

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (13-8-1995 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Aeneas and Dorcas

Acts 9:32-43

Additional Bible Reading: Mark 2:1-12; 5:21-24; 35-48

### Introduction

Now Luke in Acts puts the spotlight on Peter for a little while. So far Peter had travelled around Palestine but concentrated on Jerusalem. Now he visited two towns in the West of Palestine, Lydda and Joppa, and in both places he was the instrument used to perform notable miracles.

Lydda was 12 miles south-east of Joppa, inland. A man named Aeneas lived there, a paralytic, who had been bed-ridden for 8 years. Then on the coast itself was Joppa, the modern day Jaffa, where a lady had just died, the only lady in the Bible to be described as a “disciple”. She had two names, “Tabitha” in Aramaic, or “Dorcas” in Greek. The meaning of her name is gazelle. She was outstanding for her good works, and used her talent with needle to good effect. She made much clothing for the needy. So when she fell sick and died, there was much grief.

In both cases, the Lord (N.B. He is at the centre of the Book of Acts. Luke’s Gospel was about all that Jesus began to do, and Acts was all about what Jesus continued to do – see Acts 1:1) sent Peter, and through him perfect healing was given to Aeneas, and life was restored to Dorcas. Why did Luke include these two miracles, which involved two obscure people in small towns, when there were so many other things he could have recorded and did not?

Miracles in the New Testament are recorded because, (1) they happened – and that is exactly what we should expect because Jesus is the Son of God, and we would be surprised if there were no miracles, and (2) to provide illustrations in the physical world of spiritual truths. Thus they were used by early preachers to speak about Christ and to preach the Gospel. What are the spiritual lessons from these two stories?

### The example of Jesus

These miracles first of all follow the example of Jesus. Both miracles have direct parallels in the Lord’s ministry. The healing of Aeneas reminds us of the paralytic man carried by his four friends and let down through the roof. Jesus commanded that man **Get up, take your mat** (Mark 2:11), and Peter said to Aeneas, **Get up and take care of your mat** (Acts 9:34). Both men were paralytics. What Jesus did in Capernaum, He did again through Peter at Lydda.

The parallel is even closer in Dorcas’s case. As Jesus raised Jairus’s 12-year-old daughter, so Peter raised Dorcas. In both cases the noisy mourners were sent out of the room. The words Jesus used, as recorded by Mark, are exactly the same as those Peter used, “Talitha Koum!”, “damsel, arise!”

Is there a message here for us? We are not miracle workers in this twentieth century. But in a deeper way and at a spiritual level, we are to do as Jesus did and speak as

Jesus spoke. We often emphasise that Jesus was not just a teacher or an examples, for He is our Saviour. And yet He is an example. Indeed, if people took His example seriously, they would realize how much they failed, and would soon see how much they needed Him as their Saviour.

So the New Testament sets Him forth as an example. **Take my yoke upon you and learn from me** (Matthew 11:29). **I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you** (John 13:15). **To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps** (1 Peter 2:21). **Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did** (1 John 2:6). If we get near to Christ we shall catch His manner. If we dwell in fellowship with Him, we shall bear a resemblance to Him. If we live in the light, we become light. We cannot trust, obey, commune with and live beside the Lord without becoming like Him. Our inward experience will become our outward appearance.

The closer we get, the more we see our need for the whole of Christ – His example, and Him as Saviour. Our failures make us aware of our need of His indwelling Holy Spirit, and brings us closer still.

#### Illustration of Salvation

These miracles illustrate to us that salvation is found in Jesus. These miracles speak to the unsaved man. Look at the condition of the two people. One was paralysed, hopelessly without strength, unable to move, disabled. So it is with men in the spiritual sense. We were made by our Creator to love and glorify Him, made to walk in His will and obey His law. But our wills have lost the freedom to conform to the divine purpose. We can try as hard as we like, and try to follow the example set before us, but we fail. We are in bondage to sin. This is an incurable sickness. Who can deliver us?

Then there was Dorcas, who was dead. The people around her, their voices, colours, movement, made no impression on her because she was dead, as unresponsive as a stone. So we are, dead in trespasses and sins. God speaks through His creation, through His Son, through His Word. We hear, but cannot understand. Jesus is just a name, His Word is just a book, prayer is just a religious exercise, spiritual truth in a sermon is water off a duck's back. **They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts** (Ephesians 4:18).

Disabled from one point of view, and dead from another. What hope is there? There is only one hope. To Aeneas, Peter said **Jesus Christ heals you** (Acts 9:34). And though not stated, it was clearly implied that Christ brought life back to Dorcas. In disability and spiritual death there is only one answer – it is Jesus Christ who heals us. Because of the atoning work on Calvary, the guilt and punishment of sin has been dealt with. Because of the life-giving resurrection power which comes through the Holy Spirit, the power and bondage of sin has been dealt with.

The cases in these miracles were dealt with there and then. Aeneas and Dorcas had made no preparation previously, nothing done to make themselves better first. They were both helpless. But when the Lord's power was put forth, they were healed at

once. Aeneas arose immediately and Dorcas immediately sat up. Christ can deal with men at once, just as they are, in their sins, however great and many, they can be forgiven at once for His name's sake. New power can enter the soul and can go on to save from the habit and power of sin – making us love what we once hated, and hate what we once loved. No preparation is wanted – we can come as we are and trust Jesus at once to save.

All we need is in Christ. Christ did everything for us on Calvary, dealing with sin's punishment, and He continues to do everything within our hearts, dealing with sin's power. Both miracles are perfect illustrations of the need of man and the salvation of Christ.

### The power of Jesus alone

If the miracles illustrate salvation to the unsaved, they are a reminder to the saved that it is Christ alone who can save and put forth His power. Peter was totally helpless in face of disease or death. It is perfectly plain in both miracles that, though Peter was the instrument used, the power came from the hand that was wielding the tool. Jesus Christ was the power; Peter had no skills or ability to work these miracles. Peter got down on his knees and prayed to God when faced with the dead Dorcas. He knew that unless the Lord worked a miracle, nothing would happen.

This is an important lesson for us all to learn. We can reason, present our case, illustrate argument, plead and urge. But only God can make the paralysed walk and the dead live, the blind see and the deaf hear. **No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him** (John 6:44). **No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me... apart from me you can do nothing** (John 15:4,5). **I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow** (1 Corinthians 3:6).

The power to save is not in the sermon, the illustration, the personality, the eloquence, gifts, learning or ability. All are very serviceable when consecrated to God. But it is Jesus Christ who heals spiritual paralytics and it is Christ who gives life to the spiritually dead – He and no one else. To depend on anything else – valuable and important as it may be in its place – simply means disaster and failure. To realize the truth of these things tells us something very clearly and forcibly about ourselves (and it is not very flattering to pride) and about the Lord Himself, and how utterly indispensable prayer is. We are merely instruments and channels, and the power belongs to the Lord. There is no place for self-conceit and self-importance. Relationship with the Lord in submission and faith and dependence is our top priority and to be kept in good repair. A battle commenced without holy reliance on God, ends in total rout by the enemy.

### To the glory of Jesus

These miracles resound with the glory of Jesus. When Aeneas was healed, **all those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord** (Acts 9:35). Also when Dorcas was restored to life, **this became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord** (Acts 9:42). Miracles and signs which authenticated the Gospel and pointed to the power of the Lord to save, resulted in people turning to the

Lord and believing on Him. So Lydda and Joppa were not just places of physical healings, but spiritual healing and salvation took place there too. The result was that the Lord was glorified.

So what began with the healing of a paralytic and a widow in two obscure towns in the West of Palestine led to real advance in the Gospel and a widespread movement among unevangelized people. And these miracles have continued to teach people lessons over the intervening 2000 years. Many have been called to walk as He walked, and take Him as their example. These miracles have taught the unsaved that salvation is in Jesus Christ and none other. Saved people have been reminded to rely totally on Him, and the Lord has been glorified when people turn to God, believe on Him and are saved.