

## **“AENEAS AND TABITHA, ARISE!”**

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**Scripture Texts: Acts 9:31-43**

### **Introduction.**

Do you know how you can tell the healing of Aeneas was a really big miracle? How many of you have said to your teenager, arise and make your bed, and had no result?

I have it on good authority that after about 8 years your teenager will arise and make his bed.

This is real, tangible, in your face power. Who can do such a thing? How are these miracles stories relevant to us today? We have had four of our members in the hospital this week dealing with tough medical situations, two with heart issues, two with cancer. They could all use a healing. What good are these stories to us when this sort of thing seems to rarely happen now?

### **Lydda and Joppa.**

In Lydda (modern Lod, Tel Aviv airport) Peter goes to a man who has been paralyzed for 8 years.

In Joppa (modern Jaffa) Peter is brought to a woman named Tabitha (Aramaic, Greek is Dorcas, both mean gazelle). She was also well known, but for her good works and charity, making shirts and coats for the poor and needy, perhaps even these widows.

Let's notice the two most important details in Luke's telling of these stories. The healings were done in Jesus' name and as a result it led to many conversions.

### **Peter and Jesus.**

Who is in the spot light, Peter or Jesus?

This is that phenomena where the parent points at something and the child looks at the pointing finger. Peter points to Jesus, so don't fixate on Peter. He is the vessel, Jesus is the power.

With Aeneas Peter says, “Jesus Christ heals you.”

With Tabitha Peter prayed to Jesus before telling her to arise.

Why did Peter pray? He prayed for the same reason we all pray. We pray when something is beyond our ability, above our pay grade.

He was in over his head, out of his depth, he had never raised someone from the dead before. Instead of focusing on himself and what he couldn't do, he turned to the Lord.

Jesus is the healer. Don't lose sight of that. Peter is only an agent, a conduit, he seeks no glory for himself. Peter shows his humility, he is the one who told us he kneeled and prayed.

Healing is about Jesus. This is what so often seems to be missing in TV healers.

**They turned to the Lord and many believed in the Lord.**

Don't lose sight of the other important detail Luke draws attention to. These miracles led to many conversions. Notice both of these miracles are with high profile people known to the church and community. One was paralyzed for 8 years, the other touched many lives through her charity and kindness.

They were raised up for the sake of others, for other's faith, not their own. The purpose of miracles is not just to heal the body, but to heal souls.

The problem with people saying Jesus was a miracle worker or a great healer is that it is looking at the finger and not at the real point. Jesus did miracles to confirm that His power was real, and His message was true. Miracles point to divine authority. This is not human.

Miracles are given to authenticate the messengers and their message as from God. They confirm their important part in God's plan of salvation.

Moses and the exodus.

Elijah and Elisha and prophetic period.

Jesus and coming of Messiah, new kingdom, new covenant.

Apostles and beginning of the church.

Miracles were rare, for specific kingdom advancing purpose, for God's glory, to create faith and confirm God's divine hand and leading through His chosen messengers.

But what about now? Why no miracles? Well there are miracles where the Gospel is just beginning. But among people of faith how does God work? Think of Paul who prayed three times for healing. God answered with suffering. Suffering to test and strengthen faith and to cause Paul to rely on God and His grace, so he boasted in his own weakness. Suffering is the norm, we are called to live by faith.

The Holy Spirit's manifestation of His power in our lives and circumstances is not limited to miracles. It is evident in all kinds of manifestations of God's varied grace and power and goodness.

God does all things to point to the great and coming day of the Lord when the final salvation will be revealed.

Both miracles are signs of the salvation that comes from Jesus, both brought to life/wholeness at a single command, arise. This is what God did for Jesus, this is what Jesus does for us. This is a visible sign of the new life given to us by believing in Jesus' name.

### **Open universe or closed universe.**

I opened the service this morning as I have a few times in the past by saying, "Jesus Christ is in this place, anything can happen here."

We live in a supernatural world. I have on numerous occasions referred to our universe as an open universe. Christianity is based on miracles, the incarnation and the resurrection.

We believe in a God who is intimately involved in our world and can interrupt and change things at any time. Jesus is in this place and anything can happen here.

God is directing the flow of human history and when He wants for His glory to interrupt or change the flow He does. He converts a great enemy like Saul. He heals a paralyzed man and raises to life a dead woman.

This text reminds us and encourages us to live with an open-ended expectancy, a supernatural expectancy, an attitude that Jesus Christ is alive and well and anything can happen here, anything can happen in my life, whatever is going on right now, however bad, can and will be turned around for my good and God's glory.

Too many Christians live life like practical atheists. Sure, they believe in Jesus, but it doesn't seem to make any real difference in the day to day.

How many of us just think things will get worse and worse, or go from bad to worse to terrible, or it's just too far gone, or nothing will ever change? How many of us are fatalistic? My life can't change, my family can't change, my marriage can't change, my job can't change.

The early church thought that about Saul, a bad person like him will never change. Aeneas laying on his sleeping mat for eight years, he had long ago given up any idea that things could be different. And when people die, that's it, final, finished.

Nobody saw any of this coming. Nobody.

Who would have dreamed that Iran could start becoming a Christian nation? What about North Korea? What about the Hausa people in northern Nigeria? What about your family member, your friend, your co-worker? What are you praying for? What are you expecting?

Have you fallen into the devil's trap of believing his lies, nothing will change, nothing good will come, you are hopeless, your situation is hopeless? Oh well, whatever, just bad luck, I guess. Gloom and doom. Eeyore.

The point of the book of Acts, the point of the Bible is this is an open universe, this is a visited planet, God has broken into our house, uninvited, intruding, invading, sticking His nose into our business, changing things, turning things upside down, doing the unexpected, the unpredictable.

This is what's wrong with all the gloom and doom people who make predictions about the future. Whether its economist or global warming doomsayers, they think this is a closed system where you can chart out what's going to happen, that what has happened will continue to happen. No, God is full of surprises, He is unpredictable, He doesn't fit into a box.

Stop thinking like the world and start thinking like a Christian. Jesus is alive and well and powerfully in control and He is out to change/transform our world and our lives.

Jesus totally turns Aeneas' life around and upside down. Jesus interrupts his life. And the same with Tabitha. God is the God of great reversals, great turns of events. There is supernatural power at work in this universe. Anything can happen here.

**Implications and applications.**

Let me make two closing applications.

**First**, notice what the widows were saying at Tabitha's funeral. There were many people there extolling her virtues with words of deep gratitude. What a reputation she had. What will be said at our funerals? How would you like to be known as a person who was always doing good, thinking more about others than about herself?

She made shirts and coats for the poor, perhaps for widows. She may have been a widow herself, without much strength or means, but she could make clothes for those in more need than herself.

It is a test and an indication of our Christian character in how we treat the poor and needy and unimportant, especially when no one is looking or will know. What we do to the least we do to Jesus. And what did Jesus do for the least, for us poor, needy, lost, in spiritual poverty?

The fruit of faith is good works, acts of love and kindness, ministry and service. It is especially evident when done for those who have no way of repaying, for the poor and needy.

This is what it means to be church, a place where believers help each other in the most basic and practical and tangible of ways. Do you see a need? Can you help? Will you? Kindness should be normal, helping should be ordinary, serving should be the standard operating procedure.

We all have spiritual gifts to be used for the body. We are all called and gifted to give and serve and be used of God for the sake of the saints. We are all called to kindness, it is a fruit or evidence that we have the Holy Spirit in us. Tabitha is an example for all of us. Is our life characterized by kindness?

**Second**, we are all paralyzed spiritually, we can't get up, we can't move toward God until He comes to us and speaks into our hearts the name of Jesus. By grace through faith in Jesus we are empowered and enabled to have new life.

We are all dead spiritually, dead in our trespasses and sin, dead in our fallen humanity. We are not in a hospital, we are in a morgue, until someone comes to us and prays for us and commands us to be alive. Like Jesus to Lazarus, like Jesus to us, making dead bones alive again.

It is literally as if Jesus said this to each of us called by His name, Robert, arise. Lamar, arise, Jessica, arise. He has known our name, he has written our name into His book, He speaks our name to give us life.

As Peter moved here and there among the saints and the churches, so Jesus is moving among us, working by His Spirit in each of us. He is present, He is not absent. He is with us always.

He sees and knows our hearts, our circumstances, our broken lives, our fears and anxieties.

What happened to Aeneas and Tabitha will one day happen to all who put their faith and trust in Jesus. No more sin, no brokenness, no pain, no suffering, no heartache, no depression, no anxiety, no fear, no guilt, no shame, no pride, no anger, no lust, no greed, no hate, no evil.

This is why Jesus came, to reveal He has power and authority to heal and to save. His kingdom has broken in. We can look back to these stories to give us confidence so we can look forward with hope in Christ.