

June 9, 2024

God's Good News Story: The Church Alive & Growing

The Book of Acts Pt 13 - Acts 9:32-11:18

The Power of Grace:

Over Disease, Death & Discrimination

Today's passage found in Acts chapters 9,10 & part of 11. These passages again, give us examples to follow by the Church of the 1st Century that we can learn from and apply as the Church in the 21st Century era. **Remember the 3 key elements** (1) Continuous Devotion & Worship. (2) Common Care & Concern & (3) Courageous Obedience & Faithfulness. We find all three today!

We have been looking into the life of Saul/Paul for the last few weeks, but today we turn back to focus on the other Key player of the Early Church, Peter. In these chapters we experience Three (3) powerful and impactful miracles that Peter was involved in that helps us to see how God was teaching, modeling and challenging the early church to grow and extend God's Kingdom to all the earth. Miracles were very prominent and powerful in the early church era. We may not see the same type and frequency of miracles but they still happen today. As I have mentioned before it appears that the frequency and nature of miracles in the early church had a major role to serve as Signs of the Power and Authenticity of Jesus Christ as the True Messiah and that the Apostles and the Early Church were God's new & true people. It gave a clear sign that God has chosen and appointed the Church to be His instrument to bring His Grace, Salvation and His Kingdom rule to all the earth.

The Three Miracles showed that in Jesus' Name there is Power over Disease, Death & Discrimination.

Let's look at the **1st Miracle: Power Over Disease**

Acts 9:32-35... ³² Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions; he also came down to the saints who lived at Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years, because he was paralyzed. ³⁴ Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your own bed." Immediately he got up. ³⁵ And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Here we find Peter living out our pattern statement... Be Like Christ! Peter was traveling through middle section of Israel about 10 miles from the port city of Joppa (infamous as the town where Jonah boarded a ship to escape God's call to witness to the Ninevites). Here Peter came across a man named Aeneas who appears to have been a disciple of Jesus and member early church member (one of the saints) who suffered from a paralyzing ailment that had left him bedridden for eight (8) years. Peter sees the man and simply, yet powerfully states,

³⁴ Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your own bed." Immediately he got up. ³⁵ And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. This miracle is in the same styles of Jesus Who healed many people. This miracle showed that the Name & Power of Jesus is still active and vibrant as we read in verse ***³⁵ And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.*** So, this miracle affirmed the Power of Jesus Name, and the authenticity of Peter and the early church believers as the True People of God.

Now the 2nd Miracle : Power Over Death

As if the miracle of the paralyzed man was not enough, God continues His powerful display, this time over the arch enemy... Death!

Acts 9:36-43

³⁶ Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which when translated means Dorcas); this woman excelled in acts of kindness and charity which she did habitually. ³⁷ But it happened at that time that she became sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Do not delay in coming to us." ³⁹ So Peter got ready and went with them. When he arrived, they took him into the room upstairs; 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. ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴² It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³ And Peter stayed in Joppa many days with a tanner named Simon.

Again, this miracle involved a Follower of Jesus who had fallen ill or diseased but had sadly died. Her name was Dorcas (in Greek) and Tabitha (in Imperial Aramaic), they both mean 'Gazelle'. She was obviously a very well loved and respected vital member of the early church community. Listen what is recorded about her in verse 36... *"this woman*

excelled in acts of kindness and charity which she did habitually". What a great legacy this wonderful saint left behind.

If we read the passage carefully and we can deduce that her fellow church members were people of great faith. Listen to vs. 37 & 38 again...

³⁷ But it happened at that time that she became sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Do not delay in coming to us."

She was not just sick, she actually died! But the believers showed great faith and called for Peter to come. They displayed tremendous faith and courage by believing that God could still bring about good from this situation. And God showed up powerfully. Peter came, and again "Being Like Jesus", he sent the people out and called out to her 'Tabitha Arise' or in Aramaic "*Tabitha Koumi.*"

The scene parallels that of Jairus' daughter in Mark 5:35–43. Jesus came to Jairus' house after his daughter had died. Jesus sent the people out and called out in Aramaic "*Talitha Koum*" meaning little girl get up". Just as another reminder Jesus said to Lazarus as he laid dead in the grave after 4 days, Jesus said Lazarus, Come forth or come out". We don't have the actually Aramaic words, but it seems to be another parallel.

This miracle has a double impact...

- (1) it shows the power and authority of Jesus working through His people and
- (2) It shows the faith of the early church as they trusted that God is a life-giving God.

Now the 3rd Miracle: Power Over Discrimination

(or the Power of salvation for all people)

This section is a little too long to read in the time we have left, but let me summarize the events as recorded in Acts 10:1-11:18.

This section gives us the exciting and glorious salvation of a Roman Centurion by the name of Cornelius. Salvation is the key theme of the story, but an important co-theme is the Church being encouraged to overcome a culture of discrimination. Discrimination has always been a part of fallen human culture, but the sad part is that it has also shown its ugly head in religion and people of faith.

The Bible makes it clear that God does not want there to be discrimination or partiality shown among His followers. Listen to a few verses that highlight this:

Deuteronomy 10:17-19...*For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.*

Galatians 3:27-29...*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.*

Galatians 5:1...*For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

James 2:2-4...*For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

In today's passage we find this verse:

Acts 10:34...*So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,*

Let's get a little context on this event. Just after the last miracle of the raising of Dorcas/Tabitha from the dead. Peter is staying in the home of a man named Simon, who is describes as a 'Tanner'.

"Simon the Tanner's house in Jaffa symbolizes inclusivity and the embrace of diversity within the fledgling Christian community³. His story reminds us that God's love transcends societal norms and professions". <https://israelbylocals.com/who-was-simon-the-tanner/>

"Tanners tanned hides that they stripped off dead animals, including those that the Jewish law deemed unclean: "The carcass of any animal which divides the foot, but is not cloven-hoofed or does not chew the cud, is unclean to you. Everyone who touches it shall be unclean. And whatever goes on its paws, among all kinds of animals that go on all fours, those are unclean to you.

Whoever touches any such carcass shall be unclean until evening. Whoever carries any such carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening. It is unclean to you" (Leviticus 11:26-28). The Jews already considered gentiles to be unclean. By drawing Peter into the home of a gentile tanner - the dirtiest of the dirty - God was breaking down barriers and preparing Peter as a vessel to pour out His blessing onto the gentiles".

<https://www.bibleversestudy.com/acts/acts10-simon-the-tanner.htm>

So what does this have to do with what we need to learn from the 1st Century Church? Well basically we are to be faithful in sharing the Good News to everyone, without limits, to all people.

The Jews of that day had an ingrained discrimination against anyone who was not a Jew. Sadly, the early Christians, the Church. Was influenced by this negative trait and did not want to associate with or witness to a non-Jew or a Gentile. This is strange in that Jesus had clearly stated many times that we are to share the Good News with everyone and everywhere. In Acts 1:8 we find what I call the Great Empowerment we hear Jesus say ... ***Acts 1:8...******"but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth."***

Well, back to Peter & Cornelius... While Peter was visiting with Simon the Tanner, in another town about 30 miles away a Roman Centurion, Cornelius was praying at about 3:00pm when he had a vision from God where God

spoke to him and said '*Your prayers and charitable works have ascended as a memorial offering before Me, now send some men to go to the town of Joppa and ask for a man named Simon, also known as Peter*'. (**Acts 10:3-8**). Cornelius sends two servants and a soldier to make the trek to seek out Peter. While they were making the trip, Peter was praying at the noon hour...

let's read **Acts 10:10-16** to see what happened...

¹⁰ Peter fell into a trance; ¹¹ and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, ¹² and on it were all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the sky. ¹³ A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." ¹⁵ Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

Well, to say the least, Peter was confused, and as he sat there trying to figure out the meaning, the three men from Cornelius arrived and waited at the gate (remember Gentiles were not allowed into Jewish homes... at least up until now!) Peter came to understand what the vision was about, and he invited them in (broke Jewish law and tradition, by the way) and they ate and spent the night. The next day they made their way to Cornelius in Caesaria. Meanwhile, Cornelius in faith, gathered his family and friends in preparation to hear from Peter.

Here we read of Peter's actual sermon and the amazing salvation response... **Acts 10:34-48**...³⁴ *Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality,*³⁵ *but in every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him.*³⁶ *The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)—*³⁷ *you yourselves know the thing that happened throughout Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed.*³⁸ *You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.*³⁹ *We are witnesses of all the things that He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross.*⁴⁰ *God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He be revealed,*⁴¹ *not to all the people, but to witnesses who had been chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.*⁴² *And He ordered us to preach to the people, and to testify solemnly that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.*⁴³ *All the prophets testify of Him, that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins."*⁴⁴ *While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.*⁴⁵ *All the Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had also been poured out on the Gentiles.*⁴⁶ *For they were hearing them speaking*

*with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter responded,*⁴⁷ *"Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"*⁴⁸ *And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.*

Wow, what an awesome experience, some even call this the Gentile Pentecost!

There is a lot we could talk about, but the bottom line is that God wants all people from every tribe, race and background to become part of His family, the Church, and we should not let pride, discrimination or anything stop us from sharing the Good News and accepting everyone as our brothers and sisters in Christ. To reinforce this engrained discrimination in chapter 11, it records that many of the believers in Jerusalem (the Jewish ones) heard about Peter baptizing the Gentiles and they accused him of "*eating and drinking with uncircumcised people*" (11:3). However, Peter boldly yet, kindly, 'informed' them of the details of his vision and call from God to go to the Gentiles and that God had authorized this. Thankfully, they made the choice to put partiality and discrimination aside and accept God's plan for full acceptance of all people. This is what we read in **Acts 11:17,18**...¹⁷ *Therefore, if God gave them the same gift as He also gave to us after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"*¹⁸ *When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has also granted to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."*

In conclusion then, these miracles reminds us of the Church's true call & Purpose, both in the 1st Century and the 21st Century....

Say it with me ... Our True Call & Purpose ...

To be Powerful Witnesses of God's Good News Story,
motivated by love and empowered of the Holy Spirit!

“BE LIKE LIST”

Be Like Barnabas

Be Like Peter

Be Like Stephen

Be Like The Ethiopian

Be Like Phillip

Be Like Saul/Paul

Be Like Dorcas/Tabitha

Be Like Cornelius

Most of All

BE LIKE CHRIST

OUR TAKE-AWAY

➤ **Christ Overcomes Disease & Death.**

RELY ON HIM

➤ **Christ Shows Hospitality to All People Groups.**

IMITATE HIM

➤ **Christ Commands us to Preach the Good News to Everyone.**

PROCLAIM HIM

➤ **Christ Can Save Irreligious & religious People.**

WORSHIP HIM

(Adapted from Tony Merida. Acts: Christ-Centered Exposition)

SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGES FOR THE FULL
SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

For reference :Acts 10:1-48

¹ Now there was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, ² a devout man and one who feared God with all his household and made many charitable contributions to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually. ³ About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, "Cornelius!" ⁴ And he looked at him intently and became terrified, and said, "What is it, lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and charitable gifts have ascended as a memorial offering before God. ⁵ Now dispatch some men to Joppa and send for a man named Simon, who is also called Peter; ⁶ he is staying with a tanner named Simon, whose house is by the sea." ⁷ When the angel who *spoke to him left, he summoned two of his servants and a devout soldier from his personal attendants, ⁸ and after he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

⁹ On the next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. ¹⁰ But he became hungry and wanted to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance; ¹¹ and he *saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground, ¹² and on it were all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the sky. ¹³ A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!" ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean." ¹⁵ Again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into the sky.

¹⁷ Now while Peter was greatly perplexed in mind as to

what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men who had been sent by Cornelius had asked directions to Simon's house, and they appeared at the gate; ¹⁸ and calling out, they were asking whether Simon, who was also called Peter, was staying there. ¹⁹ While Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ But get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings, for I have sent them Myself." ²¹ Peter went down to the men and said, "Behold, I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for which you have come?" ²² They said, "Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well-spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you." ²³ So he invited them in and gave them lodging.

Now on the next day he got ready and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴ On the following day he entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and worshiped him. ²⁶ But Peter helped him up, saying, "Stand up; I, too, am just a man." ²⁷ As he talked with him, he entered and *found many people assembled. ²⁸ And he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner; and yet God has shown me that I am not to call any person unholy or unclean. ²⁹ That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask, for what reason did you send for me?"

³⁰ Cornelius said, "Four days ago to this hour, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour; and behold, a man stood before me in shining clothing, ³¹ and he *said,

‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your charitable gifts have been remembered before God. ³² Therefore send some men to Joppa and invite Simon, who is also called Peter, to come to you; he is staying at the house of Simon the tanner, by the sea.’ ³³ So I sent men to you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear everything that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

³⁴ Opening his mouth, Peter said:

“I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him. ³⁶ The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)— ³⁷ you yourselves know the thing that happened throughout Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. ³⁸ You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. ³⁹ We are witnesses of all the things that He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. ⁴⁰ God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He be revealed, ⁴¹ not to all the people, but to witnesses who had been chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. ⁴² And He ordered us to preach to the people, and to testify solemnly that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³ All the prophets testify of Him, that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. ⁴⁵ All

the Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had also been poured out on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter responded, ⁴⁷ “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” ⁴⁸ And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.