

Acts 9:32-43: Do You Matter to God or Is He Just Interested in VIPs?

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I. Introduction

God has done great things for great men and women throughout history. Does He do such things for the average Joe/Jane? Does He consider them just as important? Does He see the plight of those considered least among us? Does He go out of His way to rescue them? Does He expect anything extraordinary out of them before He'll help them or is simple faith all He looks for?

II. Acts 9:32-43: Does God Care About the Little People or Just VIPs?

9:32-35: Peter heals Aeneas, after Paul's conversion, he becomes such an effective evangelist for the Lord in Damascus and Jerusalem that two attempts are made on his life. The disciples help him escape both times, the last time putting him on a boat for Tarsus, his home town. But then the story shifts to Peter. The last time we saw Peter was in Samaria. He went there to lay hands on them so that they would receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8). Why does the story shift to Peter? Because in Acts 10 Luke will reveal an important event that only Peter can accomplish. So Luke's informing us of the events that led up to this important mission.

Up to now, we haven't seen the apostles focus their attention beyond Jerusalem. Others like Philip have gone out, but now Peter the apostle goes. By this time the church has grown all the way to the coast thanks to Philip's ministry. As Peter visits various parts outside of Jerusalem, he comes to Lydda, where he finds a man named Aeneas who's been paralyzed and bedridden for 8 yrs. Peter proceeds to heal him by saying, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." Notice who's doing the healing: it's Jesus, just as the book announced in the beginning (Acts 1:1). Through the apostles, Jesus is continuing to do what He did before He was crucified (Matthew 4:23). Thus, His apostles and others were empowered by Jesus to bring the Goodnews to the sick and hurting. Notice too that he told Aeneas to get up and make his bed, why? It's the exclamation point on this man's healing, i.e., for 8 years Aeneas has been bedridden. Others have cared for him. But now, he's going to be able to care for himself. The result is that all the Jewish folks who lived in the plain of Sharon believed in Jesus Christ when they saw the miracle He had done for this man (Lydda and the plain of Sharon were mostly inhabited by Gentiles whom had not yet been ushered into the Church. So the "all" refers to the Jewish community in this area).

9:36-43: Peter heals Tabitha, nearby in Joppa, which is on the coast north-west of Jerusalem near modern-day Tel Aviv, there was a woman named Tabitha—an Aramaic word that means "gazelle." She also had a Greek name, Dorcas—the Greek word for "gazelle." The Greek version of her name may've been due to the fact that she lived in a mostly Gentile area. Tabitha was a woman full of good works and charitable deeds. This means that she was faithful before the Lord in two things: making clothes for widows and giving money to the poor. This was God's calling on her life and she did it faithfully. But she became sick and died. According to Jewish law, a body within the walls of Jerusalem had to be buried by sundown. Outside Jerusalem, the body could remain unburied up to 3 days and 3 nights. So they decide to wash her body and place it in the upper room. Since the disciples in Joppa heard about Peter healing Aeneas, they send for him, urgently imploring him to come. They're probably hoping that Peter can do something before the 3 days are up and they have to bury her.

Peter goes and they bring him to the upper room, where all the widows were in tears. They show Peter all the dresses and garments Tabitha made for them; these women are wearing the evidence of Tabitha's faithfulness to the Lord. Peter then does something similar to what His Lord did in Mark 5:40-41. Peter put everybody out, knelt down and prayed. Then he looked at the body and said, "Tabitha, arise." She opened her eyes, saw Peter and sat up. Peter grabbed her by the hand and lifted her up. He then called all the saints and widows and presented her alive. As in Lydda, all of Joppa found out about this astounding miracle and many believed in Jesus. The many who believe is a reference to the Jewish community that lived in Joppa, another mostly Gentile city. The story ends with Peter staying in the house of another Jewish believer named Simon, who was a tanner. Why does Luke mention Simon's occupation? He's setting things up for what will happen with Peter in Acts 10 and the issue of clean vs. unclean. According to the Law, if you touched a dead carcass, you were rendered unclean (Leviticus 11:39-40). Well as a tanner that's Simon's job, to touch dead animals all day long. This means that he was constantly unclean. Yet Peter doesn't think twice about staying with him. This shows that the Lord has already begun to break down Peter's notion of what is clean and unclean. Instead of seeing an unclean man who touches dead animals all day long, Peter saw a brother in the Lord who opened his home to him. So he gladly stays with him.

What does Aeneas, Tabitha, Zacchaeus, and you have in common? The Bible contains God's grand story. In it are dramatic and important events that involve key individuals who had an impact on history and are famous to this day. So why would God include the stories of two seemingly unimportant characters named Aeneas and Tabitha? If God took the time to tell you their stories, He's telling you that they're not footnotes to history; instead God considers them as important as anyone else He includes in His Word. After all, Jesus didn't just die for the VIPs of the world, He died for everyone (1 John 2:2). When Jesus came, He went to the ones considered least in society (Mark 2:15). The least are not least to God and neither should they be to us.

And what does God consider a life of faith? Do you have to be a missionary to PNG to deserve God's attention and healing? Or can a simple dress-maker get access to God's awesome power (cf. Ephesians 1:19)? What does God look for whether a great apostle or a dress-maker? He wants to know this: will you be faithful in the lot He's given you? If He gives you dress-making and helping the poor as your life's ministry, will you do it faithfully? Are you a Tabitha? Do you think God sees your work? Do you think God hears your cries for help when you need Him?

What is God saying to you about Himself, you, and His relationship with Him (Luke 19:1-10)?

III. Conclusion

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing him the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put 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. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.