



**Acts – Can I get a Witness?
Wk. 30 Witnessing God Work
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Thinking back over what you've studied in this journey through Acts, we see the early church experience intense persecution following the stoning of Stephen:

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Acts 8:1, ESV

However, God used that season of persecution to get the attention of Saul on the road to Damascus, and redeemed the greatest persecutor of the early church by bringing him to saving faith in Jesus Christ. God did the impossible, and Saul, or Paul as we also know him, began proclaiming the good news of the gospel rather than persecuting the church, then ends up facing persecution himself as he had to escape Damascus rather than be killed.

Then we arrive at the good news of Acts 9:31 where you finished last week:

So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

Acts 9:31, ESV

What we see in the previous verses shows us that God redeemed the trials, that only lasted for a season, to spread the good news of the gospel, and then He restored peace. He did the impossible, and his name was proclaimed.

Acts 9:32-43, ESV

³² Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. ³⁴ And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. ³⁵ And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

³⁶ Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas.^[a] 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^[a] 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.

Because peace has come upon the church, the apostles are able to travel around and visit the various churches. This is good, because it helps keep everyone on the same page in terms of doctrine and belief. Peter is able to visit the church at Lydda. Lydda was a town in the tribe of Benjamin about 20 miles west of Jerusalem not very far from the Mediterranean Sea.

Peter goes to Lydda and finds a man Aeneas who has been bedridden for 8 years. Peter proclaims healing for him in the name of Jesus Christ and the man gets up and walks.

4 Truths for the Believer:

1. The Christian Life is not promised as an easy life.

We have in this story 2 examples of difficult trials that were outside of the control of the believers. The first part of the narrative brings us to a man named Aeneas who has been paralyzed and bedridden for 8 years. We don’t know how this happened, or even why. We just know that he was stuck in the bed for 8 years.

In our world today, being paralyzed is bad, but we still have options. We have wheelchairs and cars that can be equipped for wheelchairs, where people who are paralyzed can still drive with pedals on the steering wheel. But think about what it must have been like for this man, stuck in a bed for 8 years! That could not have been easy. The way this passage is written, he is counted among the saints at Lydda, yet he’s in this terrible situation. He’s probably heard of the healings that Jesus did, even that Peter and John have been apart of, yet he’s still stuck in his bed.

Then we learn about Dorcas, who’s a hard worker, a kind and benevolent member of the church. She gets sick and dies! That certainly is a terrible thing for the church. The Christian life is not easy. We aren’t promised that everything will be perfect for us. It certainly was not for these two people or the family of faith that surrounds them.

2. Our strength is limited by our circumstances

The second truth that we discover in this story is that there are some circumstances that we have no power to change. The man couldn’t just make himself be able to walk again. He had no strength, no power to do that in himself. The believers in Joppa only did what they knew to do given the circumstance of Tabitha’s death. They washed her body and prepared her for burial. They wept and mourned because this was a great loss to their

church family. But in their own strength, they could not change the circumstance. She was dead, and so they did things that people do when someone dies. Their strength to do anything was limited by the circumstance of her death.

We need to understand this truth. There are some circumstances that we can make a choice to work and change. For instance, if we are unemployed, we can apply for jobs and work to make something happen. Even then we're limited by whether or not people want to hire us, or whether or not someone else is better qualified. Our world, our culture, would tell us that we should just pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, that we can be the change we want to see in the world. But what we learn from these two encounters is that sometimes, circumstances just are what they are, and we are powerless to do anything other than accept them. That's what we see in both of these stories.

3. Pessimism is not a believer's story

Enter Peter. He recognized the situations. But he also saw beyond the circumstances to the God who is on the throne. And so, instead of pessimism, instead of just accepting the circumstances, Peter believed in faith and asked God for a miracle. But this was faith built upon what he had experienced:

- He saw Jesus heal many people.
- He saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead.
- He saw Jesus crucified, buried, and then raised again to life.
- He saw Jesus ascend to Heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father.
- He saw the Holy Spirit come upon the disciples in power, bringing proclamation of the Word of God.
- He saw people come to faith in Jesus through the preaching of that Word.
- AND, he had heard Jesus say this:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me^[e] anything in my name, I will do it.

John 14:12-14, ESV

But Peter was not just a wildly positive person. His lack of pessimism in trials was actually rooted in the belief that God was at work, and could and would redeem all things for His glory and for our good. Paul believed this too:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28, ESV

Perhaps it was out of the truth of these lived experiences that Peter penned his first letter to the early church. We can certainly see echoes of this idea in 1 Peter 1:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:6-7, ESV

What Peter is teaching here is that God tests and proves my faith.

Verse 7 – “the tested genuineness of your faith” – did you know that God is proving to you that you are saved as you endure trials and continue to praise Him through persecution. It reminds me of what James wrote at the beginning of his letter to the early church:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James 1:2-4, ESV

4. Jesus is alive and active

In contrast to our strength, which is limited and affected by trials and circumstances, Jesus is all-powerful, and still able to do all that he did during His earthly ministry.

How should we live?

1. Trusting God, not our abilities

We remember that our abilities are limited. Scripture teaches us that:

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5, ESV

But God is not limited. He is all-knowing, all-powerful, and always good. Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler in Mark 10? After Jesus said it was impossible for the rich to be saved, his disciples were astonished and asked, then who can be saved?

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God.”

Mark 10:27, ESV

Peter had experienced failure on more than one occasion. He slipped beneath the waves while walking to Jesus on the water. He denied Christ three times before his resurrection. The disciples weren't able to cast out a demon, even in the name of Jesus. Peter remembered what it was like to fail. So why was he so willing to speak the impossible in both of these situations? Because he trusted God, not his own abilities.

2. Believing our Sovereign God can do the impossible

Instead of pessimism, we are to be the kind of people that believe in the sovereignty and mighty power of our Great God.

3. Respond in faith to God's Work

We see in verse 35, following the healing of Aeneas, we read this:

And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Acts 9:35, ESV

And then, after Dorcas is raised from the dead, we see that many people believed in the Lord.

What we see from this is that the work of God leads to people coming to faith in Christ. So one of the things we need to understand is that God does the work He does in order to bring people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. These stories are not just about healing a man who was paralyzed or raising a matriarch of the church from the dead. It was about revealing the power of God to do all things that people might respond in faith.

4. Make known God's mighty deeds

Verse 42 tells us that "it became known" that Tabitha was raised from the dead. How do you think it became known? The people of the church told it, and used it to introduce others to the awesome power of our God. They used these supernatural events to witness of His greatness, and introduce people to Jesus. Peter proclaimed the importance of us doing just that in his first letter to the early church:

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

1 Peter 3:13-17, ESV

I will not let fear or worry rule my life.

...for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

2 Timothy 1:7, ESV

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

1 John 4:18, ESV

...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7, ESV

I am dedicated to the Lordship of Christ.

I will daily submit myself to Him. I will live my life to His glory. I will make decisions asking the question, "Will doing this bring glory or shame to the name of Jesus?"

I am prepared to answer questions about my faith.

Peter is specific regarding what each believer needs to be prepared to do. As Christians were arrested for their participation in the early church or interacted with non-believers in the public arena, they would need to defend the faith. Specifically, Peter tells them that their defense would be in response to "anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." Peter is not calling the Christians to attend just one evangelism training seminar. Rather, his expectation is that as a result of a Christ-centered life, the believers will be ready to defend the faith, no matter their life stage, length of time as a believer, or the situation in which the question is asked.

To truly be prepared in the Christian life to give the reason for the hope that we have, we must have hope. We must walk with Christ. We must adore Him. Our study of the Bible must not be academic, but relational. We must read, memorize and study Scripture because it teaches us about Jesus and we want to grow closer to Him.

These verses are not meant to be a call to debate non-Christians. Peter is writing that as Christians, we must honor Christ, and as we honor Him we will be given opportunities to talk to a skeptical world about Him, so honor Him in your heart and be ready.

How are we to share the gospel?

I show respect to others in the answers I give.

With gentleness. Jesus was gentle, showing people the love and mercy of God.
With respect. All people are created in the image of God, and as such deserve respect. This does not mean that we have to agree with or respect other religions, but we do have to listen to people, and respect where they are coming from so that they know that we really care about them, and are not just trying to add numbers to our church or religion.

With a good conscience. When we walk away from an evangelistic opportunity, we should have a clear conscience. That means we should know that we tried to share the gospel, that we respected them, and were gentle in the way that we shared with them.
What is the HOPE that we have?
It is Jesus.

My reputation glorifies Christ.

Notice that Peter says this in several different ways. First, he says we are to be gentle and respectful in our defense of the hope that we have. Second, he says that we should have a good conscience, meaning that every time we walk away from an encounter with a non-believer, we must know that we have represented Christ well. Your reputation as a Christ-follower should be such that even when people try to speak evil against you, they will be shamed, not because you can out-debate them, but because their words are clearly untrue.

Why are we to be gentle and respectful?

Because people will slander us for believing in Jesus.

Our good behavior reflects directly on our Savior. People will exalt the name of Jesus if they see His people acting with love and in obedience to His word. Conversely, people will curse the name of Jesus if they see us acting in defiance to what His Word commands.

Ultimately, we desire that Christ be exalted, which means that all who oppose Him must be brought to shame. Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that **every knee will bow, and every**



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tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.