

Acts 9:32-43: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Acts chapter 9 verses 32 to 43. Which translated means Dorcas.

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. Acts chapter 9 concludes with two miraculous healings.

Performed through the apostle Peter. From here until the end of chapter 12. Peter will be the focus. Before Peter largely disappears from the text of Acts. Save for a brief appearance in chapter 15.

[1 : 46] Luke often has male and female pairings in his gospel. And here we find another male and female pair of healings. There are also features of these two healings. That might remind us of healings in the gospel.

Or healings in the Old Testament. As we will soon see. The section begins with Peter travelling from place to place. Between various Christian congregations. He seems to be consolidating these early gatherings of Christian disciples.

Encouraging them in the faith. And connecting them with the heart of the Judean Christian movement. In the city of Jerusalem. As he's doing this. He spends some time among the saints that live at Lydda. While there he encounters Aeneas.

Who's been bedridden for eight years. A paralytic. Jesus heals a paralytic in Luke chapter 5.

Forgiving his sins at the same time. It's not clear whether Aeneas was a Christian or not.

But Peter heals him in the name of Jesus the Messiah. Instructing him to rise up and make his bed. He is immediately healed. And the news of this healing. Travels throughout the entire region. And many people turn to the Lord.

[2 : 48] This gives a window into the spread of the gospel. In Judean regions beyond Jerusalem. The church is clearly growing. Expanding outwards into these various parts of the land. Only a year or two previously.

The disciples themselves had gone throughout all these different regions. As Jesus had moved towards Jerusalem. At that time they had declared the good news of the kingdom of God that was coming. During that period they had performed signs and wonders.

This work presumably prepared the ground for what was taking place now. As they went to these various towns and villages. They were going to places that had already received messages about Christ.

Prior to his crucifixion and resurrection. And now they could be filled in on the rest of the story. The fame of Christ and of the gospel is spread by these marvellous works.

Works that are performed in the name of Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter does not claim miraculous power of his own. Rather he claims to act as the emissary of Jesus Christ. Speaking and healing in his name.

[3 : 46] As has happened in many other occasions in the history of the church. Miraculous healings and signs are a means by which God's kingdom announces itself in a new region. The power of the name in which the church acts.

And a reality filled promise of the healing and the restoration of the kingdom that it proclaims. Are both conveyed in such signs and wonders. Some have seen in the name Aeneas. Some reference to the mythical founder of Rome.

Perhaps in giving us the name of this man. Luke is drawing our attention to the direction in which the gospel is moving. Lydda where Peter was currently working. Was about 12 miles from the city of

Joppa.

Joppa was a port. Perhaps most famously where the prophet Jonah. Had sought to catch a ship to take him to Tarshish. When he was running from the mission of the Lord. At Joppa a female disciple has just died.

A woman named Tabitha which is translated as Dorcas. Tabitha means gazelle. And Dorcas would be the equivalent name in Greek. Burial usually occurred quite swiftly after someone died.

[4 : 47] As we saw in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. But this woman after she has died is washed and placed in an upper room. And the disciples hurry to summon Peter from Lydda. When someone dies it's most common to bring their bodies down.

To bring their bodies down towards the earth where they will finally rest. The bringing of a body up into an upper room. Might remind us of two stories from the books of 1st and 2nd Kings.

In 1st Kings chapter 17. Elijah carries the body of the dead son of the widow of Zarephath. Up into his upper room. In 2nd Kings chapter 4. The Shunammite woman brings the body of her dead son. Up into the upper room of the prophet Elisha. In each of these cases. There is a movement of the body away from the realm. That is associated with death. The lower realm. And a raising of the body up.

Tabitha is presented to Peter and to us. As a woman noted for her good works and her charity. Her ministry is one of making clothes for needy people. And she is particularly of service to the widows.

[5 : 47] After Peter places them all outside. He raises Tabitha up. As Tabitha is brought back to life. The miracle is another proof of the power of Christ to the surrounding region.

And many people throughout Joppa believe in the Lord. Peter had been present at a similar raising by Jesus in the Gospels. In Mark chapter 5 verses 40 to 43 we read.

But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him. And went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her. Talitha Kumi. Talitha Kumi. Which means.

Little girl I say to you arise. And immediately the girl got up and began walking. For she was 12 years of age. And they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this.

And told them to give her something to eat. Talitha Kumi might remind us of Tabitha arise. Only one letter differs between these two words. And it is one of many details that makes this raising of Tabitha reminiscent of Christ's raising of Jairus' daughter.

[6 : 49] It is also, as we have already noted, reminiscent of Elijah's healing of the son of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings chapter 17 verses 17 to 24.

And of Elisha's healing of the son of the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings chapter 4 verses 18 to 37. Comparable miracles of Christ occur in Luke chapter 7 verses 11 to 17.

And chapter 8 verses 41 to 42 and 49 to 56. Robert Tannehill is one of various commentators who observe different family resemblances between these stories.

Not every story has all of these details. But each one contains enough of them to connect them with the other stories. First, the dead body is placed in an upper room. Second, the healer is absent and must be summoned.

Third, the healer encounters people weeping. Fourth, the healer excludes the public. Fifth, the healer prays in private. Fourth, there is a command to rise.

[7 : 48] Seventh, after the command or healing action, the dead person's eyes open. Eighth, the dead person sits up. Ninth, the healer either grasps the hand of the dead person or, after they are revived, gives them their hand.

Tenth, the healer calls relatives or friends to show them the person alive. Eleventh, the report of the person being raised up goes roundabout. There will be another similar story in Acts chapter 20, when Paul raises Eutychus.

The effect of all of this is for the gospel to grow in its influence in these various parts of Judea. More and more people are hearing and responding. And Peter's missionary journey, which anticipates the missionary journeys of Paul among the Gentiles, leads to a great number of converts in the land of Palestine.

A question to consider. What might we learn from Luke's portrayal of Tabitha's ministry? A question to consider.