

Gospel Triumph: Broken People Restored – Acts 9:32-43

When Bethany and I lived in California we were involved in the youth group at our church. I remember one summer camp we were playing games one afternoon and a kid from our group had his shoulder knocked out of joint. I've never had this experience personally, but my understanding is that it's quite painful. If my memory serves me correctly, he had the assistance of a friend and was able to get his shoulder back in place fairly quickly. He then commented that this happened with some regularity and then he seemed fine the rest of the week.

A joint out of socket provides a very real picture of what has happened in the world because of sin. Things just don't work properly. We are broken people and live in a broken world. The good news of the Gospel message is that Jesus Christ has come to reset the joint and to heal what has been broken. He's come to restore wholeness.

Our passage for this morning could very easily become a flyover passage in the book of Acts. It's nestled in between Saul's dramatic conversion and the movement of the Gospel to the Gentiles with the conversion of Cornelius. Right in between these two massively important conversion stories we have two very brief stories of Peter and Miracles. Why are these two stories here? They are here to remind us that the good news of the Gospel is restoration to wholeness. These miracles tell us something true about the work God intends to do in the world and how he intends to use us to accomplish that work.

So, in Acts 9:32-43 we will see **2 Means God Uses to Restore Broken People.**

1. Christ's Authority Restores (vv. 32-35)

I mentioned a moment ago that this story comes right after Saul's conversion in Acts 9. Well, almost right after it. There's a summary statement in 9:31 that gives us the big picture of what's happening in the church. Look there.

When the persecution under Saul began in chapter 8 the Apostles stayed in Jerusalem. Now that the church is experiencing peace, the Apostles begin to travel more broadly to teach and train believers in various cities. Look at 9:32.

Let's look at a map here to get an idea of where Lydda is located. It's about 25 miles from Jerusalem and Peter specifically goes to see believers in this town.

Notice that the believers here are called “saints”. We’ll return to that in a few minutes. But while Peter is in Lydda he meets a man named Aeneas. Look at verse 33. Obviously, this is a significant problem, and this man has been paralyzed and unable to walk for a long time. People knew of his condition, and we’ll see by the response to what Peter does in verse 34. Look there.

It's very simply stated, isn't it? But notice that Peter makes the connection to the authority of Jesus Christ clear here. Jesus is the one doing the healing. Look at the result in verse 35. This was fairly typical with the miracles of Jesus. Word would spread quickly and the news of this miracle healing travels outside of the town of Lydda to the region of Sharon. This authenticates the message that Peter was proclaiming and ultimately leads to many turning to Christ in repentance and faith.

One author said this about miracles in Acts. *“As we have seen before, the miracles in Acts are signs of the power of Jesus and often serve as the initial basis that leads to ultimate commitment. They are never, however, a substitute for faith.”*- John Polhill

Let's talk about how miracles are signs. They do point to the power of Jesus, but they do much more than that. Think of the miracles when Jesus turns the water into wine in Cana. That miraculous event tells us that Jesus is powerful, but it does more than that. In the OT an abundance of wine is tied to the Messianic banquet and Messianic kingdom. So, when Jesus turned water into wine he was saying, “The Messianic King is here, and His Kingdom will be one of rich abundance.”

So, what message is being sent here by healing this man even as it's stated so succinctly? The Gospel is good news because it promises restoration to wholeness and healing from brokenness. This doesn't mean that every person will be instantly healed of sickness or physical struggles in this life. But it does teach us about the scope of Gospel hope.

The Gospel restores our relationship to God and provides the basis for restoration of interpersonal relationships. Take a marriage for example. When two people know Jesus and are committed to His truth, they have a foundation for forgiveness and grace in how they deal with one another. The Gospel directs them to sacrifice for each other and to serve each other. The Gospel restores broken relationships

in this life and gives us the hope and expectation that all will be set right in the future.

The beauty of Christ's restoring authority is that it's directed toward individual people. There are several things that tie these two miracles together in our passage for this morning. But one of them is that we get the names of those who receive the healing and restoration. We've seen a lot of general statements of healing so far in Acts and we've seen one specific individual healed, the lame man in the temple. But we haven't gotten specific names and individual accounts of healing impacting people. I don't want to make too much of this but it's also a noticeable feature of these two stories.

It's a reminder that God deals with real people with real names and stories. Genuine brokenness in many different areas of life. The book of Acts isn't just about the massive sweep of the Gospel. It's about individual people whose lives were changed forever by being restored to wholeness physically and spiritually.

All of this let's us know that your situation and story matters to God. You are not lost in the billions of believers. God wants to work in your life and bring wholeness and restoration to your relationships and circumstances. God is not too busy for you. He's got to catch up on managing the universe, so he'll have to pass your struggle down to angel #3. You've got the full attention of the Creator God of the universe right now.

So, Christ's authority works to restore and make whole. But Jesus always uses human agents in His work of renewal. This is our second means.

2. Christ's Agent's Renew (vv. 36-43)

We saw this with Peter in the story of Aeneas's healing, but it's not just Apostles for miracles, although that does happen again in this next story. Look at verse 36. Let me show you the map again. Joppa is only about 12 miles further on than Lydda. Notice the attention Luke gives to Tabitha's works of charity.

She may have been a widow herself and was almost certainly a woman of some wealth. But she devoted her time to doing all the good she could for people. When it says "acts of charity" here it simply means doing good for the poor. We'll see in a minute what she did in more detail but look what happens to her in verses 37-38. We don't know if they merely called Peter to come and pay his

respects to a very devoted and influential disciple or if they maybe thought Peter may be able to do something about this situation. Either way, Peter comes quickly and the journey would have only taken him half a day or so. Look at verse 39.

It's clear that Tabitha had been regularly providing clothes for the widows. We've mentioned before how difficult it would have been to be a widow in this culture. Tabitha consistently helps them and meets their needs and so they are devastated by her passing. Once Peter arrives, he acts. Look at verses 40-41.

Now, Peter doesn't speak the name of Jesus here like he did before, but this miracle is tied to a specific miracle of Jesus. The story of the daughter of Jairus in Mark 5 sounds very similar to what Peter does here. In addition, Peter prays and seeks the Lord's work in this. Notice how Peter "presents" her alive to the widows. This was an incredible gift from God back to these women of one who had helped them so much.

Now, let's zoom out a bit and think through this second story. God uses Peter to raise Tabitha from the dead, but the story also makes plain that she was an agent used by God to bless and renew those around her. And this is tied directly to the fact that she is a disciple of Jesus in verse 36.

Both Peter and Tabitha are agents of God's work. Peter reminds us that the Gospel promises restoration and resurrection for each believer in the future. Tabitha teaches us to actively work to do good now and to bless others now in our temporary lives here. In many ways she was just living out her faith by doing good work, but her works had a tangible and real impact on those who were needy around her.

This story gives a very powerful scene here when the widows who had been blessed by her care were gathered around her body and showing Peter what she had made for them. It's a worthwhile thought experiment to occasionally imagine your own funeral. What impact are you having on those around you? Will anyone be lacking when you pass off the scene?

This is exactly the type of life that should be typical of those who follow Christ. There's a reason both of these miracle stories refer to believers as "saints". Surprisingly this description of believers is only used 4 times in Acts and two of them are here. What is a saint? Someone who is set apart and different from the

world around them. But saints aren't set apart by being aloof and out of touch. Saints are set apart by getting their hands dirty and sacrificially giving for the good of others. Saints are set apart by serving until it hurts and then serving some more. Saints live for others.

Christians are meant to be agents of renewal on earth in real and tangible ways. We are light piercing the darkness. What dominates our world right now? Anger, division, and fighting. How can we be agents of peace? How can we serve to do good? How can we speak words of life and not tear down with words of death?

And the beauty of this story of Tabitha is that she was simply doing her work in relative obscurity in a small town by the ocean away from Jerusalem. She was serving widows without snapping a selfie and broadcasting the good works. She was being a real Christian without acclaim, and it had a noticeable impact. The result here is much the same as what we saw in Lydda. Look at verse 42.

Now of course the fact of the resurrection here was significant, but Acts has made it clear repeatedly that the unity and charity of the early church was a major catalyst in the advancement of the Gospel.

And we'll see the Gospel move forward in a major way with Cornelius and the Gentiles and Luke prepares us for that with verse 43. A tanner was one who worked with the skins of dead animals to make leather. He was often considered ritually unclean because of his work, but Peter stays with him here. We'll find out more about this next week in Acts 10.

But the main message of this transitional passage today has been that God uses means to accomplish His ends. The Gospel brings about restoration and renewal both now in some ways and in the future in every way. This Gospel restoration happens through Christ's agents, or his saints. You and I are called to actively and intentionally love and serve others now as we work toward wholeness and renewal in the lives of those around us.

Here's the challenge for you as you leave today. Identify one person you can invest time, resources, service, and love into for the purpose of blessing and renewal. Then, go live out your faith in tangible ways for that person. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Question – 2/23/25

- What are some ways that sin puts life “out of joint”?
- What are some ways that the Gospel brings healing to those areas?
- How do these two miracle stories in Acts fit into the flow of the book?
- In what ways does it matter to your spiritual life to know that you matter to God as an individual?
- How was Tabitha an agent of renewal?
- Is it a good exercise to occasionally imagine what people might say about you at your own funeral? Why or why not?
- What does the word “saint” mean in Scripture?
- What are some real ways we can be “set apart” from the culture around us in our day that will bless others?
- Who is one person you can identify to love and serve this week?
- What are the biggest hindrances to investing ourselves like Tabitha did?
- What are some tangible ways to bless others with the love of Christ?

- Who can you say a kind word to that may need it? Who can you call to encourage? Who can you write a note to?
- How could you get involved in a real way in meeting the needs of someone in the community?