

Bold
May 15, 2016
Allen Power

Acts 9:36-43

Today's text is about God empowering Peter to raise a faithful church member from the dead. Opening question: **Why do you think God isn't empowering his leaders to raise people from the dead today?**

To be a sincere follower of Christ you must believe God has the power to perform any miracle He sees fit. But He's God, and He doesn't do anything "on demand." That's the sovereignty of God. Even in the Bible He used this power sparingly.

"Resurrection of the dead was not something God did every day, even then. The Bible records only a few examples of these kinds of resuscitations after death. Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-23), and Elisha raised a Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:32-37). A young man being buried in Elisha's tomb was also raised (2 Kings 13:21). The Gospels record three resuscitations by Jesus during His public ministry (Luke 7:12-15; Mark 5:40-42; John 11:43-44). Paul also raised a young man named Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12)."¹

Just as He used the parting of the Red Sea to make a historic point for Israel in the Old Testament; the New Testament miracles of resurrection were signs and wonders God used to establish His church and draw more people to the gospel.

It's unlikely that you or I will be called upon to be God's instrument to raise someone from the dead. So, what can we learn from this scripture? A lot.

The big idea of this lesson is how the boldness of several of God's servants resulted in the further spread of the gospel, and growth of the church.

Acts 9:36–43 (ESV)

³⁶ Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. ³⁷ In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, “Please come to us without delay.” ³⁹ So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. ⁴⁰ But Peter put them all outside, 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. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴² And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³ And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

- Verse 36: Tabitha, or Dorcas was “full of good works and acts of charity.”
- Admit it, you laugh when you see the name Dorcas. “*What will you name that new baby girl? Dorcas!*” In that time and in a seaport like Joppa where there were both Jews and Gentiles, it was customary to have two names, one Aramaic and one Greek. Dorcas was the Greek translation of Tabitha.
- The name means gazelle. The Hebrews thought it was a beautiful name for a girl because they knew about the Song of Solomon (2:9, 17; 4:5; 7:3.) She may have been known by both names.²
- As a child I recall a Sunday School class called the Dorcas Class. I thought it was funny. Actually it was a class made up of elderly widows and the name was very biblical.
- When you see Dorcas it shouldn’t make you laugh; it should make you smile! Dorcas is symbolic of a woman who lived out her faith using the spiritual gift of mercy to take care of widows and others in need. She lived out 1 John 3:18 (ESV) ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

- In verse 39 the widows tearfully showed Peter the garments and robes Tabitha/Dorcas made by hand for those with nothing to wear. Literally her “handiwork” for the poor. We don’t know her personality. Was she was loud and forceful, or quiet and shy? We DO know this lady met needs!
- **How does meeting needs of people require boldness?**
- Tabitha/Dorcas boldly reached out to help people in need. Proverbs tells us people would fondly celebrate serving, saintly woman like this:

Proverbs 31:30 (ESV)

³⁰ Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Proverbs 10:7 (ESV) also tells us,

- ⁷ The memory of the righteous is a blessing,
- Now, when you see the name Dorcas you’ll remember not to laugh; but to smile!
 - Verse 37: They washed her body but didn’t bury it. That’s strange.
 - Verse 38: They sent to men to get Peter who was nearby.
 - The Jews buried their dead right away. **What do these two verses tell you about the friends of this lady?**
 - Verses 32-35 tell us Peter had just healed a man in nearby Lydda. However, in this case the lady was already dead. It took BOLD FAITH in God’s power for these people to imagine Peter could do anything to help.
 - Is turning to God’s power on behalf of our friends our first response?
 - When you hear of someone in a desperate situation to you immediately take it to God and ask with BOLD FAITH for Him to meet that need? Do you keep asking and keep trusting God to come through.
 - If I’m in crisis, I’d love to have some friends with BOLD FAITH like these!
 - After the bold faith of the friends; we see Peter’s BOLD RESPONSE.
 - **Why do some people feel hesitant or awkward to respond to a death?**
 - **How can we get over that hesitancy? What is the most important way we can respond in a time of death?**

- When people are in need you and I need to BOLDLY RESPOND.
- Verse 40: **What was Peter's first action? Why do you think it was?**
- Peter didn't come to put on a show; he came to be God's instrument. That's a good lesson for you and me!
- With the room cleared of the weeping widows, **what did Peter do next? What does that tell us about how Peter approached this situation? What is the lesson for you and me?**
- Peter didn't come in his own strength, (*"I just healed a man twelve miles down the road, I can handle this!"*) Peter knew God could raise this woman but only if GOD CHOSE TO.
- **Peter had healed some people but he'd never raised someone from the dead. Why do you think he even attempted this?**
- We don't know how or when God impressed upon Peter the fact that he wanted to use him to raise this lady from the dead. Was it before he left Lydda? Was it on the way to Joppa? Was it when he first saw the lady and the impact she had made on her community? We'll never know. What's for sure is that God spoke to Peter and said: "I'm going to use you to do something BOLD today!"
- This is interesting. In verse 40 Peter prays then says "Tabitha, arise."
- Peter was just following the example of His savior. Look at Mark 5.

In Mark 5:40–42 Jesus had been called because a man's daughter was dead:

⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." ⁴² And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement.

- In that passage, Jesus spoke in Aramaic: **talitha cumi** (tah-leeth«ah kōō´mee), an Aramaic sentence that means ‘young girl, arise,’³ In Acts 9:40 Peter said (also in Aramaic): Tabitha cumi; Tabitha arise!
- Just one syllable of difference between those two phrases!
- Wiersbe: *“The parallels in the stories point to Jesus as the Source of both healings. Peter carried on the healing ministry of Jesus in His power.”*⁴
- We’ve seen the BOLD FAITH of the friends, and the BOLD RESPONSE and BOLD FAITH of Peter. Now look at the BOLD WITNESS of this event.
- Verse 42 says: *“...it became known throughout Joppa and many believed in the Lord.”* Notice, it doesn’t say Peter became famous. It says people believed in the Lord. This tells us clearly that the credit went where it always belongs: the credit goes to the source, the Lord!
- BOLD FAITH and BOLD RESPONSE lead to BOLD WITNESS. God uses the bold faith and action of His people to spread the gospel. In other words, BOLD EXPANSION beyond the Jews.
- This last verse, verse 43, is one sentence with an important detail. This is why you can’t rush through scripture. You need to take in every detail.
- Verse 43 says: Peter stayed for many days. By the way, when we’re ministering to people we need to give them as much time as they require. Don’t overstay your welcome but don’t rush either!
- That’s not the detail though. Look at the last two words: *“...a tanner.”* Peter stayed with a man who tanned hides for a living. So what?
- It’s not surprising that a tanner of leather would live near the sea. They used seawater in their trade and there was plenty nearby in Joppa. What WAS surprising was that a Jew like Peter would stay at this man’s house. You see the Jews considered a man who handled the hides of dead animals all day as unclean.
- Wiersbe: *“It is significant that Peter stayed in the home of a tanner, because tanners were considered “unclean” by the Jewish rabbis (see Lev. 11:35–40). God was moving Peter a step at a time from Jewish legalism into the freedom of His wonderful grace.”*⁵

So, What's the Takeaway?

- When people around you are in need do you go in the other direction or do you boldly seek to help? Tabitha simply made garments and met needs. I see examples of this in our own class! What can you do?
- When there are needs we need to be BOLD RESPONDERS.
- We also need to practice BOLD FAITH. When you hear that someone is dealing with sickness, crisis, or even death, do you begin an immediate work of prayer on his or her behalf? Do you put it on a sticky note to remind you to keep it up?
- We need to be prayer warriors who exercise BOLD FAITH.
- Because BOLD FAITH, and BOLD RESPONSE in the face of needs, leads to a BOLD WITNESS that brings people to Christ.

¹ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Commentary Acts 9:36-43*.

² Vincent, M. R. (1887). *Word studies in the New Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 496). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

³ Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper's Bible dictionary* (1st ed., p. 1016). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

⁴ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Commentary Acts 9:36-43*.

⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 444). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.