

April 28, 2024

The Acts of the Apostles
XIII. Jesus Christ Heals You
Acts 9:32-43

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During His earthly ministry, Jesus had given His disciples power and authority to cast out demons and to cure diseases. He had even said to them that the works which He had done, they would do also. And that is what we see in our passage this morning – Peter, in fact, specifically recreating two of Jesus’ healings. Jesus had healed a paralyzed man after the man’s four friends had lowered him down through the ceiling.¹ This morning Peter comes across a paralyzed man and, like Jesus, heals him. Even the language is similar. Jesus had told the man He had healed to, “*Rise, pick up your bed and go home.*”² Peter tells Aeneas, the man he heals, to “*Rise and make your bed.*”

And were that not miracle enough, then Peter performs an even greater one of Jesus’ miracles – raising someone from the dead. Jesus had raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead – having first cleared everyone out of the room except for Peter, James, and John.³ Then He had spoken to the girl, saying, “*Child, arise.*”⁴ And she had immediately done so. Peter is called upon to raise Tabitha, also known as Dorcas. He shoos everyone out of the room, prays, and then says to her what he had heard Jesus say, “*Tabitha, arise.*” And immediately she does so. Just as Jesus had said, the works that He had done, the disciples would do also.

But I think the meaning of these two healings for us this morning lies less in what Peter does than in what Peter says – particularly what he says to Aeneas before he heals him, words which are implied also by his prayer before healing Dorcas. He says to Aeneas, not “*I heal you*” – but rather, “*Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you.*” For that same reason he prays before raising Dorcas – it is not Peter who heals her, but Jesus Christ. “*Jesus Christ heals you.*” We see this also in the fact that Peter tells both Aeneas and Dorcas to “rise” – the very same word used to describe Jesus Himself rising from the dead. “*Jesus Christ heals you, rise*” – meaning for us this morning simply this: that Easter is not over. We might have celebrated Easter four weeks ago, but it is not over. Jesus may have risen from the dead two thousand years ago, but His resurrection is not over. For He is still raising us up – from out of our sickness and sorrow into new life, and from out of our death and the grave into eternal life. “*Jesus Christ heals you,*” says Peter, “*Arise.*” Because Jesus Christ is healing us, healing this world, still.

“*Jesus Christ heals you.*” We make a big mistake when we assume that such healing works of Jesus Christ can only be found in the form of miracles. True miracles are rare, but they were rare in Peter’s day also. We read of only a very few in the New Testament, outside of the earthly

ministry of Jesus. But the healing work of Jesus Christ has never been limited to miracles. Jesus Christ heals us in all sorts of ways, from all manner of maladies.

Think, for example, of the healing power He has placed within our bodies themselves – our immune systems, which He created, are a world of miracle healings unto themselves. We get over a cold and think nothing of it – but it is Jesus we have to thank for giving our bodies the capacity to get over a cold. Or think of the great healing power Jesus Christ works through modern medicine – yet another thing we often take for granted, but which is nothing less than the working of Jesus Christ through physicians and nurses and technicians and medications. There is a wonderful passage in the Apocrypha – which we Protestants do not accept as Scripture, but do consider useful to read – there is a wonderful passage in the Apocrypha, Sirach chapter 38, which speaks of both physicians and medicines as specifically being gifts of God’s healing to us:

*Honor the physician with the honor due him . . .
for the Lord created him;
for healing comes from the Most High . . .
The Lord created medicines from the earth,
and a sensible man will not despise them.⁵*

“Jesus Christ heals you.”

But He heals us still, not just in body, but also – and maybe even more importantly – in spirit. For the sickness, sorrow, and sufferings of the heart and mind and spirit can paralyze us in life just as badly as the affliction of the body paralyzed Aeneas in his legs. But Jesus Christ can and does raise us up, heal us in spirit, enabling us to have hope and laughter and love again.

For example, Tony Campolo tells of preaching at a church in Oregon. On a Holy Spirit impulse, he ended the service by stating that he would be glad to stay around after the service to pray with anyone who desired healing. About thirty people stayed, and he prayed for each one of them individually. No miracles happened, but it was good nonetheless. Then, four days later, he got a phone call from the wife of one of the people he had prayed for. She said, *“Tony, on Sunday you prayed for my husband. He had cancer.”* *“Had,”* answered Campolo, thinking maybe there might have been a miraculous healing after all. But that hope was crushed when she replied by saying, *“Well, he’s dead now.”* Campolo started to say how sorry he was, but she cut him off:

“You don’t understand. When my husband and I walked into that church on Sunday, he was angry with God. He had cancer and he knew he was going to be dead soon, and he hated God for letting it happen . . . At night he would lie in bed and curse God. It was horrible. And the angrier he got toward God, the meaner he was to everyone around him. It was unbearable to be in the same room with him. His nastiness just kept getting worse and worse and worse. But then you laid hands on him on Sunday morning and you prayed for him. When he walked out of church I knew there was something different. I could feel it. He was a different person. The last four days of our lives have been the best four days we’ve ever

had together. We talked and laughed. We even sang hymns with each other. It was a good, good time.”

She paused, then added something really profound. She said, “Tony, he wasn’t cured, but he was healed.”⁶

“*Jesus Christ heals you.*” He heals us in body, He raises us up in spirit. Because Easter is not over, and won’t be until His Kingdom comes. Gardner Taylor, long-time pastor of the famous Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn – and a man who had known and who had witnessed more than his share of life’s sorrow and sufferings – once proclaimed these powerful Jesus Christ heals you and Easter isn’t over words in a sermon, words that I have kept near to me in my own life and ministry:

There are times in life when the days seem hardly worth living, when the sun has left the sky, and we walk through a grim, gray, cloudy time. But always we must remember that the Lord can still bless us in our sorrow and in our disappointment. He can make bitter waters sweet for us, and he can turn cloudy days sunny. He can turn valleys of sorrow into sunlit paths of joy. This God with whom we deal never leaves and never forsakes. He is always nearby. Our Calvary may be painful and lonely, our course rough and cruel, but God can and will heal our hurts and soothe our sorrows and turn our griefs into glad hosannas. The Judge of all the earth will do right. The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.⁷

“*Jesus Christ heals you.*” Jesus Christ is healing us still. Jesus Christ is risen. And Jesus Christ is raising up His people still – from sickness into health, from sadness into joy, and from darkness into hope.

And let us not forget that the greatest healing of all still awaits us. “*Jesus Christ heals you,*” says Peter, “*Arise!*” Meaning that when we close our eyes in death, like our sister Dorcas, we will then hear Him speaking to us – gently, powerfully, irresistibly, and joyfully – speaking to us, “*My child, arise.*” And rise we shall – into a life rich beyond our wildest imaginings; into a joy deeper than our happiest dreams; and into a love so high, so deep, so broad that we will know a peace so profound that it is right now completely beyond our understanding. Easter is not over – because Jesus Christ is still raising His children up from death into life new and eternal.

“*Jesus Christ heals you.*” And so we no longer need to be afraid of death, which we all are to one degree or another. But we don’t have to be afraid any longer. Steve Hayner, the late president of Columbia Theological Seminary, testified to precisely the truth and inspiration and courage that promise instills in us. Not too long before his far too young death from cancer, he wrote down this testimonial:

All life on planet earth is terminal, and while we can certainly contribute to our own well-being in amazing ways, none of us is ultimately in control. One day, my life will be swallowed up by

Life. And for today, I am choosing truth, joy and love wherever and however I can . . .

I'm apprehensive about the unknown, and I am certainly feeling knocked around. But I am not afraid . . .

To paraphrase Psalm 121, "I lift my eyes to the hills. Is that where my help comes from? No, my help comes from the Lord, who is maker of both heaven and earth – and who holds me in the palm of [His] hand."⁸

"Jesus Christ heals you," says Peter to Aeneas and prays over Dorcas. For Easter is not over, and shall not be – until at last that day when we are all raised up from the dead and His Kingdom comes. Until that day when He has at last healed all things, raised up all things and made them good and right and well again. That is the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ – His Easter victory – that in Him all things shall be healed; and that in Him all things, including us, are even now being healed through His resurrection power.

Which leads to one more message, one more joy springing from the pages of this passage into our lives. Not only does He heal us – but He invites us to become instruments of His healing entering into the lives of others. That is what Peter is doing. Peter does not heal, but Jesus Christ uses Peter to bring His healing to Aeneas and Dorcas. And to bring the Good News of the Gospel, through those healings, to so many others. Peter not only raises up Aeneas, but in doing so brings many to the healing, saving love of Christ: "*And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.*" And the same happens after Peter is used by Jesus to raise up Dorcas: "*And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.*" Peter is used by Jesus not only to heal bodies, but also to heal souls.

But maybe Dorcas herself is an even better example to us of this than the miracles of Peter, which seem so far beyond us. Look at what our text says about her: "*She was full of good works and acts of charity.*" The reason the widows of Joppa are so devastated by her loss, and so keen to have Peter raise her up, is because she has been the one taking care of them, providing for them when all else had turned their backs on them. Note how, when Peter walks into the room, these widows immediately crowd around him to show him the garments Dorcas had made for them – evidence of her good works and acts of charity, as well as the reason why they want her to be raised. In other words, long before Peter was used by Jesus Christ to raise up Dorcas, Dorcas was being used by Jesus Christ to raise up the widows of Joppa. She, every bit as much as Peter, is an instrument of God's healing, bringing Christ's healing power and love into the lives of those around her. And so we are not only those being healed by Jesus Christ, but we – like Dorcas and Peter – are also those who are being given the privilege, the joy, the high calling of being used by Jesus, through our own good works and acts of charity, being used by Jesus to bring His healing power and love into the lives of those around us.

Another Tony Campolo story. He was such an amazingly contagious Christian, and one of the best storytellers I've ever heard. God certainly used him to bring the Gospel, and its healing power, to so many. This is the story. He was waiting for a flight in a small airport in New Mexico. Sitting there waiting, he noticed a woman sitting a little ways away from him, her face as sad as a person's face can look. He was just drawn to her. He got up and went over to her and struck up a

conversation. He eventually got her laughing, laughing so hard he thought she was going to hurt herself. Her laughter was so contagious that, before long, a small group had collected around them, each person sharing some funny story or another and multiplying the laughter.

Eventually the woman's friend arrived to pick her up, and she got up and said goodbye to the group. Campolo says he watched her go out through the glass door and get into her car and head out. But within seconds, he says, the car had stopped and turned around and come back to the terminal. The woman got out of the car, went up to Campolo and said to him, "*Mister, you don't know this, but it was three years ago today that my husband died. I didn't realize it until I was on the way home that today is the first day since then that I've been able to laugh. I wanted to come back and thank you.*"⁹ "*Jesus Christ heals you.*" And joyful is the truth that even as He is healing us, He is offering us the glorious opportunity, like Dorcas and Peter, to be the instruments of His healing power reaching into the lives of those around us.

So, no – Easter is not over. Easter has still only just begun. Because "*Jesus Christ heals you,*" heals us, just as Peter said. Because Jesus Christ is still at work in His world healing us all, raising us up from sickness and from sorrow, from despair and from death. Raising us up to be instruments of His healing power in the lives of others. Raising us up in preparation for that day when at last all shall be healed and all shall be resurrected – that day when, at last, His Kingdom shall have fully come.

¹ Luke 5:17-26.

² Luke 5:24.

³ Luke 8:40-42, 49-56.

⁴ Luke 8:54.

⁵ Sirach 38:1-2, 4. The Book of Sirach is also known as Ecclesiasticus.

⁶ Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You A Story* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), pp. 35-36.

⁷ Sermon entitled, "A Cry in Disappointment," in *The Words of Gardner Taylor, Vol. 1*, ed. Edward L. Taylor (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1999), p. 19.

⁸ Steve and Sharol Hayner, *Joy in the Journey: Finding Abundance in the Shadow of Death* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2015), pp. 32-33.

⁹ Tony Campolo, "Trusting in God in the Days that Lie Ahead," sermon text originally accessed on-line at http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/Campolo_4604.htm (no longer available).