

Acts 9:32-43

(New International Version 1984, ©1984)

Aeneas and Dorcas

³² As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴ "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas^[a]), who was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 9:36](#) Both *Tabitha* (Aramaic) and *Dorcas* (Greek) mean *gazelle*.
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Introduction.

When John Wimber became a Christian back in the 1960s, he came to Christ as a part of the Jesus Movement in southern California with no background in the church growing up. The Lord changed his life in a remarkable way, and he became very passionate about following Jesus as he read the New Testament day and night during the early weeks after his conversion.

One Sunday he wandered into a church, and after the worship service, he went up to the pastor and said, "Hey, your sermon made me really think, and the music was great and all, but when do we get to do the cool stuff?"

The pastor looked puzzled and said, "The cool stuff?"

Wimber replied, "Yeah, the cool stuff. You know, like healing people and raising them from the dead. The cool stuff that I've been reading about in the New Testament. When do we get to do the cool stuff?"

The pastor thought for a moment, and then he answered, "I'm sorry, we don't do the cool stuff here. We talk about it, but we don't do it. You might try another church down the street. But I'm not sure if they do the cool stuff either."

Why is it that the church of Jesus Christ in North America is reluctant to ask God to do the "cool stuff," as Wimber called it? What exactly does the Bible teach on the subject of healing, and how are we to apply it to our lives today? This morning I hope to address these questions.



I. The Power of God to Heal.

For most of chapter 9, Luke has been writing about the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who later became the apostle Paul, and the author tells us about the early phases of Saul's ministry. However, in verse 32 Luke takes us back to the leading figure in the early church, the apostle Peter.

Peter is reintroduced in this passage as he traveled around Palestine. You will recall that previously when persecution had broken out, all the apostles decided to remain in Jerusalem (8:1), but now that the church was enjoying a time of peace (since Saul's conversion) they were free to leave the city without fear. The purpose of Peter's travels was 2-fold: to share the gospel; and to visit new followers of Christ in order to teach and encourage them. On one of these tours, Peter traveled along the western seacoast of Palestine where two particular miraculous events took place in the cities of Lydda and Joppa respectively.

While in Lydda, Peter met a paralytic named Aeneas who had been bedridden for 8 years. The apostle spoke to him and said, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat." Immediately, the man got up, and he was healed. The news of his healing spread throughout the surrounding area, and when people saw him and heard the testimony of his healing, many turned to the Lord themselves.

The passage also tells us that in Joppa there lived a woman named Tabitha, or Dorcas (the Greek translation of her Aramaic name). Both names were the respective words in their language for "gazelle." Luke describes her as a very special woman who had a heart for the poor and a talent for sewing. Tabitha grew ill, and she died. Her body was washed in preparation for burial and placed in an upper room. They sent two people to Lydda, 12 miles away, who pleaded with Peter to come and help. When the apostle arrived, he sent the mourners out of the room, got down on his knees and prayed. Turning to the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, Peter took her by the hand, and he helped her to her feet. She was raised from the dead.

This passage which talks about the healing of Aeneas and the raising of Tabitha reminds us that there is healing power in the name of Jesus. Part of the ministry that Christ began in the world and His disciples continued was a ministry of miracles. Death and disease entered the world as a result of the Fall, but Christ came to reverse the curse and to bring healing and new life to people.

We must sadly admit that most of us by and large do not expect much from God. We give Him credit for all the ordinary and even special blessings in our lives, but most of us have a pretty low expectation for God to do anything great for us. Even though we pray, "Lord, heal so-and-so," if God actually answered our prayer and did so miraculously, we would probably fall over in a dead faint! Jesus' word to His disciples long ago all too often applies to us today, "O, you of little faith."

This passage makes clear that our God is a God of miracles, and it is His desire to work supernaturally on many occasions in the lives of His children. As I learned at the Lausanne Congress in Cape Town last fall, God is still doing miracles around the world.

II. What Do We Do When God Chooses Not To Heal?

Have you ever had to deal with unanswered prayer, or, even worse, have you had God say "no" to your prayer? I know I have. There are many stories I could tell you of faithful people who have happy endings to their prayer for God's healing power. Amazing things have happened; I've witnessed them myself. But I can also tell you of many people who have had folks praying for them with equal fervency and faith, and nevertheless they continued to suffer, and some of them died.

Our son Jason suffered from asthma growing up. Once, a number of years ago, we took him to a leading Christian figure who has the gift of healing. I had personally seen God heal a number of people



through the ministry of this man. He prayed over our son, asking that God would heal him, but the next day Jason went into a terrible asthma attack. He actually got worse after we prayed for his healing!

My father died 35 years ago after a massive heart attack, and I was the one who found him when I came home late one night after a date. I tried to revive him, but it was too late. He had been dead for a few hours. After I called the authorities and our family doctor, I went back into my bedroom and knelt down beside my bed. I prayed to God with all my heart and all the faith I could muster and said, "Lord Jesus, you raised people from the dead in your day, and I know you are able to raise my father, too. I pray that you will raise him this night for a spiritual purpose to your glory." When I walked back into the den where his body lay, I was confident that I would see my father alive again. I knew Christ was able. But when I walked in, I discovered he was as dead as ever. God said "no" in answer to that prayer.

If God is all-powerful and He can heal people, like Aeneas, if He can raise them from the dead, like Tabitha, what are we to make of those times when His answer is "no"? How do we make sense of it all and find a way to move forward in faith? And why don't we see more miraculous healings like this today? I'm convinced one reason people are reluctant to pray for healing is they don't want to be disappointed. They are not sure their faith can stand what feels like a rejection from God.

In 2 Corinthians 12, we are given a picture of a person of faith who prayed diligently for healing, but to whom God answered "no" in response to his request. The apostle Paul struggled with a "thorn in the flesh", as he called it. We're not sure what the physical problem was, but it is clear that the illness was debilitating, and Paul felt that it was limiting his effectiveness in ministry.

Three times he asked the Lord to remove this thorn, to heal him, but three times the Lord answered "no." Then God added, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in your weakness*" (2 Cor. 12:9). Reflecting on this, Paul said that his human weakness provided the opportunity for God to demonstrate His divine power, and Paul's physical illness kept him humble before the Lord and before others.

The reality is that the most faithful believer still gets sick, and even our most fervent prayers are not always answered in the way we hope. Even with Peter in Lydda and Joppa, only Aeneas and Tabitha were healed. How many other sick people lived in those towns? Sometimes, the true measure of faith is how we respond to the "no's" we receive from God, trusting that He has a good purpose in it all for us.

The best way I can make sense of what the Bible has to say about these things is that physical healing is intended by God to be temporary witness to the inbreaking power of the kingdom of God in this world, and we should ask for the Lord to do a great work and demonstrate His power with boldness. I met believers from around the world who were doing this very thing. However, we should never yearn for that more than we yearn for God Himself and to be in the center of His will. If our heavenly Father believes we can glorify Him more in a state of illness than a state of health, like the apostle Paul, then our calling is to accept even this as a gift from His hand, and we should use our weakness to lean upon God in a new way.

Healing is faith's reward on many occasions, because faith is confident that when people have done their best and failed, the power of God in Christ is inexhaustible. God is revealed in Scripture as having limitless power and resources, and He regularly demonstrates His strength on behalf of His people. Yet, as Christians we still live out our lives in a fallen world, and we await the time when we will experience the full "redemption of our bodies," as Paul says (Rm. 8:23), when the Lord returns. In this life, we can enjoy substantial healing, but not total healing. In this life with can enjoy substantial victory over sin, but not total victory – not until Jesus comes again.



III. My personal story.

I've talked a lot in a theological way about what the Bible has to say with regard to these matters, but how do we put it into practice, and what does this look like in real life? I want to share with you a bit autobiographically. This is not intended to say, "Look at me! I've got it all together!", but to provide an example of a struggling soul who has tried to be faithful to Christ and live out the teachings of Scripture.

When I was 25, I developed rheumatoid arthritis during my first year of marriage to Lorie. She was probably thinking to herself, "Oh boy, I've gotten damaged goods!" I noticed a gradual but increasing pain in my hip that shot down my right leg which eventually crippled me. I remember the Sunday morning Lorie had to dress me because I was in so much pain. Eventually, I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, because the blood tests indicated the possibility of the disease, and I responded to the anti-inflammatory drugs.

After months of no physical exercise, once I got on the meds I rejoiced at being able to run and play basketball again, and I felt like a kid again. However, there were side-effects to the drugs I was taking, and eventually these began to have a debilitating effect on my body as well. By this time, Lorie and I were in Washington, DC, when I was a pastor in a church there. I was also seeing a rheumatologist who was a Christian and had been a missionary in Africa. In consultation with him, I approached the senior pastor of my church and the Session and asked them to lay hands on me, anoint me with oil, after the pattern in James 5, and pray for my healing. The doctor supported my decision, and after the elders prayed over me, I began to back off my medication. The pain was gone, and I was healed. Over the last 30+ years, I have experienced only minor pain in my hip on very rare occasions, and an Advil has been sufficient to address the pain. I feel like I experienced a miracle of God's healing, and I praise His name for it!

However, about 5 years ago I had another physical problem which was quite a puzzle. On a Monday, I noticed a pain in my ankle. It felt like I had sprained it, even though there had been no event that would have caused this kind of pain. By the time I returned home from a committee meeting the next day, I was in a crisis. (Now, some of you may be saying, "Oh, that explains it. Committee meetings can be a real pain!") I called my doc, somewhat in a panic, because I was leaving the next day for a denominational meeting. Eventually, I was on crutches and unable to walk without a limp.

Over the next 5 weeks, they took x-rays, I tried different drugs, they did an MRI, they gave me a cortisone injection, they drew blood, but no one could quite figure it out. I remember coming to a point when I realized that there was a chance I might never run or play basketball again, and I have to confess I slipped into a bit of depression over it. It was a time of testing and leaning on God, because it meant losing something very dear to me. That may sound silly to some of you, but I know those in our congregation who love sports understand what I'm talking about.

They one Sunday, I went to a service for healing prayer at my church. Elders there also anointed me with oil, laid hands on me and prayed. I have to be honest and say that nothing much improved after that for a couple of weeks. However, one day I felt strength in my ankle and an absence of pain unlike I had experienced in quite some time. Gradually, the pain left and I was able to run again and resume playing the sports I love.

Now, to what should I attribute the improvement in the ankle? Was it the healing prayer? Was it the cortisone injection? Was it just a virus that attacked the joint, and it worked its way out? Is the relief only temporary, and it will reoccur? Has something gone into remission, or have I been healed? I'm not exactly sure, but I do know God is the called the Great Physician in Scripture, and whenever



healing occurs, whether it is as a result of medical treatment, prayer, or a spontaneous miracle, God is at work to bring healing to body, mind and spirit. It is for our good, and it is for His glory.

Conclusion.

God can be glorified by healing us of physical disease, but He can also be glorified by sustaining us in the midst of suffering. The Lord is more concerned with what is happening inside us, in our spirits, than He is with what is happening in our physical bodies. One relates to the other, but God is always more concerned with the interior of the soul, which will last forever, than our outward flesh and bones, which will one day pass away.

Wade Boggs was an All Star third baseman who used to play for the Boston Red Sox. A friend of mine worked as a chaplain to the team, and he told me that for the longest time Wade had no interest in spiritual things. Even when his world was shattered by a moral scandal involving a woman other than his wife that was in all the papers, he still had no interest in God. However, one winter Wade's sister was miraculously healed of MS, and as a result he made a promise to God that he would turn his life over to the Lord. Wade began to attend chapel with the team, and he started coming to the Friday bible study.

Wade Boggs came to Christ because of the miracle of healing in his sister's life. But I would suggest that the real miracle here was not the healing of the MS; it was the healing of Wade's heart. God is more concerned with what happens in us than He is with what happens to us. Physical healing is only for a season, but the healing of the soul will last for eternity.

Do you need healing in your body today? Ask God for His power to heal. Do you need healing in your heart today? Look to Jesus, for God has the power to heal that, too. Amen.

