

Acts 9:32-43, “Roles and Repentance” 2024-07-07.

Intro & Review:

Last week we looked at the conversion of Saul. This is a piece of the puzzle explaining how the gospel went to the gentiles. It started in Jerusalem and Judea, went to Samaria and the half Jews with Phillip. Saul, who had been persecuting Christians now is a preacher. Next chapter we will see a full on gentile converted. Then after that, Saul, now Paul, will conduct three missionary journeys to the ends of the earth reaching almost exclusively Gentiles.

We see in our text for today the healing of a man named Aeneas (vs 32-35) and the resuscitation of Tabitha (v36-43). The healing parallels the healings that Jesus did. In fact, the language that Peter uses is almost exactly the same as what Jesus said (Mark 5:41)

That being said, I want to highlight two points in our text today. One is more theological and the other is more obviously practical. That is not to say that they are mutually exclusive but one has to do with how we understand something, that leads to some practical implications, while the other is a direct action. They are in the tile of the message for today but I want to take them in reverse order.

I. Repentance

In our passage, we have two miracles: the healing of Aeneas in verses 32-35 and the raising of Tabitha from the dead in verses 36-43. Notice the *result of both*. In v35, it says that all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him (the healed man), and the *turned* to the Lord. In v42 it says that Tabitha’s being raised from the dead “became known all over Joppa, and many *believed* in the Lord.” The result is the same but described in a little different nuance. People are saved because of the miracle. One group is described as having turned to the Lord and the other is said to have believed in the Lord. Are we to somehow think that these are two different kinds of responses? No. They are the same.

Repentance and belief are the SAME thing, not two different things. Zan Hodges, “free grace movement” from DTS. I doubt many, if any here, believe in such a thing where repentance is somehow bifurcated from belief especially when the WCF teaches otherwise. However, in our great state of Texas, the preponderance of this system has its deepest foothold. The popularity of the Ryrie study Bible and its forerunner, the Scofield study Bible, both taught that repentance was separate from belief and not necessary for salvation. In our view, this is a terrible twisting of the text and certainly does not line up with historical Christian belief. It is

responsible for what I and other call the Jesus vaccine and inadvertently sends many to hell. All the while, those people think that they are saved even though they haven't ever shown any fruit, identified themselves with God's people and been baptized, or even if they have, have fallen away, showing themselves to be false converts. This theology was popularized in Bible churches, man Baptist churches, Calvary Chapel and non-denominational circles where there is no creed or confession.

The results have been catastrophic. We now have false converts with false assurance running around almost everywhere in our land. People have gotten the Jesus vaccine and now they go about their lives almost as if nothing has changed. There is very little, if any lordship of Jesus in their lives.

This phenomenon is the outworking of pragmatism even though extensive efforts have been made to prove it from the Bible. This belief is also the result of a faulty hermeneutic (method of Bible interpretation) where church history is either outright ignored or deeply discounted. For two thousand years, the church of the living God has read and explained the Scriptures. As Lewis pointed out, we commit cultural pride and arrogance when we ignore such work.

The more obvious problem with this *easy believism* is that, ironically, it does not hold up to its own standards of Biblical exegesis. In other words, the Bible itself does not teach such a doctrine and those who have perpetuated it have done enormous gymnastics to make it try and fit in.

This may seem like some sort of ivory tower debate about doctrine disconnected from real life. I assure you it is not. It has real world implications and has done terrible damage to the true message of Christ.

I'm sure that there are probably some personal reasons that so called biblical teachers promulgated such beliefs. I'm willing to bet all my personal assets that many if not most had backslidden or apostate family or friends that they wanted to believe that those were saved. I have those kinds of people in my life too. We all do, including me. I have people very close to me that I love deeply that at some point prayed a prayer "accepting Christ" but have fallen away.

We all have friends or family that we care about deeply that at some point made a profession of faith and have fallen away. I personally know scores of people who used to be very involved in church, some were leaders, and they are not involved anymore. Part of the problem is that they have been taught that a personal private faith is all that is needed to get to heaven. They think that somehow Jesus is disconnected from His church or that they themselves are church apart from the broader body of Christ. This has no standing either in the Scriptures or church

history. It is an indefensible position Biblically. The Bible knows nothing of lone ranger Christianity.

We do not change our beliefs about the Scriptures based on our experiences and culture. Instead, we inform our interpretations of our experiences and beliefs based on the Scriptures. These people have it backwards. The free grace movement is a pernicious misrepresentation of the Scriptures that needs to be corrected. The book of Hebrews, Jude, Jesus' teaching, and almost all of Paul's writings taken as a whole contradict this view. The view we should hold is clearly taught in the WCF chapters 14 and 15. Faith and repentance, belief and trust are two sides of the SAME coin. They are not two different things separated into justification and sanctification. Both things are commanded at conversion and continuation in the faith.

We need to understand this concept for ourselves and teach it to others including our children. Faith and repentance. Believe and trust. If you believe Jesus is Lord, then act like it. Faith without works is dead. Works do not save but they are the evidence of genuine conversion. Perseverance in them are the signs of salvation. If anyone says they believe and do not have evidence, they are in dire danger. The Scriptures give such a person no assurance of salvation.

Faith and repentance. Belief and trust. They go together like the combination of air and fuel to make an engine run, both must be present otherwise it won't work.

When Aeneas was healed, people turned to the Lord. When Tabitha was raised, people believed in the Lord. That was the single purpose of the miracles, that salvation would come to these regions.

II. Roles

The story of Tabitha is reminiscent of Jesus and Lazarus.

Tabitha was a woman. It has been mentioned before that Luke, more than any other writer in the NT, highlights both women and gentiles. This would have been shocking and unprecedented in his time. The message is clear. God welcomes everyone, men and women, Jew and Gentile.

She was a woman of action. "...full of good works and charity..." v36. V39 indicates that she made clothing for widows. Perhaps she was one herself. We do not know. What we do know is that She was no slacker waiting for someone else to do something. She saw a need and met it. She was busy, not a busybody. She was a diligent doer. Not lazy but active. She took initiative and served these women wholeheartedly. She was devoted and committed. She was "full of

good works and charity.” Not half full, or kinda, sorta, maybe, involved. She was the tip of the spear so to speak. This woman was fully engaged. That leads to the next observation...

Notice also Tabitha’s character. Tabitha was a woman of consistency. “...she continually did” v36. She was not inconsistent. She was dependable and unwavering. She showed up without fail and without being asked. This was her lifestyle, not a flash in the pan. She had a servant heart and she worked. No doubt, she spent hours and hours by herself sewing and knitting and sourcing materials and preparing. She was a woman of consistency.

Of course, the reason I’m pointing these things out is because that is the kind of quiet, steady, consistent, action oriented, faithfulness that is still needed today.

What does Jesus say in about good works (Matt 5:16 and 6:1-4)? He says to do them in order to point people to the Father (5:16). He also says to do them in secret, so that the reward will be from God, not recognition from people.

Examples: Albert Granbury (building homes for single mothers and financing them at scandalous rates, secretly giving the church money for almost every cause); Hank (establishing a ministry primarily intended for meeting the needs of widows and single moms, car care changing oil and performing all the maintenance that a man would normally handle, handyman services, an annual conference that lavishes enormous acts of kindness); Johnny Myers (buying and fixing bicycles for children and delivering them on Christmas); ladies @ FBC Celeste who make the most delicious food anytime there is a need be it a funeral or VBS or some other event. There are countless types of people who secretly serve Christ not for the recognition or glory but because they have been loved, they love.

Conclusion:

The same Jesus is at work today by His Spirit. He commands all men, everywhere, to repent and believe the gospel. Repent and be baptized! Trust the Lord. Be converted.

For those who have, we have a role to play. Peter had a role to play. He was a mouthpiece. Stephen, Saul, Ananias, Barnabas, Aeneas, Tabitha all had roles to play. They were all different people that God used for His purposes. I wonder what His Spirit calls you to today. Perhaps it is a new role. Perhaps it is the one you are already in and He is confirming that work. How will we obey Him today?

Is there a change in our theology that needs to take place? Is there a change in our action or attitudes? Let us reflect on these questions and obey God.

Closing Prayer:

Holy Father, help us to believe and behave correctly. Let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be pure in Your sight. By your Spirit, use us for Your purposes. Now, as we partake in the Lord's supper, find us faithful servants. We remember and celebrate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Give us grace as we take it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Questions:

Who are the personalities in Acts 9, particularly in our text for today?

What roles do they play?

How is Tabitha described in v36b?

What does Jesus say in about good works (Matt 5:16 and 6:3)?

What does this say about *how* and *why* we do what we do?

How are repentance and faith connected? Define each.

Why does this matter? What happens if you only focus on one or the other?

Application:

God calls individuals to play certain roles in His work in the church and in the world. What is your role(s)?

How are you being faithful to His mission?