



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 9: 32-43

Acts

"Imitating Christ"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are in Acts chapter 9 this morning, finishing it up. It's quite a significant chapter. It's the chapter that begins with the apostle Paul persecuting the church and then meeting Christ on the Damascus road, his amazing conversion, change in ministry to the church in Antioch, and the Jewish community there, and then his ministry in Jerusalem which caused quite a furor, and he was rescued twice, once in Antioch and then in Jerusalem by the believers there. He was taken down to Caesarea, the port city of Palestine at that time, and set off to his home in Tarsus. Well, this morning, we come to Peter's ministry. Luke has left off Peter's ministry since chapter 8 when he was in Samaria, picked up with Paul's conversion in his early ministry, and now he returns to Peter's ministry. And we read in verse 32 of Acts 9:

Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions –and those are the regions that are mentioned in verse 31: Judea, Galilee, and Samaria – he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed. Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed." Immediately he got up. And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him,

implored him, "Do not delay in coming to us." So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. But Peter sent them all out 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; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace. We thank You for the privilege we have to be here together as saints, as men and women who have been called to faith in Jesus Christ, and by Your grace have believed in Him. We are new creatures in Christ. We are to Him. We are the body of Christ, and we are greatly privileged. We are saved now and forever. That's Your great work, and the great work continues on at this moment because You have placed within the hearts of every believer the Holy Spirit, who is the seal upon our hearts who protects us, who is our guide through life and our guide in the study of Your word. He is our teacher. We have the anointing, as John said. And it is the Spirit of God, and we thank You for that great privilege and faith, that His ministry would go unhindered this morning, that You would prepare our hearts and open them to receive the ministry that You have for us, and that it would edify us, it would build us up in the faith, and equip us for the week to come, that we might serve You effectively and well. It's what we've been called to do as we study through this Book of Acts, Father, we are reminded by Your Son that we are to be His witnesses. That is the mission of the church down through the ages, to go throughout the world and be witnesses for Him. May we do that task well this week, and may we set about to do that task the rest of our lives. And so, to that end, we pray that You would bless us in our study, sanctify us, build us up in the faith. That occurs, Lord, through Your work. We know that.

Yet, how often it is that we neglect the reading and the study of Your word. Move us to be more diligent in that, and bless us in this hour as we study, that we would be taught well, and that we would be well-equipped for the things of life. Life is more than spiritual though, Father; it's also material, and we have our material concerns, our physical needs. You have created us in such a way that we are completely dependent, dependent on the environment in which we live, and dependent ultimately upon You for everything that we have, and everything that we are. We know that. We sometimes forget it, Father, because the things of life come so frequently and so freely to us. Such a natural part of our life to receive an abundance of good things that we take it for granted. We think of it as just the natural course of events. And yet, everything that we have, every breath that we take, every beat of our heart, every good thing in this world, whether it be health, or employment, or friends, or whatever, it all comes from You. We thank You for that. Sometimes those things are taken away and we are reminded of our frailty, and caused to draw near to the throne of grace, and we do that, Father, for ourselves, and for those who have sought our prayers, we pray for the sick, we pray that You'd give blessing. Bless each of us in the work that we do, that we please You. We pray for our time here. We pray for our time this evening when we return to this place and remember the Lord, and what He's done for us. Bless us. Bless us this evening, bless us now as we sing our final hymn, and prepare our hearts for a time of study and worship together. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] There is a story that has been told about a chaplain who preached in a jail many years ago and chose a subject that he divided into two parts. The first part was the sinner's disease. He took this as his topic one Sunday and concluded the sermon by saying that he would preach the sinner's remedy the next Sunday. Unfortunately, it was the custom in those days to hang prisoners on Monday, and several of those who had listened to the sermon went to the gallows the next day without receiving that part that was most necessary for them to hear. Well, it does take some time to develop the sinner's need, and sometimes takes time to be persuasive about it. But it certainly would have been better simply to have told them all at once the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Now, I don't know where we'll be tomorrow. I trust that we'll be okay and we'll all be back next Sunday. But if not, you won't miss the answer to the sinner's greatest need. Our text gives the full story of salvation in the two miracles that Peter did when he healed a person who was paralyzed and raised another from the dead. Both people give a picture of the sinner's disease, of mankind's desperate condition, and both illustrate the remedy, which is only in Christ, the remedy that only He can give. Both miracles have rightly been called signs of salvation, a salvation that is in Jesus Christ, and they closely resemble two miracles that Christ did. And not only illustrate salvation, but Peter's action in doing those shows us the right pattern for the Christian life and for Christian service. It is in imitating Christ.

That's what Peter did. His miracles were imitations of the miracles that Jesus had done, and that is the reason that he accomplished the great work that he did. That's really the second lesson of our text. It is not only a text that illustrates the way of salvation, but also the way of Christian success. That's a popular word today: success. But for the Christian, what it means is right living and service, bringing glory to God, and that is done in patterning our lives after Christ.

Well, as I say, Peter did that. He was not an innovator. He didn't rely on his own authority or his own power. He followed the example of Christ and he called on His power to heal. So, there is a great deal for us to learn from these two miracles and from this passage that we have at the end of chapter 9. Those miracles occurred because the church was at peace. That's how Luke concluded the first portion of chapter 9. Paul has been converted. The great persecutor of the church is now a member of it, an active member of it. And so, Luke writes in verse 31, "The church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace being built up."

Now, we might not have expected that. We might have expected that Luke, rather than give a summary and move on into a new subject would have developed the ministry and the missionary journeys of Paul, developed his story. But he doesn't do that. He doesn't do that until chapter 13. From that point on, Paul is the central figure of the Book of Acts.

But for the next few chapters, Peter is still the focus of the book as he now carries the gospel from Jerusalem to the Gentiles down in Caesarea. In fact, the events of chapter 9 lead up to that. We are coming to something of a transition in the book to great events in the book. And what we study this morning sets the state

somewhat for the event in Cornelius' house in chapter 10 when the Gentiles are saved, and they become a part of the church. Peter and John had been up in Samaria. The Samaritans had been included in the church, but transitioned of events and great revival had occurred there through the ministry of Philip. The apostle sent Philip and John there to visit that mission, that ministry, and take part in it to some degree. Now, we read that Peter leaves Jerusalem again to tour the other regions where the gospel had spread and visit the saints who were in those places. One of these communities was in the city of Lydda in Western Judea toward the Mediterranean Coast. If you've ever visited Israel, Lydda is the place where you first set foot in the land. Today it's called Lod. It is the site of Israel's international airport. And so if you arrive by plane, that's where you landed.

In Peter's day, it was an important city. It was a commercial center with a church, and a church that most likely had been established by Philip. You remember, he goes from Samaria down to Gaza, down to the desert. He meets the Ethiopian eunuch. He preaches the gospel to him, baptizes him, and suddenly, he's snatched away by the Spirit, and he begins to travel up north. He goes through this region all the way up to Caesarea, and he's preaching. And evidently, he established a church there in this area. And while Peter was there, while he was visiting, we read in verse 33 that he found a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed.

Aeneas was probably a Jew. It is premature for Peter to be dealing with the Gentiles. That comes in chapter 10. So, probably, Aeneas was a Jew, but I mention that because his name was a very Gentile name. In classical literature, Aeneas was one of the Trojan heroes in Homer's *Iliad*, and Aeneas was Vergil's hero who fled Troy and built Rome. He was a great warrior. And, so there is some irony in the fact that this man, whose namesake was a man of action, a man of heroic deeds, was himself paralyzed and bedridden. But in that, we see a picture of ourselves. It is ourselves naturally. Because regardless of how well people may think of themselves, call themselves great things such as righteous or pious or religious, take all kinds of nice, flattering names to themselves, before God, they are not any of those things. Those names and descriptions, religious, pious, moral, whatever, are as empty and meaningless to God as the name Aeneas was for that man. What he was physically, all men, are spiritually, by nature. Naturally, we are all unable to act righteously,

unable to do what is good in the eyes of God. Now, I don't say we're unable to do things that are good and we're unable to be moral men in the eyes of other men. People can look upon your life and you can look upon the life of someone who is wholly and completely outside the faith and you can say yes, they're a good citizen; yes, they are an honest businessman; yes, he or she is a moral person. In our eyes, we can appear to be good; but in the eyes of God, there is none righteous, no, not one.

Paul makes that very clear in various places, but he makes it very clear that we cannot please God. We are unable to do that. In Romans chapter 8, the first few verses, and in verse 8, he makes it very clear when he writes: "Those who are in the flesh." And when he's speaking of those in the flesh, he means the natural man. The unconverted person, the one who has not believed in Jesus Christ, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Now, he doesn't say they do not please God. He's already said that. In verses 6 and 7. In verse 8 he says, "They cannot." They don't have the ability. They are not able to do that. And Aeneas gives us an illustration of that inability with his physical condition. It was well known he was truly sick with an incurable disease. And so, what happened was an obvious miracle. Peter said, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you." The fact that Peter makes that statement without any explanation as to who Jesus Christ is suggests that Aeneas already had a knowledge of Christ. It would've been very difficult for him not to have had a knowledge of Christ after our Lord's ministry which took place in Galilee and Judea, and this whole region, and certainly very difficult not to know who Jesus Christ was after His crucifixion, His resurrection, and the spread of the gospel.

And so, it seems from the statement that Peter makes without any explanation given, that Aeneas already had some knowledge of Christ. And if that is so, then Aeneas is an example of a person who knew about Christ, who had heard the gospel, but had not yet believed.

And so when he heard the words, "Jesus Christ heals you," he may very well have remembered those statements that he had heard before about Christ, that he is Savior. That's what His name signifies. That's what's communicated in the name, "Jesus Christ." The name Jesus means: the Lord is salvation; and Christ means the Anointed One, the Messiah. He is the deliverer promised to Israel, the anointed Savior. That's what Peter was saying. And so with that statement, Jesus Christ heals you, Aeneas may well have remembered the things that he had heard, that the Lord

had died for sinners. But in the statement that Peter made, he is also reminded of the fact that this one who died is alive. That's clear from the way Peter makes his statement, because he said, "He heals." Jesus still heals, and He heals you, Aeneas. Then Peter said, arise, make your bed. And we read, "Immediately, he arose." Not because of Peter's words, not because of Peter's power. He had none. There was no authority in what Peter said in Peter himself. The man arose, the man was healed because Christ healed him. For the same reason, people are saved, people are healed from the ravages of sin and the penalty of sin because Christ saves. Salvation is of the Lord. He died as our substitute. He bore the penalty of our sin in our place. He satisfied God completely and finally in the sacrifice that He offered at Calvary so that at the moment of faith, the moment a person believes, at that very moment, he or she is justified, declared righteous, forgiven of sin, given eternal life that is eternal, can never be taken away, saved forever.

Now, Aeneas' healing is an illustration of that, an illustration of the new life that Christ gives when, in obedience to the command of Peter, he stands and walks. Now, as I said earlier, his condition was well-known, and the result of his cure was that people in the town of Lydda and throughout the region of Sharon, which is the coastal plain that stretches up north to Hypha, large area. The people in this area believed. It's a great revival. They turned to the Lord, Luke writes. So, the Lord gave the church peace. Peter did the work of the gospel and revival spread into Western Judea. Following this, Peter went to Joppa on the coast, the Mediterranean Coast where a certain disciple named Tabitha had died. Her death would result in a second and more remarkable miracle. If the healing of Aeneas illustrates Christ's power to save the helpless, then, as Dr. Johnson has said, the raising of Tabitha illustrates Christ's power to save the hopeless. Her name, in Greek, is Dorcas. It means "gazelle." She was a godly woman, and a blessing to the community, particularly to the widows of Joppa.

And so, her death hit them particularly hard. It happened while Peter was still in Lydda, and so when Tabitha died, the disciples in Joppa washed her body and laid it in an upper room. Then they sent two messengers to Lydda, which is about ten miles away, and they asked Peter to return with them to Joppa. Verse 39, "So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room and all of the widows stood beside him weeping and showing all the tunics and

garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them." She was in many ways a model Christian woman. For that matter, she was just a model Christian for men and women. In Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 10, Paul wrote about the good works that we do, and it's a significant statement because it follows verses 8 and 9 where Paul makes that very clear, doctrinal gospel statement that we're not saved by our works. We are saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest any man should boast. We cannot earn our way into heaven. We cannot gain God's approval by our works. They are filthy rags to Him. We are saved by grace alone. But having been saved, then we do works. Good deeds, works of righteousness follow from salvation. They don't produce salvation. They're the fruit of salvation. And so in verse 10, Paul makes that point. He says that we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, the works that God prepared before and that we walk in.

A life of works, a life of good deeds, a life of righteousness is very important. It is an essential aspect of the Christian life and we see that in her life. Tabitha was a woman with many good works. There are many ways to serve Christ. But fundamental to all Christian service is living an orderly and productive life. That's really what Paul teaches the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:11. They were having a problem with working, becoming somewhat indolent, and he told them to get to work. He said that they were to make it their ambition to lead a quiet life, attend their own business, don't be gossips, don't be putting their nose into other peoples' business. They're to attend their own business and work with their hands. That is basic to the Christian life: an orderly, honest, productive life. That is a significant witness to the world. We tend to think that real Christian service is found in a place like this, in a pulpit, or in a church. And of course, that's part of it, and we all are called to minister in the body of Christ, in the church in which we associate.

But, there's something more fundamental to that, it seems to me, in light of what Paul says, and that is to live a quiet life and a life in which we work, in which we have an orderly kind of life and a productive kind of life. That is a great witness to the world. They see what we do. They see how we conduct our lives. In fact, without that, there really is no witness. If all we have is words and no life that conforms to it, then all we have is hypocrisy.

Tabitha had a great witness because she lived her faith. She had work as a seamstress, and used her time, used her energy, used her skill to serve God's people,

and especially serve the destitute widows in the assembly. That was her legacy. It's similar to that of another selfless seamstress, a woman who contributed to George Mueller's ministry in the early years when Mueller was just beginning his first orphanage in England. He received a gift from a woman of 100 pounds. Now, he had received other gifts, very small gifts, and many of them weren't monetary gifts; they were items such as clothing or plates and forks to help in the service and the maintenance of an orphanage. But this was the first large gift he received. You know the story of Mueller and his ministry. It was a faith ministry. He never put out appeals for money, never told anyone of the needs that he had in his ministry, and the needs that orphans had. It was kept within the circle of those who worked, and those needs were presented to the Lord. They were not published abroad, and yet God faithfully supplied him with all his needs. And one of the first major gifts, the first large gift was this gift of 100 pounds that was given to him by this woman. And when he learned that she was a poor seamstress, he went to her, found where she lived, spoke to her about it. She had received a small inheritance of 480 pounds. She had used it to pay off her debts. She gave 100 pounds to her mother and the rest, the 100 pounds that she had, was given to the orphans.

Now, Mr. Mueller, knowing that she was a poor woman, tried to return the money to her. She wouldn't take it. He spoke to her at length, but she would not be persuaded. Her reply was: "The Lord Jesus has given His last drop of blood for me and should I not give all the money to Him?" And so she gave this gift selflessly. She lived her life selflessly, and that is the kind of person that Tabitha was. She used what she had for the Lord's service and for the Lord's people. She may have helped orphans too, but mainly her service was for widows. She practiced what James calls pure and undefiled religion, to visit orphans and widows in their distress. She gladly, generously helped those in need in a day when there were no government agencies or relief organizations. She became that. And so, her death was a great loss to these women, not only materially, but spiritually. They had lost in her a dear friend. They expressed that to Peter. They filled the room when he came in, and they affectionately showed him the tunics and the garments they were wearing that Tabitha had made for them. It was a demonstrative plea for help. He had already healed Aeneas. They knew that, and they were confident that he could raise Tabitha.

Peter responded to their request. He sent them all out of the room. Then he knelt down and prayed. He could do nothing in his own power. He knew he didn't have the power to raise this person, and so he looked to the source of power. He looked to the source of life. He looked to the Lord Himself. Then Luke writes, turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up, and he gave her his hand and raised her up, and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. It became known all over Joppa and many believed in the Lord.

It was an evidence of the truth of what Peter had preached about Christ. He says He's the Son of God, and then this demonstrative event happens, this miracle occurs that supports his word, demonstrates the truth of it, and this is another picture of salvation, of how Christ raises souls from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Well, that's the first lesson we see in this passage. Both miracles illustrate the new birth. They were salvation signs, and show God's grace and God's mercy to the helpless and the hopeless. But there's something more here. There is a second lesson, and that is seen in the similarity between the miracles that Peter did and those that the Lord did. In fact, from the time that Peter left Jerusalem to visit the saints in the surrounding districts, he imitated Christ. It was a time of peace for the church. The Lord had given His people temporary relief from persecution. This is something of a lull in the storm because persecution will come again. But this was the Lord's gift to the church, and it was certainly that. It was a great blessing. It was a time of growth. And in verse 31, Luke stated that the church did grow during this period of time, and the people were going on, he says, in the fear of the Lord.

So, this time of peace was a blessing for them. But peace doesn't always work as a blessing. It doesn't always work to the church's favor. Not when people take their ease during times of peace. Calvin said that. He commented that in peacetime, we sometimes abandon ourselves to a riot of luxury. That's true. We sometimes do that. That's just human nature. We enter into times of peace and we take our ease, and we begin to focus on ourselves and our own comforts and our own pleasures. But that didn't happen in Jerusalem. That did not happen with the apostles, and Peter in particular, who was the subject of Luke's story, seized the opportunity to go out and visit the new churches that had been established and preach the word.

That was an imitation of Christ because Christ counselled that very thing. He did that very thing. John chapter 9 and verse 4, Jesus said, "We must work the works of Him who sent Me. As long as it is day, night is coming when no one can work." Just as there is a limited period of time in the day to do physical labor, so too in our spiritual labors, there is a limited time for it. It's not something we can be casual about. We are to redeem the time. Rather than taking our ease, we are to be doing the Lord's work. The Lord Himself did that. He never wasted a moment. The Lord never regretted a moment of His life. Can you imagine that? Imagine coming to the end and saying, "There is not one second of my life that I wasted." It's true of our Lord. Not true of any of us. It wasn't true of Peter, but Peter did follow His example. He did not take his ease in Jerusalem. When peace came, he used it as an opportunity to minister, and his ministry followed the pattern of Christ's ministry.

Students of this passage have noticed the obvious similarities between the two miracles that Peter performed and two of our Lord's. When Peter healed Aeneas, he must've thought of the Lord's miracle in Capernaum when He healed the paralytic saying, "Rise, pick up your pallet and go home," because Peter's words are very similar. In Lydda, he said to Aeneas, "Arise and make your bed." Very similar statement, and we see that again when he raised Tabitha. The events that occur resemble very much the Lord's miracle when he raised Jairus' daughter in Mark chapter 5. Jairus was a ruler of the synagogue whose daughter fell sick. He came to the Lord, he fell at His feet, he asked Him to come to his house and heal her. By the time the Lord reached the house, she was dead, and the room was filled with mourners who were weeping, and wailing, and making a great commotion. Jesus put them all out. Then, taking the child's hand, He said to her, "*Talitha kum*," which means, "Little girl, get up." And immediately, she got up and began to walk. When Peter arrived in Joppa, he sent the mourners out of the room just as he had seen the Lord do. Then, turning to the body, said, "Tabitha, arise." In Aramaic, his words would've been, "*Tabitha, kum*." Which, if you change one letter, is a duplicate of the Lord's statement, "*Talitha, kum*." And those similarities seem to show a deliberate imitation by Peter. He remembered what the Lord had done. He remembered what the Lord had said, and he followed His example in that similar situation.

They're very strong similarities, but they're also very significant differences, too. Peter prayed before raising Tabitha. The Lord did not pray before raising Jairus'

daughter. And the reason is: Peter was looking to the source of life. The Lord is the source of life. What we see in these similarities, as well as the differences, is that Peter was depending on the Lord, imitating the Lord. In imitating the Lord, he was becoming like the Lord. That's the lesson.

If we get near to Christ, if we study Him, fellowship with Him, by spending time in His word, spending time in prayer, communing with Him, having a relationship with Him; if we imitate Him, we will become increasingly like Him and do His works. The Lord is not just a modeled man from history. He is not just some impressive figure from the past. He is not some beautiful memory. He is alive and involved. And Peter's action in all of this expresses his confidence in that very fact. When he healed Aeneas, he said, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you." Present tense. He acts as though the Lord is still alive, is still acting, and that is what he did believe, and that is exactly what the Book of Acts is about. The Book of Acts is traditionally known as the Acts of the Apostles, but it is not that at all. It is the acts of Jesus Christ through the church. He is alive. And knowing that the Lord is alive, Peter spoke and acted as though the Lord were there in the room with him.

And He was. He was with Peter. He is with us. And He's every bit as powerful today as He was then. He does miracles today. He does not always do physical miracles. He can if He wills, and if that is to His glory, that is what He will do. But they are rare. They are very rare. More importantly, what we can expect is that He will do spiritual miracles. He gives new life. That's regeneration. He brings that about. He gives resurrection life. That's what new life in Christ is. No one is so dead spiritually that Christ can't raise him. No one is too far away for the arm of His grace.

Paul is proof of that. The chief of sinners is brought to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Not only saved, but made into a great servant, the greatest servant in the history of the church. That's the power of God. That's what He does. He gives new life. He transforms the dead into the living. He makes children of wrath into children of God. That's the power of God. That's spiritual miracles. And after giving life, He continues to change us. He doesn't stop by making us children of God and then leave us in our spiritual infancy. He gives growth, which is sanctification. He gives us freedom from old habits and prejudices. That's how we enter the Christian life. We don't enter the new life perfect. We come in with all of the old baggage of the

previous life, and we spend the rest of our lives being sanctified as God takes those things away, and He changes us. He gives us freedom from old habits and prejudices. He gives healing to broken hearts. He gives relief to those who are crippled by guilt, and the list goes on of what He does to change us. There's no spiritual paralysis or problem that He cannot overcome. And He will do just that as we look to Him. We follow Him.

The Lord truly changes people, and Peter himself is the great example of that. He is a man who failed miserably many times. He almost drowned in the sea. When he began to walk on it, and then took his eyes off Christ. He later confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It was a great confession that he made, then was rebuked just after that when he opposed the cross. "Get behind me, Satan." There's no greater, more severe rebuke than the one Peter received from our Lord. He vowed to be loyal to the death, and then he denied the Lord three times. He was a man with weaknesses and failures like all of us. But this is the man that the Lord chose and used greatly. He is the proof of what God makes of us when we follow Him.

Walk with Him. Learn from Him. He promised to do that, and He can do that because He is alive, because He is with us, because He is in us, and because we are in Him. In His Upper Room Discourse in chapter 15, He told the disciples that He would change them, and He would make them very fruitful, very useful, and He told them to abide in Him. And the illustration or the example that He uses is of a vine and a branch, and they're to be like the branches that abide in the vine. And He said as they do that, they will bear much fruit, for apart from Me, you can do nothing.

And so, as we abide in Christ, as we draw close to Him, as we follow Him, as we obey Him, as we imitate Him, His life has a changing effect upon us. It flows through us with power, and it makes us different. It makes us fruitful. It makes us mature. That happened to Peter. He left Jerusalem in obedience to Christ. He didn't stay there and take his ease. He knew what his job was. He knew what his mission was. It was to be a witness for Christ, and there were many out there who had recently been brought to a saving knowledge of Christ, and he wanted to visit them and strengthen them and build them up in the faith, and proclaim the gospel in those regions. And so, by faith and obedience, he left Jerusalem.

And as he went, he went looking to Christ and looking to Him for everything. And by the Lord's power, he produced miracles. And he obeyed Christ not only by

imitating His actions, imitating the things that He did, but also imitating His attitude, having the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. We see that in verse 43 where we read that in Joppa, he stayed with a man named Simon who was a tanner. Now, we might tend to read that and just conclude the chapter with, well, we're informed where he stayed and who he stayed with. That's a very significant statement. We see in this something of a miracle as well, because scrupulous Jews considered tanning an unclean trade, and tanners were ostracized. They had to deal with dead animals. The smell of their shop was very unpleasant, and so they had to live outside of town.

One of the rabbis said, "It is impossible for the world to do without tanners, but woe to him who is a tanner." In fact, the rabbis ruled that if a Jewish woman discovered that her fiancée was involved in the tanning business, you could break the engagement. I wonder how she could get engaged to someone and not know that, but evidently that was a possibility. And if it was, well, she could break that engagement. That's how they felt about that trade. But Peter had met a Jewish tanner who loved Christ, and he gladly associated with him, and he stayed with him. Not just a few days, but Luke says "many days." It showed that he didn't carry his prejudices as others did. Change had taken place in Peter's life. Since he'd come to a knowledge of Christ, the old biases he had were breaking down. Now, there were more to be broken down, but that's a true miracle. And again, it is the result of being near to Christ and learning from Him, because that is the kind of man that our Lord was. He ate with publicans and sinners. He was roundly criticized for that, but He gladly associated with those people. He received all who came to Him. He didn't discriminate on the basis of social, or ethnic, or occupational differences. And that's unusual. That's not natural within men and women. Those who are that way, those who are disabused of their prejudices are so because of the grace of God.

The natural man is prejudiced. The natural man has his biases. And so, to change a person is every bit the miracle that healing the paralyzed and raising the dead is. That's what the Lord had done in Peter. The age of physical miracles is largely passed. They were needed at that time, the time of the apostles, because the church was young, it was struggling against great prejudices and great forces. It needed supernatural credentials. That was established during the first generation of the church through the ministry of the apostles. Those miracles don't continue today. They're not needed. That has been established already. The miracles that continue

today occur through the teaching of God's word as we are made more and more like Christ. And that is a mighty work of grace. Just think of what the work of grace does in these spiritual miracles, how it changes people. It makes unfaithful husbands into loving husbands, faithful husbands. It makes disobedient children into obedient children. It takes us, who are unwise in and of ourselves, without the knowledge of God, and gives us wisdom. It makes worldly-minded people heavenly-minded people. It gives us a perspective that is no longer bound by time, but is eternal in its perspective. That's a work of grace. That's the work that God does and is doing today. And it's our experience as we, like Peter, imitate Christ. That should be our desire. It should be the way we live. You will never grow in the Christian faith. You will never produce the fruit of the Christian life. You'll never be productive with that which is eternal in any other way. It comes by looking to Jesus Christ. It comes by learning of Jesus Christ, fellowshiping with Him, imitating Him.

It is a lifelong process. The Lord had done a great work in Peter's life, but He wasn't finished with him. He'd gone to Simon's house, which was a large step. In chapter 10, the Lord will send him to Cornelius' house, a Gentile, which will be an even bigger step. The Lord was about to open the door of the church to the Gentiles, and He would use the ministry of Peter to do that. That would mean that He would break down more biases in him. The Lord was not finished developing Peter. He is not finished with us. His work is never done. It's never completed in our lives, in this life. There is always need for more change, and He is always at work to produce it. He's making us like Christ. That's His work. And it's our business to seek to be like Christ by looking to Him, by learning and doing.

But to do that, to imitate Christ, a person must first come to Christ. A person must believe in Christ, be joined to Him. That's when salvation occurs. All efforts to please God by imitating Christ or even by imitating someone like Tabitha with works of charity outside of conversion, outside of repenting of sin and trusting in Christ. All of that is worthless. The first step toward pleasing God is to recognize that we are not pleasing to Him, that we are sinners, that we are helpless and hopeless, that we need the grace of God and look to Him. It's what the miracles in Lydda and Joppa illustrate: our need and the solution in the gracious power of God. The sinners' disease, and the sinners' remedy. It's what we find here.

So, if you're here without Christ, see your need. Look to Him for the remedy, and do so while you can. Like those prisoners who never heard the second half of the chaplain's sermon, "Monday may come, and you may not be here." You may be gone forever. Today is the day of salvation. Look to Jesus Christ. Trust in Him. In doing so, become a new creature in Christ. And then, by the grace of God, live to imitate Him. May God help you to do that and help all of us, to live productive lives and follow Christ. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace. We thank You for what we see in this text, a work of grace for the helpless and the hopeless, which is what we were outside of that grace until You came to us, the gospel was preached to us, the Spirit of God quickened us and brought us to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. And then, as we look at the life of Peter, we're reminded of what You are continually doing in our lives, the work of changing us and making us like Him. We thank You for that, Father. Make us receptive to –