

Text: Acts 9:31-43

Title: Peace and Progress in the Church

Truth: God cleared Saul from the path of progress for the church, and a period of solid growth occurred in numerous cities.

Date/Location: 1/13/2013 and 12/20,27/2023 at FBC

Introduction

The first $\frac{3}{4}$ or so of Acts 9 recorded Saul's conversion and preaching of Jesus Christ. A foremost persecutor of the faith was turned into a foremost advocate.

I. Rest for the Churches, v. 31

- A. After the conversion of Saul, the persecution movement suffered a huge setback. It lost a lot of steam for the moment.
- B. This came at the same time as there was a new Roman governor, one less tolerant of Jewish trouble-making than Pilate. There was also a situation where Emperor Caligula wanted to set up a statue of himself in Herod's temple with the power of two legions of Roman troops, and the Jews were highly resistant to this. Agrippa brokered peace, and became "king" over the region until 44 A.D. when he died suddenly.
- C. This reminds us that a secular government can be good for the Christian churches—if it punishes true criminals and restrains sinners from running amok. This allows the church to have a peaceful existence. And *that* is what we are to be praying about, as directed in 1 Timothy 2:1-2.
- D. The verse gives us several details:
 - 1. A wide area of churches were impacted: Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Although the Jerusalem church started out very large, I suspect most churches in the region were much smaller.
 - 2. The impact was significant: peace. They were no longer afraid for their lives.

3. The relief from persecution allowed them to focus on edification. They were built up in the faith, solidified in belief, learned in doctrine,
 4. The churches also experienced the fear of the Lord. Remember Acts 2:43, and 5:5, 11. See also Acts 19:17.
 5. In addition the churches were living with the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised “another comforter” and that is indeed what the churches experienced.
 6. Finally, the text tells us that the churches were multiplied. There was growth. Notice this pattern: In Acts 6:7 there was a problem, then growth. Here again, the problem of Saul, then growth after that was resolved. There are “seasons” in the life of the church. If we find ourselves in a season of peace, we need to do everything we can to take advantage of that for the sake of the gospel. Not for the sake of our personal comfort!
- E. Note that the Great commission (Acts 1:8) is well underway with the local areas covered: Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and Galilee. The “uttermost” parts of the earth is next.
- F. God did not abandon the church and does not do so today either. Persecution can purify and prune so that growth occurs.

II. Healing of Aeneas, v. 32-35

- A. Peter was on a preaching tour and visited saints in a church at Lydda. The stilling of persecution made it easier for him to travel about, as it should be in a free society.
- B. Lydda is probably the same as Lod mentioned in 1 Chron. 8:12, a day’s journey from Joppa, near modern Tel Aviv.
- C. Aeneas was a *certain man* but Luke does not mention whether or not he was a follower of Jesus. He was paralyzed and as a result was bedridden for eight years.
- D. Note that it was *not* Peter who healed the man; Jesus Christ did it. Peter was a mediator in the healing ministry of Jesus Christ. Peter makes the announcement, at which point the word of the

Lord took effect. It was like the powerful word of God that created the world or the word of the Jesus who healed and raised people from the dead. The effects of the healing were immediate and complete.

- E. Others in the region became believers when they saw the miracle-man. Based on the prior context of the entire book, and Peter’s pattern of preaching like His Lord, we are well within reason to believe that they heard the message of Christ from Peter and responded to it. They did not respond solely because of the miracle. Miracles do not have truth content that can save. They verify a messenger and the God of the messenger, and the power of God, but they cannot save.

III. Raising of Tabitha (Dorcas)

- A. Tabitha (Dorcas) was a VERY good Christian lady, a bit different than the “certain man” Aeneas. She was “full of” charitable deeds. That is exactly how Christians should be. In Greek class, we would pronounce her names Tah-bee-thá (her Hebrew name) and Dor-kás (her Greek name).
- B. She became ill and died, which even good people do. But the Lord was going to use her death—as a well-known person, with a well-publicized death, to have a community-wide witness. The vast majority of the time, God does not resurrect someone from the dead immediately. But He can and does still use people’s death as a witness to those around.
- C. Her body was prepared for the mourners and eventually for burial. At the same time, the disciples hoped that Peter might assist them by working a miracle to raise her from the dead.
- D. (38) Two men were dispatched to Peter, probably two for safety and encouragement on the 10- to 12-mile journey. The text does detail how they explained the situation to Peter, but that is easy enough understand from the context. They had a lot of faith, but they still wanted Peter to hurry!

From the human viewpoint, the miracle does seem “harder” the longer a person has been dead. But from God’s perspective, that thought is a bit humorous. A miracle is no harder for God if the

person has been dead four hours or four days (Lazarus) or 400 years or 4,000 years, as will be the case with some who have died and will be resurrected that many years afterward.

Anyway, Peter hurried to the neighboring city, and the people presented ample evidence of Tabitha's good deeds.

E. In verse 40, Peter prayed. Perhaps he asked the Lord what HIS will was, namely if He would have her to be raised from the dead, or if He did not want that. It is not always God's will to heal—think of Trophimus (2 Tim. 4:20). Remember when the disciples faced a difficult situation in Mark 9:14-29 with a stubborn demon? The Lord emphasized prayer was necessary to cast out such a beast.

But after praying, Peter spoke some words to Tabitha and she opened her eyes, sat up, and got out of the bed.

This follows the pattern of Mark 5:35-43, when Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus. Peter was one of the three disciples present at that time.

F. The miracle again was used as a witness throughout the city of Joppa and many believed on the Lord.

G. This sets up Peter's lodging at Joppa in preparation for God's calling him to another place—Caesarea. God arranged everything in accordance with His providence so that the events of chapters 10 and 11 would occur at just the right time.

H. The fact that Peter stays in the home of a tanner is a notable since that is an unclean job—working with dead animal bodies. It is probably also smelly! Maybe Peter was beginning to see that people were more important than dietary laws. More on that when we study Acts 10.

IV. Connection to Jesus's Ministry

A. Jesus continued His work in the world. Remember Acts 1:1 where Luke explained that his prior missive that Jesus began to do and teach things.

- B. The implication is that Jesus now continues to do and teach things, through the apostles. We find out later, Acts 1:8, that they are to do this ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- C. Jesus has not finished using Peter. As he did his itinerant preaching, Peter was still “feeding the lambs” (John 21:15-17). He followed the Lord’s practice of itinerancy to cover a lot of ground.

Conclusion

We cannot do the healing and resurrection miracles, as God ordained for that to stop early in the church era after the foundation of the church was well-established. But there are other things we are called to do, therefore *able* to do, and should focus on doing. We might think we are powerless like the paralyzed man was powerless to get up and make his bed, but when the command comes, and obedience is begun, God will supply the needed power. Specifically for us, we are to be obedient in preaching in the name of Jesus, showing that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God.

To the extent that we do “benevolent works” toward people, we must do them with a purpose—the spread of the gospel, not merely to be force for social good.

Let us thank God for a time of peace in our part of the world, and pray that the church will be edified, walk in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Spirit, and be multiplied.

MAP