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Walking In His Steps

Acts 9:32-43

Intro: As we have seen, the 9th chapter of Acts presents the unique conversion of Saul of Tarsus, better known by the church as Paul the Apostle. The story of his conversion was not just a wonderful illustration of the power of God's grace; it was actually a watershed event for the early Christian church. Since this event was so important, you might expect Luke's account to now focus exclusively on Paul and his ministry – but it doesn't. As surprising as it may be, the end of ch9 provides us with 2 more stories about the ministry of Peter. In fact, we won't hear from Paul again until ch13. So, what's going on here? What is Luke up to in blending the accounts of Paul and Peter's ministries?

First off, let's understand that there is nothing incidental or purely anecdotal in the Bible. None of the authors of any of the Books of the Bible had the habit or practice of throwing in random information just to fill in space. Every word and phrase in God's Word is there for a reason and a specific purpose and it is the life-long task of Bible students to pursue and discover those reasons. If you were to review the entire Book of Acts, you would see that the first 12 chapters are mostly about Peter and his ministry. From ch13 to the end, Paul is the main focus. What we have in ch9-12 is sort of a blending of focus. While Paul is away in Tarsus, Peter is still ministering and the church is still growing. But soon, Peter will fade out and Paul will come forward.

This is not a matter of prominence or importance between these Apostles and it's not Luke playing favorites. If you recall, the purpose of the Book of Acts is to record the spread of the Gospel across the Roman Empire by the first generation of believers so the focus must, by necessity, move from one minister and location to another. But, what we have in ch9-12 is not just an overlapping of focus. As Luke brings these events together, he's revealing to us something rather important. He showing us that Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, and Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, were not teaching different doctrines or ministering in different ways. They were unified in both doctrine and work.

A quick survey of the ministries of Peter and Paul in the Book of Acts will reveal certain parallels between the 2. Both were used by the Lord to heal lame individuals (3:6 & 9:34, 14:10); both raised someone from the dead (9:40, 20:10).

Both were arrested, imprisoned and miraculously delivered (12:11, 16:28), both were treated like gods (10:25, 14:8). Both gave a strong witness for Christ before the authorities and both had to confront false prophets (8:9, 13:6). Clearly, Peter and Paul were not moving in different directions. Luke takes great pains to show us that these 2 great Apostles were actually of one mind and one heart in their ministry of the Gospel.

There is another parallel between Peter and Paul that is developed in the next chapter. Although in ch9, Jesus calls Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles, in ch10 God also calls Peter to this same exact ministry. This means that, although Peter will continue to be the chief Apostle to the Jews, it is actually Peter, not Paul, that opens the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Thus, ch9 and 10 provide us with parallel accounts, 2 great breakthroughs that launch the next big step in the church's worldwide expansion. Sure, Philip had carried the Gospel up and down the Mediterranean coast but this was still basically a Jewish area. Now in ch10, for the first time, there is going to be a breakthrough of the gospel message into the Gentile community.

32-33 – It appears that the Apostle Peter was engaged in an itinerant ministry during this time. He was doing what he was suppose to be doing, what Jesus had commissioned him to do – Feed My Sheep (Jn 21:17). As the chief Apostle to the Jews, Peter was traveling around visiting the various Jewish communities where the Gospel has spread. He had previously made a visit to Samaria to check out the progress there. Now, he was making his way to the coast, where Philip had been. This was still pretty early in the history of the church but there were already established churches in this area. We can tell this from the story because it's not just a random person here or there that Peter visits but actual groups of believers. These believers knew each other, prayed for one another, showed concern towards each other and are seen working together. It's to these communities that Peter comes to minister to.

We don't know anything about Aeneas except that he had been paralyzed and thus bedridden for 8 years. We don't know if he was a part of the

church or just someone Peter happened to come across during his visit. All we do know is that Peter discovered this needy man that God wanted to miraculously heal and he found him as he was out ministering to others in the name of Jesus. There's an important spiritual principle here. The most common way to discover and seize opportunities to minister to people is to discover them while you are in the midst of ministering to others. We can't just sit at home and expect the Lord to speak to us in a vision and direct us to a specific person in a specific circumstance. Sure, He did it with Ananias but that was a fairly unique event. I'm not saying God couldn't do it again. But, the normal way to stumble upon a spiritual need is when you're in the process of meeting other needs.

34-35 – Peter clearly identified who it was that was able to heal – Jesus the Christ! Peter knew he was only an instrument of healing in the hands of Jesus. While He walked this earth, Jesus was able to heal with the power of Jesus but Peter knew he couldn't heal anyone with the power of Peter. Peter relied solely and faithfully on the power of Jesus. It was the resurrected Christ, by the authority of His name that brought perfect soundness to the body of Aeneas! His healing was instantaneous and he had the ability to roll up his bed and carry it off with him.

Why did Peter instruct him to do this? Maybe he had recalled the words of Jesus when He healed the lame man in **Mark 2:11**. Don't disparage Peter for not coming up with his own original catch phrase for healing paralyzed people. Sure, he's just copying Jesus but that's exactly what Jesus had called Peter to do – deny himself; take up his cross and follow Him – follow in His footsteps, do what He did. Besides, who else could Peter emulate in healing the lame other than Jesus? Peter was called to follow in Jesus' footsteps and so are we. Few may ever have the opportunity to be used by Jesus to perform some miraculous feat but we can all strive to emulate Him in His relationship with the Father. Truth be told, that intimate relationship must be established before we'll see many miracles performed.

Not only was Aeneas a walking miracle – he was also a walking advertisement for the Gospel! It appears that everyone who knew him or saw him after his healing was 1) convinced of the power of the Gospel and 2) open to the truth of the Gospel. The healing of Aeneas caused many people in that area to turn to Jesus; presumably because Peter preached the Gospel to them. No one in the bible was ever saved by witnessing a

miracle, they were only saved by repenting of their sin and accepting Jesus Christ as their savior just like people are saved today.

36-38 – Lydda was a city about 25-30 miles west of Jerusalem, Joppa was 10 miles further, on the Mediterranean coast. Joppa is an important city in biblical history as it is the place where the prophet Jonah embarked from when he tried to flee from God’s call. Ironically, Jonah went to Joppa to avoid going to the Gentiles but Peter, while he is in Joppa, will receive his call to go to the Gentiles. Because Jonah disobeyed God, He sent a storm that caused the Gentile sailors to fear for their lives. But, since Peter will obey God’s call, the Lord will send the “wind of the Spirit” to the Gentiles and they will experience great joy and peace! What a difference an obedient servant makes!

Joppa had a large Jewish community. That’s why Peter went there. But when this lady died, they didn’t bury her right away. Why not? In Jerusalem, there was a law stating that a body wasn’t allowed to remain around for a second day. It had to be buried at once. That’s why Ananias and Sapphira were buried immediately. Everywhere else, the normal period between death and burial was three days. This was Joppa’s custom. So it was during these three days that those who knew and loved Dorcas sent for Peter. So far in Acts, there is no record of any of the Apostles raising the dead, so their sending for Peter was evidence of their faith in the power of the risen Christ. Jesus raised the dead when He ministered on the earth, why would he not be able to raise the dead now from His exalted throne in glory?

39-40 – Like the previous story about Aeneas, there are also echoes in this story to things Jesus had done during His earthly ministry. In this instance, there are parallels of 2 resurrections Jesus had performed. The first to come to Peter’s mind would have been the raising of Lazarus. Jesus, just like Peter with Dorcas, wasn’t with His friend Lazarus when he died. His sisters had to send for Jesus and the resurrection took place after a large amount of time had passed. This was also Peter’s predicament. As he was making his way to Joppa, he no doubt was curious as to what God would do in this situation and probably recalled the time Jesus raised Lazarus.

When Peter arrived at Dorcas’ house, there were circumstances there that may have reminded him of another time Jesus raised the dead – the daughter of Jairus (**Mk 5**). That also occurred in an upper room. The people

in that room were also distressed and wailing. Jesus put them all out of the room so there would be quiet then He called out to the little girl – talitha, cumi – “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” When Peter saw the situation in that room it must have immediately brought the memory of Jairus’ daughter to his mind. So, once again, he followed in Jesus’ footsteps. He asked the women to leave and then he knelt to pray. He must have prayed fervently. Sure, he’s an Apostle and God had been doing miracles through him but...it still must have required a great deal of faith for Peter to get up from his knees, turn to the dead corpse and say, “Tabitha, get up!” But, he did it and miraculously, so did she!

Now, some may look at Peter and say, “It figures! Peter went through a lot with Jesus and was very close to Him so it stands to reason that he should be used in such a mighty way.” But, does that assessment of Peter stand up under honest scrutiny? If we look at just a few brief glimpses of Peter’s history with Jesus, we’ll see how unlikely a person he really was to be used in such a great way by the Lord.

When Jesus first called Peter to follow Him, he was a fisherman. Jesus was preaching by the Sea of Galilee and the crowd began to press too close. He hopped in a nearby boat, Peter’s, and asked him to push off from the shore. After His sermon, Jesus instructed Peter to push out a little further and cast his nets. Peter was less than thrilled with the idea since he had already been at it all night and had come up empty and it wasn’t the right time of day to fish. But, he must have liked Jesus’ sermon because he agreed and when he pulled up the nets – they were full to bursting! Peter immediately said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” ([Lk 5:8](#)). What he meant was, “Why are You calling me? You’re the Holy One, I’m just a sinful fisherman; I don’t deserve to be Your disciple.”

Was Peter correct? Of course he was! Was Peter worthy to be called and used by the Lord? Not at all! You know who was worthy? Nobody! Saul wasn’t worthy, nor Ananias, nor Philip or even Stephen. None of us are worthy of salvation yet God still chooses to invite us into His family. None are worthy to be His servants but God still chooses to employ us in His great work. Peter objected because he was sinful but that’s exactly who God uses – sinful men and women. If God didn’t use sinful people, He could use anybody because we’re all sinful.

It's not who we are or where we come from that's important. It's what God makes of us. We're not worthy to be saved by God or be used by God but the blood of Jesus not only makes us worthy – it makes us valuable to the service of the Kingdom of God. It wasn't Peter's background that mattered; it's what Jesus chose to do through him.

Then there was the time Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was. It was Peter who spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (Mt 16:16). It was so unusual for Peter to get something right that Jesus stopped to point it out and explain that the reason he was right was that God had given him special revelation.

Sadly, instead of being humbled by this, Peter let it go to his head. So, when Jesus went on to say that He was going to Jerusalem to suffer, die and then rise again, Peter rebuked Him, saying, "This shall not happen to You." This time Jesus had to rebuke him. He knew that the one speaking through Peter now was not the Holy Spirit but Satan, trying to discourage Him from going to the cross.

What a day in the life of Peter: One minute he's the vessel of God's revelation, the next a vehicle for Satan. Yet that was Peter! And that's what we're like too. We're just like Elijah. One moment we're up on the mountain, calling down fire from heaven. The next, we're down in the valley, saying, "Lord, let me die." There are none stable but the Lord.

Time prevents us from going into detail with Peter's denial of Jesus. It was while Peter was separated from Jesus that he denied his Lord. But, even though he denied Jesus, Peter didn't fall away. He didn't fall away because Jesus prayed for him and because He prayed for Peter, he was actually strengthened by his failure. Eventually, Peter met with the Risen Lord and Jesus recommissioned him into His service. "Simon, do you love Me?" "Tend My sheep. Feed My lambs. Feed My sheep." That's what Peter is doing in ch9 – he was following Jesus. He was doing exactly what Jesus had been doing, serving in the same way, preaching the same message, demonstrating the same character. The same Spirit that had worked through Jesus' life was now working through the Apostle Peter.

41-43 – Dorcas was raised back to life but we should know that she wasn't raised for her own sake or benefit. If given a choice, I'm sure she'd have rather stayed in heaven with Jesus! Obviously, she was raised for another

reason – she was raised for the sake of her ministry to others. Now, you might think, “What a bummer for her. She had to leave the glories of heaven to come back and make clothes for her fellow believers!” But, if you think about it, that’s the same reason every believer has passed from death into life – so that we might do the good works God has planned for us and serve our Master. The only difference between us and Dorcas is: she knew what she was missing

This is also the first time the word “saints” has been applied to believers in the Book of Acts. That term has come to have a much different connotation in the modern religious vernacular. Today, it is commonly used to refer to select individuals who have lived exemplary lives and even performed a miracle or at least were present when it happened. The Bible knows nothing about this definition. When the Bible calls a Christian a saint – it never implies the idea of a super-perfect people. The idea is always of a people who are different. Saints are those who are sanctified or set apart from the world in general. Saints are distinctive, unique, even peculiar. They’re different from the world.

Like Aeneas, Dorcas was a walking testimony to the power of the Gospel and Peter was there to minister to them

This was still early in the Christian era, but Christianity had already spread south to Ethiopia, north to Samaria and Damascus, and now west to the Mediterranean. Plus, Paul was back to Turkey and certainly had begun to preach there. Why was this happening? It’s because the nature of the Gospel is to spread. It’s like perfume. If you open a bottle of perfume, the aroma soon spreads throughout the room. You can’t stop it. The Gospel is the sweet smell of true doctrine, a gospel centered in a gracious, loving God, who sent his Son to die for our salvation. A message like that just can’t be bottled up. If it is bottled up in you then you don’t really understand it yet. Maybe you’ve not actually entered into it. These people had, and it was spreading. Here in Lydda and Joppa, there were Christians who were already worshiping and serving Jesus Christ.

Though Peter had followed in the steps and power of Jesus for many days, his journey wasn’t over yet. In fact, in ch10, he’s going to be sent to Cornelius, the Gentile, and by this means God is going to use him to open the door of the gospel to those who were not Jews. God was working in his

life, but God had not finished working.

God is not finished with you either. It doesn't matter where you've come from or what you've learned or how far you've come or not come in your Christian walk. If you're alive and know Jesus as your Savior, God has not finished with you. You're supposed to keep on learning, doing, serving and loving. 😊