

ACTS
The Miracle Worker
Acts 9:32-43

Probably almost every Christian in America has either sung or heard the song, "I Believe in Miracles." As part of our Christian tradition and culture we assent to the supernatural, but do we really believe in miracles, and do we live in such a way that other people know we believe in the miraculous? Supernaturalism is at the very core of our Christianity and without a deep commitment to the supernatural we have no Christianity.

As soon as we say, "I believe in miracles," this opens up many questions. Does God heal the sick and raise the dead today as He did in the first century? Are the spiritual gifts of healing and miracles in existence today? Is it Christ or men who heal others? Hopefully, we will be able to answer some of these questions intelligently in this sermon.

In Acts 9:31-43, there are three miracles performed; two are stated as miracles and the other must be inferred. There is the healing of the deceased man, Aeneas, which is a miracle of the body. There is also the raising of a dead person in Dorcas which is a miracle of both the body and spirit. Lastly, there is the overcoming of the dogmatic man in the life of Peter which is a miracle of the heart. These were all great miracles but they, like all miracles of the Bible, were designed by God to teach about the spiritual miracle which God performs in the heart of a person when he or she is saved. Any healing of the body is at best temporary. Everyone who was healed in the New Testament later died. The healing of these bodies was just temporary because they were designed to be a picture of the wonderful way God heals the spirit of a man for all eternity. Aeneas represents the healing power of Jesus Christ to the spiritually helpless. Dorcas illustrates the power of Jesus Christ over the hopelessness of death in all of its forms. Peter pictures the power of Jesus Christ to change the prejudice of a religious man's heart. It is a far greater miracle to change the life of a person than to heal the body or raise the dead. It is far more wonderful to have eternal life imparted than to prolong human life.

THE HEALING OF AENEAS (Acts 9:32-35)

The Condition of Aeneas (32-33)

"Now it came about that as Peter was traveling through all those parts, he came also to the saints who lived at Lydda." -- Most of these saints at Lydda were probably pointed to Christ by Philip the Evangelist and the rest were refugees who had fled persecution in Jerusalem. Peter undoubtedly came to this small group of believers to encourage and strengthen them in the faith. We could say that Philip was the obstetrician and Peter was the pediatrician. Each had his particular place in the body of Christ.

"And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed." -- We do not know for sure whether Aeneas was saved or unsaved, but we know that he had a paralysis of the body which kept him in bed for eight long years. My own opinion is that he was not a saved man. Here was a sick, impotent man who was not able to fulfill his physical life as God intended it to be lived. He was a helpless cripple who was a parasite on human society. His life was probably characterized by despair and frustration for he spent weeks, months and years captive to a bed. His condition was utter helplessness.

This is a picture of the unregenerate man from a spiritual standpoint. A sinner is paralyzed by sin, incapable of doing the will of God, utterly helpless as to his relationship with God. The unsaved man is paralyzed by his fears, frustration and futility. He is a slave to his own sin nature and he is not living life as God originally designed that man should live it.

“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Cor. 2:14).

The Command of Peter (34a)

“And Peter said to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; arise, and make your bed.’” -- Peter, with absolute confidence said, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you.” Notice carefully that the promise of healing came before, not after, the command to arise. He did not say, “Aeneas, arise and Christ will heal you,” which would indicate that Aeneas had some power in himself to heal himself. No, Christ imparted healing power which enabled Aeneas to rise up. So it is in the spiritual realm, Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit moves in power on a helpless sinner to save him, and in granting that power the sinner is able to believe in Christ and be saved.

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:6-8).

Because of Christ's death for sinners, men can now believe in Christ.

Aeneas must have had some previous knowledge about Christ before Peter gave him this command since Peter assumed he knew who Christ was. He probably heard how Jesus Christ claimed to be the Messiah, that He was the God-Man, that He died on the cross for sinners, that He was resurrected from the dead. He probably heard how Jesus actually healed a man of palsy and said, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” He probably knew all these facts about Christ but he did not know Christ personally. He had an intellectual acquaintance with Christ but did not have a personal acquaintance. For him to know Christ, Christ had to invade his life. So it is also true in the spiritual realm. We can know all about Christ, but we must know Him personally and this comes as Christ moves into the life of a person. If you live in America, you probably know that Christ claimed to be God, that He died for sinners and that He gives eternal life to all who believe in Him. But perhaps you are like Aeneas, you have not yet acted. If you are like Aeneas, Jesus says, “Arise, and believe.” If you do this you know that He has granted you power to believe in Him.

Notice carefully that Peter did not claim he had the power to heal Aeneas. He said, “Jesus Christ heals you.” Peter was but an instrument or a vehicle to carry a message with authority, but it was the resurrected Christ who actually healed Aeneas. The only person who has the power to heal the physical body or the authority to forgive the sin-sick soul is Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity. If any human being claims the power to heal bodies or forgive sins, this is false doctrine coming from the mouth of a false teacher.

The Cure of Aeneas (34b)

“And immediately he arose.” -- The healing Christ gave Aeneas was immediate, complete, perfect and permanent. This man never was paralyzed again. All biblical healings are complete, perfect and permanent. Think of it, this was the first time this man had made his bed in eight years. I personally covet this kind of power. I say to my teenagers quite often, “Arise and make your bed!” But they neither rise nor make their beds. Yet Peter could say, “Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed,” and it happened. Why? Peter had the sign gifts that were given to the Apostles and these sign gifts passed out of existence after the Apostles died. As an Apostle, Peter had power and authority that no ordinary man then or now possesses.

This raises the question, “Does Christ heal today?” The answer is obviously, “Yes.” The evidence is overwhelming that Christ does heal today. There are many recorded instances of sudden, complete and permanent healings which came to Christians and there is no known medical explanation for the cure. If we say there is no supernatural healing today, we are adopting a very unscientific attitude, for the facts prove otherwise. God does heal today through believing prayer of Christians individually and collectively and through the prayers of the elders of the church.

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him

with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him” (James 5:14-15).

God, however, is not obligated to heal everyone or anyone. God heals whom and when and where He will. He is sovereign. He sometimes heals miraculously but most of the time He heals through the use of medicine and skillful doctors.

There have been many good and sincere Christian ministers who were sincerely wrong in their theology about healing. Every Christian and every Christian minister has blind spots and holds to some wrong theology. No one man has all the truth but obviously some men have more truth than others. Men such as the late S. D. Gordon, a Presbyterian, and A. B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian Missionary Alliance Church, taught that healing is in the atonement of Christ. They based their thinking on two verses.

“Surely our griefs (sickness) He Himself bore, And our sorrows (pains) He carried . . . And by His scourging we are healed” (Isa. 53:4-5).

“And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled saying, ‘HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES, AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES’” (Matt. 8:16-17).

They argue that since Christ bore our sicknesses, healing is in the atonement and just as our sins are forgiven completely by Christ so, too, we can claim freedom from sickness. They admitted that everyone must die, but no Christian had to die of an illness. They felt for anyone to die of sickness was to die out of the perfect will of God, for it was God's will to cure sickness as well as sin. They further argued that the only reason a person is not healed of sickness was because he did not exercise strong faith. If a man was not healed when he claimed a healing, the problem was not in the atonement but in the man's weak faith. This position was held by the late Kathryn Kuhlman and is presently held by Earnest Angley. Most Methodists, holiness pentecostals and modern day charismatics hold this view as well. The simple answer to the belief that healing is in the atonement of Christ is that Isaiah 53:4 refers in context to spiritual healing and Matthew 8:16-17 refer to the earthly ministry of Christ, not his atoning work. Furthermore, Paul prayed three times for God to deliver him from some illness but was refused his request.

“. . . there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me--to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me” (II Cor. 12:7b-8).

Lastly, Christ moved among multitudes of sick and only healed a few. Logically, if we believe that the atonement is effective or efficacious (actually works), then no Christian should ever be sick or die, for the atonement must remove sickness or be powerless. The final key, however, is understanding that healing is a sovereign act of God and He heals whom and when and where He pleases. It is also interesting to note that S. D. Gordon and A. B. Simpson, who both taught a Christian does not have to die of illness, both died of a drawn out, terminal sickness. Because they thought they could claim freedom from this sickness, they died under a sense of having had God turn His back on them, and they were disappointed with their own failure to muster enough faith to be healed. The theology that says healing is in the atonement is not only false teaching but it leads to despair and frustration for most people who hold it.

Are there then faith healers today? Men who have the spiritual gift of miracles? The sign gifts passed away with the Apostles and there are no people today who can claim the power of God to heal men. There is faith healing but no faith healers. What about people who claim to be healers and people seem to get healed in their meetings? My answer to that is the Devil also has the power to heal and does heal, and so convincing are these demonstrations that many Christians are led astray, but the Bible predicts this will happen, especially towards the end of the age. “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24). We must test all healing by the ultimate criteria of the Bible and not by visible results.

The Conversion of Multitudes (35)

“And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.” -- The healing of Aeneas had an evangelistic impact. The key word here is “saw.” They saw the man was healed and turned to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The unbelievers saw this man no longer helpless but delivered and free and they could not dispute what had happened. There was an amazing revival because it says “all” in these two cities believed in Christ. When we carry this over into the spiritual realm, nothing has more of an impact for Jesus Christ than a changed life. Unsaved men can mock at their false image of Christ, fight the whole concept of the supernatural, argue about the rightness or wrongness of Christianity, but they cannot deny the fact that when men claim to know Christ their lives are changed. Changed lives, more than any other thing, will cause unsaved men to seek after Christ.

THE RAISING OF DORCAS (Acts 9:36-42)

The Character of Dorcas (36)

“Now in Joppa, there was a certain disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity, which she continually did.” -- There was in Joppa a true disciple of Christ named Dorcas (Tabitha). Her name actually means Gazelle or Antelope and these animals are characterized by grace and charm. Dorcas was a Christian woman who displayed much grace and charm. She was not only a beautiful person on the inside but she was a woman constantly doing good deeds of kindness and charity. She displayed a life of ministry in selfless love, for she was always thinking about others and not herself. Apparently her main gift was helping the poor and needy. Dorcas was involved in a social service to her fellow Christians and her community. She made garments for the needy. Her natural talent was sewing and her spiritual gift was helps. Her gift, in comparison, seems so insignificant when compared to the gifts of Peter. He could preach, teach, lead, heal and even raise the dead, but Dorcas was given ten deft fingers with which to make garments for the poor. Yet, her gift was as important to the body of Christ as was Peter's gifts. Dorcas probably never spoke at a missionary meeting or taught a home Bible class, but she did a lot of wonderful things for people. Dorcas was a true disciple of Christ and she proved it by her good works. The true Christian will have good works flowing from the life.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

“ . . . so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:26b).

Good deeds are the inevitable issue of a living faith. Dorcas' good works were motivated by her love for the Lord Jesus Christ alone. She was a lovely person whom everyone loved.

Many Christians are so fickle and self-centered. They are always looking for some new religious thrill or spiritual experience. They are always asking themselves if their needs are being met but they are little concerned about meeting the needs of other people. Dorcas was ministering and giving herself to others and she had an abundance of friends who loved her.

In the life of Dorcas, we certainly see the need for Christian social work. The true gospel of Christ always brings a social awareness and blessing to the needy. There were no hospitals for the sick or mentally ill before Christ came. The sick were treated as second class citizens and the mentally ill were dealt with like animals. There was no such thing as an orphanage until Jesus came. Orphaned children who were not adopted by relatives in ancient societies were left to die or sold into slavery. Even the Red Cross had a Christian beginning. Christ always makes people conscious of their social responsibilities.

The Condition of Dorcas (37)

“And it came about at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room.” -- Dorcas, quite suddenly and unexpectedly took sick and died. This beautiful life was seemingly cut short and her service was brought to an end. Her spirit and soul went to heaven and her body lay there in the upper room. They had prepared her for burial by washing the body and anointing it with oils and spices so as to keep down the odor of putrefaction.

Dorcas is a picture of the hopelessness of spiritual death. The Bible says that all men before conversion are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Unsaved men are not just sick but dead; not just weak but dead, totally separated from God with no ability or desire to come to Christ. Spiritual death takes many forms. Boredom is a form of death. Sickness is a type of death. Fear and worry are forms of death. Bitterness is a type of death. Spiritually dead men must have spiritual life shot into them by Christ if they are to come alive to God. It is God who quickens (makes alive) the spirit of a man. “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins . . . even when we were dead in our transgressions, (God) made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Eph. 2:1, 5).

The Concern of Dorcas’s Friends (38-39)

“And since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, entreating him, ‘Do not delay to come to us.’ And Peter arose and went with them. And when he had come, they brought him into the upper room, 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.” -- When Dorcas died, her friends wanted her back so they sent for the Apostle Peter who was about ten miles away in Lydda. Perhaps her friends felt that Dorcas’s ministry among the widows was still needed. Whatever, it took great faith for the Christians to send for Peter. They could have said, “What is the use for Dorcas is already dead.” Yet, they believed that Peter could raise Dorcas from the dead. When Peter arrived, he found the widows weeping and having a little fashion show of Dorcas’s work. It must have been an interesting kind of pre-funeral activities.

The Command of Peter (40-41)

“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. And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.” -- The Apostle Peter, as one who had the Apostolic sign gift of miracles, raised Dorcas from the dead. She was restored from the dead. This is a beautiful picture of how Christ takes a sinner who is in a hopeless spiritual condition of death and brings him alive. At the command of Christ, the sinner comes to spiritual life. God quickens and the sinner believes in Christ and is gloriously saved. Every time a person is saved a marvelous miracle takes place which is a greater miracle than raising the dead.

Do you notice how Peter raised Dorcas? He did not do it before a crowd. He sent everyone away. He sought no publicity and no personal glory. His only goal was to glorify Christ. How different was Peter than the so-called modern day faith healers who draw only attention to themselves and to these so-called miracles before thousands.

Another observation is that it must have taken great obedience for Dorcas to come back from the dead. Dorcas’s spirit was in heaven. She had seen the Lord and was getting her first glimpses of heaven when she was called back to earthly life and suffering. Just when she was getting adjusted to heaven, a messenger probably tapped her on the shoulder and said, “Dorcas, the Lord has further need of you.” In obedience to her Lord she came back. Who would ever want to come back to human life and suffering after once tasting heaven? We assume that the Lord had to wipe all the thoughts of heaven from Dorcas’s mind and this must have been some disheartening experience.

The question still may be asked, “Do people get raised from the dead today?” Pentecostals and charismatics make these claims, but they can never be proven to my satisfaction. It is always something which happens in Indonesia, or South Korea or Haiti where it is almost impossible to authenticate. My personal conviction is that Christ does not raise the dead today because this was tied up with the sign-gifts which are no longer in existence. But this I know for sure. God does a far greater miracle than raising the physical dead every time he shoots

spiritual life into an unregenerate sinner. Men come to life as they are quickened by the Spirit. Christ brings Christ-rejecting sinners to spiritual and eternal life through the supernatural new birth. When men and women, boys and girls pass from death to life this is a far greater miracle than what occurred in Dorcas.

The Conversion of Many (42)

“And it became known allover Joppa, and many believed in the Lord .” -- Again these miracles attracted many to become interested in Jesus Christ and they were gloriously saved. When we Christians live like supernaturalists, this will be attractive to the unsaved, and as they see men whose lives are supernaturally changed by Christ, they will be drawn to Christ.

THE OVERCOMING OF PREJUDICE IN PETER (Acts 9:43)

“And it came about that he stayed many days in Joppa with a certain tanner, Simon.” -- Here is another miracle which took place in the heart of Peter. A tanner worked with leather and had to work with the skins of dead animals. A tanner was considered unclean according to Jewish law and he was to be avoided by religious Jews. A tanner was such a social outcast that if a woman found out she married a tanner she could get a divorce from him. A tanner was the lowest thing on the social scale. Yet we are told that Peter as a converted religious Jew stayed in the home of Simon the Tanner. Peter received the victory over an ingrained prejudice in his life. He was bigoted, intolerant and opinionated against tanners as an unsaved Jew but Christ changed his heart towards people, even social outcasts. If the healing of Aeneas was a miracle and the raising of Dorcas a supernatural phenomenon, then victory over prejudice by Peter was an incredible thing. God changed the heart of a man steeped in religion and tradition.

It is a marvelous work of God to save a person deep in sin such as an adulterer, thief, drunkard or drug addict. It is even a more wonderful work of God to save a good man who is filled with pride, self-esteem and self-righteousness. But the greatest work of all is when God saves a religious man. A man who attends church, gives intellectual assent to Christianity and even gives regularly of his time and money to the church, is a man who is trusting in his religious works and not Christ to save him. To save a religious man is almost an impossible task and only God can do it. There is nothing more exciting than to watch a man receive the new birth and then watch this man shed his religious prejudices, traditions and formalisms.

CONCLUSION

Are you an Aeneas? Are you spiritually paralyzed? Has sin made you helplessly lame? You can walk spiritually if you will but trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Are you a Dorcas? Are you aware that you are hopelessly dead in your sin? Christ can impart spiritual life to you and you can come alive.

What must you do to be saved? Arise, trust in Jesus Christ. Exercise faith in Jesus Christ. All you need to do is trust Jesus to save you. Christ heals the troubled, sin-sick soul. Christ makes the dead sinner come alive. Come alive, Mary! Come alive, Bill! Come alive, Jane! Come alive, Tom! Arise, grasp Christ by the hand of faith! Christ will save you from sin and hell the moment you trust Him as Lord and Savior. He will supernaturally save you. He is the Miracle Worker. Arise! Arise! Arise!