Rom 16:1) The busy Reformers Luther and Calvin did not neglect their pastoral duties. My the idea of a man of God who ministers only to large crowds is foreign to the Scriptures. God expects all of us, leaders included to pour our lives into the lives of others. (2 Tim 2:2) Peter knew what it was to preach to the masses, but now he ministers personally to individuals. Look at,

(a) THE MAN PETER DISCOVERED:

Look at (9:33) We know very little about Aeneas. How old was he ? Was he a believer ? Was he a Jew or Gentile ? What caused his paralysis ? Did he fall ? Did he have a disease ? Well, Luke does not give these details. He only mentions that for eight years Aeneas had been confined to bed. Only a victim of paralysis can truly understand Aeneas inner agony. Ill: One such victim is Joni Eareckson Tada. Since 1967, she has been paralysed from the neck down as a result of a diving accident. She knows what it is like to hear the words, “ *You will never walk again.* ” She understands the frustrations, the self-hatred, the helplessness, and the anger that must have tormented Aeneas. When Peter came to him, he saw all these emotions and compassionately said, “ *Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.* ” This was,

(b) THE METHOD PETER EMPLOYED:

You see Peter had the gift of healing, one of the validating gifts of the early church. And he instantly healed this man in the name of Jesus. My this is how it was with the gift of healing. Find the most difficult case. Seek him out. Heal him instantly, beyond all shadow of doubt, permanently. There was no mass meeting, no hysteria, no stage-managed effects, no offerings, just a simple exercise of a rare and temporary but awesome and convincing spiritual gift. Now for a moment let’s step back from the story to observe Peters method of healing compared to that of modern day faith healers. Notice,

(1) PETER FOUND AENEAS:

Aeneas did not have to come to Peter, or to a meeting for his healing.

(2) THERE WAS NO LARGE CROWD GATHERED:

No big spectacle, no hysteria and no hype.

(3) THE HEALING WAS IMMEDIATE AND COMPLETE:

All Peter said was, “ *Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.* ” (9:34) There was no need for any therapy, no extra rehabilitation. There was no progression, no talk of recurring symptoms. There was no recuperation period. No taking it easy for a few weeks. It was not

only instantaneous but total.

(4) THE LORD JESUS WAS EXALTED THROUGH THIS HEALING:

Peter did not say, “ *Aeneas, Peter maketh thee whole.*” Christ was the focus, and the people who heard about the miracle “ *turned to the Lord,*” (9:35) and not to Peter.

(5) THE APOSTLES WERE ABLE TO RAISE THE DEAD:

For Peter brought back Dorcas to life. (9:40) And that miracle gave credence and impact to the gospel message for we read, “ *And it was known throughout all Joppa and many believed in the Lord.*” (9:42) Where are the so called healers in Ulster who can raise the dead ? I notice that people who taut the gift of healing today do not spent time in funeral parlours, funeral processions, hospitals or cemeteries. The reason is obvious. But how different was Peter’s miracle ministry for notice,

(c) THE MIRACLE PETER WITNESSED:

“ *And he arose immediately.*” (9:34) Charles Swindoll has said, “ *This was really power ! Some of us for years have been saying, ' Arise and make your bed,' to our teenagers with no result.*” My this was a great miracle. There is no other explanation. “ *But incredible things are happening today how do you explain it ? I know this lady who had cancer and I*

know this person who was so bent over with arthritis and she couldn't move and,” How do you explain it ? Let me turn the question around to the charismatics. “ **How do you explain it ?**” It certainly is not the Biblical gift of healing. Does God then heal today ? My God heals whom He wills, when He wills. Genuine healings may come as a result of prayer and most often involve simple natural processes. But the gift of healing, healings that can be “ *claimed,*” have no Biblical sanction in the post-apostolic era. But lets return to Peters story and notice what happen next. (1) (2) But we have here:

(3) AN INFLUENTIAL WOMAN

The seaside town of Joppa was about 10 miles from Lydda. Here, too, there was a local church. And one of its members had achieved a lovely reputation of being, “ *full of good works.*” (9:36) Her name, Tabitha in the Hebrew, Dorcas in Greek, meant “ *gazelle.*” The gazelle is a graceful creature and Dorcas was a gracious woman filled with love and compassion for the poor.

(a) LOOK AT DORCAS LITERALLY:

Just as she is presented to us in (Acts 9) Luke takes note of:

(1) HER DEEDS:

(9:36) “ *This woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.*”

Her busy hands carried out the plans of a loving heart. Here was a lovely, graceful, giving saint who made garments for the needy. (9:39) Do you know something ? Dorcas used her needle for the glory of God ! My is there something that you could use for the good of others and the glory of God ? Could it be said of you that you are “ *full of good works* ?” Good works do not earn salvation but they evidence it. The Lord Jesus “ *went about doing good.*” (10:38) (1)

(2) HER DEATH:

(10:37) What a serious blow to the believers in Joppa. Dorcas died. Was this not (Rom 8:28) in operation. Do you recall what Paul says there ? “ *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.*” My we cannot explain many of the “ *whys,*” of suffering, sickness, accident and death, but “ *as for God His way is perfect.*” Dorcas died, and her body was tenderly washed and laid out in an upper chamber pending burial. But hallelujah they never reached the burial ground for Luke takes note of,

(3) HER DELIVERANCE:

(9:40) My did you notice that Peters actions were modelled on what his Master said and did at the raising of Jairus’s daughter ? (Mk 5:35-43 Matt 9:23-25) Can you imagine the emotions of the saints and widows when they saw their dear Dorcas alive ! Luke adds an interesting comment in (9:42) You see God used these miracles to authenticate the ministry of the apostles. (a)

(b) LOOK AT DORCAS SPIRITUALLY:

For from her experience of death and resurrection we have some tremendous lessons concerning the power of God, in the spiritual realm, to raise the dead souls of sinners. You see,

(1) DORCAS WAS DEAD:

(9:37) My is this not what God says about everyone who is outside of Christ ? “ *Dead in trespasses and sins.*” (Eph 2:1)

(2) DORCAS WAS LOVED:

(9:39) My when Dorcas died there was a deep concern on the part of the church at Joppa and that concern showed itself Emotionally for they wept at her passing and that concern showed itself Practically, for they sent for Peter. Tell me: have you a burden for your lost friends ? Do you ever shed tears because of their spiritual condition ? Do you ever do anything to get them out of the place of “ *death,*” and into the place of “ *life,*”

(3) DORCAS WAS RAISED:

(9:40) Dorcas was raised from the dead but not without,

1. Personal Contact: Do you ever think of the links in the chain that brought Dorcas from death to life ? There were the two men who went to Lydda to fetch

Peter. There were the disciples who sent them. Then Peter came himself. All links in the chain by which Dorcas was raised. My ... are you available to be a link in the chain to bring others to Christ ? Dorcas was **raised but not without**

2. Personal Communion: Look at (9:40) Do you know what prayer acknowledges ? Dependence on God. Do you know what prayer recognises ? That God is “ *able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us.* ” (Eph 3:20) Many years ago five young students made their way to London to hear Charles Haddon Spurgeon preach. Arriving early at ***The Metropolitan Tabernacle***, they found the doors still locked and a great queue waiting to get into the Tabernacle. While they waited on the steps, a man approached them. “ ***Would you like to see the heating apparatus of this church ?*** ” he asked. They weren’t particularly interested on a hot sultry July evening.

That was not what they had come for but they agreed to go with him. He led them into the building down a flight of stairs and into a hallway. At the end of the hallway he opened a door into a large room filled with 700 believers on their knees praying. “ *That,* ” said their guide who was none other than Spurgeon himself, “ *is the heating apparatus of this church.* ” Sure, he was an outstanding soul-winner, the founder of Colleges and Orphanages, the Defender of the Faith, all of that but behind him were a people who really prayed. Someone said to Mr. Spurgeon on one occasion, “ What is the secret of your success ? ” He

replied, “ ***My people pray for me.*** ”

Peters Miracle Ministry. And the greatest miracle of all is the salvation of a lost sinner. The question is, will you love them and pray them into the kingdom ?