

Acts 9:32-43

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Date: 19 July 2026

Preacher: Harry Ovey

[0:00] Please do open your Bibles back up to Acts chapter 9, Acts chapter 9, verses 32 to 43.

That we would be built up, your church would be built up, and the whole world would be filled with your glory. Amen. I wonder what your gut, your instantaneous answer to the question would be if I asked you, what is Jesus doing right now?

What is Jesus doing right now? You might say, in the language of the creeds and of Psalm 110, Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. That's good.

Point. You get a point for that. You might go a bit further. You might use the language of Paul in Romans 8. He's seated at the right hand of God, and he's interceding for us. You have two points for that.

You might think Jesus isn't doing very much right now. You might look around at the world and think, what is Jesus doing right now? Where are you, God? Well, I can say with confidence, he's not doing nothing right now.

[1:25] Jesus is doing something. He is seated at the right hand of the Father. He's interceding for his people. But there's something else that Jesus is doing right now. There's something that Jesus is doing right now.

He's doing it in Acts chapter 9 that we read earlier. Acts chapter 9 on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in the late 30s AD. And he's doing the same thing in Ealing in 2026.

Jesus, in his own words, is building his church. And we just sang it. Jesus is building his church. The line comes from Matthew chapter 16.

But it's actually, it's perfectly true of the whole of the book of Acts. It could even be the subtitle for the book of Acts. It could say, Acts, Jesus is building his church. In fact, it's been said before, the book of Acts is, the full title is the Acts of the Apostles.

But you could describe it as the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles. Or even the Acts of the Lord Jesus. Luke makes that clear. That that is his intention to display that throughout the whole of the book.

[2:28] In the very first verse of Acts. In Acts chapter 1, verse 1. Luke writes to the person he's writing to. In the first book, Theophilus, the guy he's writing to. I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach.

The first book, Luke's Gospel, deals with all that Jesus began to do and to teach. What's the implication? This book, the second book, Acts, deals with what Jesus is continuing to do and to teach.

And what does he continue to do? He continues to build his church. That is what the book of Acts documents. It is this global expansion of the church.

The church starts in Jerusalem and it spreads to Judea and then to Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. That is what you see as you read through the book of Acts.

That's Jesus' promise that is fulfilled. In the first seven chapters, you see the church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem is growing. It is successful. The disciples are preaching the word.

[3:29] And chapter seven, it culminates with Stephen's speech in Jerusalem. And he gets stoned and the believers are scattered across the region. It's a bad time to use a football phrase.

But they do think it's all over at that point. But it's not all over. Because as the persecution increases, the spread of the gospel also increases. They're persecuted in Jerusalem.

So what do they do? Philip travels to Samaria. Samaritans, only half Jewish, receive the Holy Spirit. Jesus is building his church. Philip then goes on the road to Gaza and meets the Ethiopian eunuch who receives the Holy Spirit.

And then in chapter nine, we get the blockbuster conversion of Saul, once persecutor of the church. And now Jesus' instrument to carry his name, not to Jews, not to half Jews, Samaritans, but to the Gentiles.

The gospel is going out. Jesus is building his church. And just after what we read in chapter 10, you get Peter's monumental vision as Jesus declares all foods clean.

[4:39] And the Gentiles coming into the church do not need to become Jews. They do not need to live like Jews. They are welcomed into the church as the Roman centurion Cornelius and his whole household receive the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is building his church. And as you read these back-to-back incredible events, you read of Stephen's speech, and then you read of Philip and the Ethiopian, and the Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit, and Paul's conversion, and Peter's vision, Acts 9, 32 to 43 feels almost out of place.

It is a little bit strange. It feels strange for a few reasons. It feels strange because, for those who are familiar with the Gospels, you begin to wonder, is this really Peter?

It feels a lot like Jesus. It sounds a lot like Jesus. Maybe Theophilus is reading Acts, and you think, oh, I thought I read that in the last book. Is Luke getting confused here?

Or maybe Luke is, he's got the camera angle on Paul, but he has to shift it to Peter somehow, and so this is his way of introducing Peter back into the story.

[5:47] Is this a couple of warm-up miracles before the big event of Cornelius in chapter 10? No, this isn't a camera shift. This isn't a filler scene.

This isn't Luke's memory playing up. This passage here in Acts chapter 9, I think, illustrates the heartbeat of the book of Acts, the Gospel going out, the Word prevailing, Jesus building his church. In fact, we see that in the very verse just before this passage. In verse 31, we get this great summary of the Gospel work that's been going on. Acts 9, 31.

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.

The church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria is being built up and multiplying, and that's almost like the hyperlink, and you click on the hyperlink, and it takes you into these two episodes, these two miracles, Aeneas and Tabitha.

[6:53] And Luke is illustrating, he's displaying exactly how it is that the church is being built up, how it is that they're walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is building his church, and we're going to see how he does it. And the first way that we see Jesus building his church is that he heals and he restores. That's our first point this morning.

Jesus heals and restores. While it is about Peter, these passages, Peter looks like he's the active player in the game, but really it's not about Peter.

It is all about Jesus. It is Jesus who is doing the healing. In verse 32, Peter is going here and there among those churches in Galilee and Judea and Samaria. He's visiting the saints, and he comes down from Samaria into the northwest of Judea to a place called Lydda, and he finds a man named Aeneas.

Aeneas, the name means praiseworthy. But as you meet Luke's description of Aeneas, he's not particularly praiseworthy. I don't mean to be derogatory, but he's a paralyzed man who's been on his bed for eight years.

[8:02] And what does Peter do? Peter says to him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed. And he does. Jesus heals Aeneas.

At the same time, in nearby Joppa, a believer named Tabitha in Aramaic, Dorcas in Greek, falls ill and she dies. Tabitha is well known by her church.

She's loved by her church. She's full of good works and acts of charity, literally almsgiving. She's a woman of means, and she uses her means for good. She gives to the poor.

She shows that she has money or income, and she makes wonderful garments. It seems as though she's one of the widows in the church, and they're there, weeping, mourning, where she's laid in an upper room.

And so Peter is sent for. And Peter goes to where Tabitha is laid. And he kneels down, and he prays. And he says to her, Tabitha, arise.

[9:07] And she does. Jesus restores Tabitha. Peter says explicitly to Aeneas, it is Jesus Christ who heals you. And he implicitly reveals that it is Jesus Christ who heals Tabitha as he prays to his Lord and his Master for her to be raised up.

Jesus heals and restores. But then when we see that it's Jesus doing it, we have to ask the question, why is Peter there at all? Why did they need Peter?

There are saints there in Lydda that he's gone to visit. Why couldn't one of them do it? Why did he have to go when there's a group of disciples in Joppa? Why is Tabitha so praiseworthy indeed, unable to heal herself?

Is she lacking in faith? Why is Aeneas, praiseworthy in name, paralyzed? Is he lacking in faith? Peter was needed.

Peter was sent for by the disciples. God ordained for Peter to be in those places because Peter was a capital A, as we say, capital A apostle.

[10:15] As readers of Acts, Luke is reminding us here, just before the episode with Cornelius, who it is that Peter is. We're getting Peter's credentials as one of the apostles.

Peter was one of the twelve who walked with Jesus in his earthly ministry from his baptism to his burial. He follows in the footsteps in Jesus' life, and then he follows in Jesus' footsteps here.

We're meant to make that connection. It's not misremembering. We're meant to make the connection between Peter and Jesus. Just as Jesus told the paralytic to take up his mat and walk in Luke chapter 5, Peter tells Aeneas to rise and make his bed in Acts 9.

Just as Jesus tells all the mourners to leave the house in Luke chapter 8, Peter puts all the mourners and the widows and the tunics and garments out of the house in Acts chapter 9.

Jesus says to Jairus' daughter, little girl, or in Aramaic, Talitha, arise. Peter tells Tabitha to arise. There's one letter difference, a beta and a lambda, a B and an L.

[11:26] I think that's why Luke includes the Aramaic name, is so that we can make that connection between the two. Luke wants us to see the similarity between Jesus and Peter.

He wants us to know that Peter is an apostle holding a special office in church history. So we have Peter following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Peter is being authenticated as an apostle, as part of this long line throughout the Bible, of prophets and apostles like Moses and Joshua, like Elijah and Elisha, of those who work signs and wonders. Peter is the one who Jesus is acting through as an apostle. But that is also why we would say that this sort of miraculous activity isn't normative today.

It's not expected today. We don't expect something to happen through an apostolic conduit in the same way. Now, we need to be careful when we say that.

[12:31] That is not in the slightest to say that God cannot or does not work in miraculous ways still. We know that deep down because we pray for God to heal people.

We pray for God to heal those who are sick. We pray for God to end suffering. We pray to ask God for healing. In fact, as we're going to see, God arguably works in the most miraculous way of bringing those who are dead in sin to life in Christ.

He turns those who have hearts of stone to have hearts of flesh. But the office of apostle that Peter held is not one that continues today.

Peter did not appoint an apostolic heir, someone to continue his healing ministry. In fact, as you read the narrative, I don't think the miracles, the climaxes, they're not the high points of the narrative.

It is rather the locals turning to Christ that is the high point in verses 35 and verse 42. The result of these miracles isn't Peter setting up this traveling ministry where he goes around healing and raising people.

[13:44] The result of these miracles is that Christ is exalted, not Peter is exalted. In fact, that's a very easy rule of thumb to tell a genuine ministry from a false ministry.

Who is being exalted? Is it creature or creator? Is it man or God? And here, it is clearly the Lord Jesus who's being exalted. It is the Lord Jesus who is healing and restoring.

And so the same is true for us today. While there are no apostles, it's not normative but not impossible for the paralyzed to walk, for the dead to rise. Jesus is still building his church in this way by healing and restoring those who are dead in sin to life in Christ.

Now, while Aeneas was healed, while he could walk again, he wasn't given a perfect resurrection body. He would likely grow old and maybe lose the better use of his legs, maybe completely lose the use of his legs.

Tabitha was raised from the dead. She would die again. But Jesus is building his church not in these temporary physical healings, but through the inward regenerative healing and restoration of

people from sin to new life with him.

[15 : 03] This is the way that Jesus has been building his church for two millennia as the church spread from Jerusalem to Judea to Sumeria to the ends of the earth. This is the way that Jesus is building his church in England and across the globe.

And in fact, we can forget, can't we, that every person who becomes a Christian, every convert, every adult baptism, every covenant child who holds fast to their baptism is not a number on a church spreadsheet or a church growth chart, but someone born in sin and raised to newness of life in Christ.

Angels rejoice over each one that Jesus heals and restores. So if someone asks us, what is Jesus doing now? Why aren't there miracles going on if Jesus is real, if Jesus is living and working?

There are. Jesus is raising those who are dead in sin every day. Jesus heals and restores. Jesus works miracles. And that is how he is building his church.

Those that he heals and restores are raised to newness of life in him. But that also means that as those raised to newness of life in him, they are different to the way they were before.

[16 : 25] Those who are healed and those who are restored live transformed lives. That's our second point this morning. Jesus transforms lives. As we read those two episodes, there's two really clear examples of transformed lives, right?

There's Aeneas and Tabitha. Imagine Aeneas' life is completely different after this event. Can you imagine after eight years of being bedbound, unable to stand, you suddenly regain the perfect use of your legs?

All those things that would have required assistance, getting up in the morning, going to the markets, going to church. You can suddenly do all on your own. Those things that were completely impossible, just going for a walk and looking at beautiful litter, going for a run, doing the local park run, is suddenly an achievable thing.

He can do that. His life has been completely transformed. But the irony is that while we see those lives transformed, they're not the transformed lives that Jesus is building the church with.

Again, we see that the transformed lives are those of believers. These illustrations, or they're like physical illustrations of Aeneas and Tabitha.

[17 : 44] They both really happened, but they illustrate the deeper, the greater, the spiritual work by which Jesus is building his church. The book of Acts is full of these summary statements, like the one we read in verse 31, where Luke kind of interjects into the narrative that the Lord added to the number of believers day by day, or the word of God multiplied and increased.

The number of disciples grew and multiplied greatly. And this passage has these two mini summary statements in it, building on that one in verse 31. We have in verse 35, all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, saw Aeneas, and they turned to the Lord.

And then in verse 42, it and it, Tabitha's resurrection became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. In Lydda, they turn to the Lord.

In Joppa, they believe in the Lord. We have turning to the Lord. We have believing in the Lord. We have repentance and faith. The two sides of the coin, or as one Puritan phrased it, the two wings by which we fly to heaven.

Repentance and faith, turning and believing. Just like Jesus' very first words in Mark chapter 1, repent and believe the good news.

[19 : 11] Repentance and faith mark the new beginning, the total change of the believer's life. They were once dead in Adam. They are now alive in Christ.

They were once a sinner, and they are now a saint. All because they have turned from their sin to God, and they have put their faith in Christ. And the healing of Aeneas, and the raising of Dorcas, they illustrate this internal transformation which Jesus is building his church with.

Sinners repent and believe. They turn to God, and they believe. And as they do so, they are inwardly and they are outwardly transformed. Turning to the Lord has been God's call to his people all throughout the biblical narrative.

In Deuteronomy chapter 30, he writes, Turn to the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul.

Isaiah chapter 45, Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.

Psalms 22, All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord. And just as Jesus told the disciples in Acts 1 that all the ends of the earth will turn to him, we are seeing that fulfilled in Acts 9.

[20 : 27] All the ends of the earth, whether in Jerusalem or Judea or Samaria, they are turning to the Lord. Now, turning repentance is, like I said, is the other side of that two-sided coin, repentance and faith.

And faith is the side that we talk a lot about. And repentance is the side that is often, I believe, neglected. We don't talk about it quite so much.

So, we're going to talk about repentance. Puritans had an uncanny ability to flesh out what you'd think is a small topic in ways you could never imagine.

In Thomas Watson, his book, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, he gives us six ingredients that make up the spiritual medicine of true repentance.

repentance. And, like all good Puritans do, each of those ingredients has subpoints, and the subpoints have subpoints. And if you're lucky, the subpoints subpoints don't have another subpoint to them.

[21 : 35] One of his ingredients, I won't give you all of them, one of Watson's ingredients of true repentance is turning from sin and to God.

That is the natural aspect or the double aspect of repentance. It is turning from one thing to another thing. Leaving behind the old way of life.

Putting off the old man. Putting on the new man. We could maybe use some sanctified imagination and think about the residents of Lydda and Sharon and Joppa.

After these two episodes of Aeneas and Tabitha, word spreads around the region. Somebody nearby says, did you hear about what happened in Joppa? And they say, what are you talking about?

Are you talking about what happened with Aeneas? No, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the way that the people lived there. They used to be adulterers. They used to be swindlers, idolatrous.

[22 : 35] But now they are full of love for their friends and love for their enemies. They have changed. They've turned. And what about in Joppa?

They used to be this prideful, pharisaical bunch. And now there are people marked by faith in Christ. Maybe Peter or someone from the Jerusalem church would write them a letter similar to Paul's letter to Thessalonians saying, word of your turning from idols to God has gone around the local region.

That's what we see here. All the residents turn to the Lord. Watson, Thomas Watson, writes on this turning from sin, is turning from sin a necessary ingredient in repentance?

If so, then there is little repentance to be found. People are not turned from their sins. They're still the same as they were. Like beasts in Noah's ark, they went into the ark unclean and they came out unclean.

Those are hard words. And we should pray that that is not the case with us. We should pray to God that our repentance would be true. That if we turn from sin, we turn from sin and don't return to sin.

[24 : 04] The difference between a repentant person, someone who was turned from sin, should be as stark as the before and after of Aeneas.

Once paralyzed, now walking. It should be as stark as Dorcas, dead and then alive. They say that, and one that I know, person who has had a near-death experience, say that it completely changed their outlook on life.

People say things like it's changed their lifestyle. They go out more. They go and enjoy the world they're in. They change their relationships. They spend more time with their loved ones.

They change their values and the things that they prioritize in life. Tabitha, you can imagine, if she was full of good works before this beyond near-death experience, how much more so would she be after this near-death, real-death experience?

And shouldn't the same thing be true of us? We are those who were dead in our sins and are alive in Christ.

[25 : 18] Would that, should that not completely change the way that we live? Our turning from sin and turning to God should be obvious, it should be apparent to everyone around us so that word could go around the region saying, have you heard about those guys in Ealing?

Of course, we need to be careful with this. When we talk about Jesus transforming lives here, we're talking about sanctification. And when we talk about Jesus healing, as I was earlier, we're talking about justification.

Justification is what saves. Justification is what makes us right before God, not our sanctification. but the sanctification is promised and it should be expected in the believer.

Just because we won't be perfect in this life does not give us license to sin. We should seek at every opportunity to put sin to death and seek to live for Christ.

That is how Jesus is building his church. It is through transformed lives. And lastly, as well as those lives being transformed as they are viewed from the outside.

[26:36] Those lives are transformed in their view towards the outside, in their view of the outside. Notice how it is that those in Lydda and Sharon and those in Joppa come to faith.

In verse 35, the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him. they saw Aeneas and they turned to the Lord. And then verse 42, it became known throughout all Joppa.

It became known, it was told throughout all Joppa. They saw Aeneas, it became known. How does that happen? It is because people went into those places and told and showed the changes that had happened.

Probably Aeneas and Tabitha most of all. people made known to the world around them the transformation that had gone on in their hearts. And while the healings of Aeneas and Tabitha might be extraordinary, underneath the extraordinary actions is an ordinary obedience.

They are the ones who rise and go. In fact, all through chapters 8 to 11 in Acts, you get this strange repetition, either of the command, rise and go, or of the response, he rose and went.

[28:01] That's what Peter does even when the disciples in Joppa go to find him. They say, come to see Tabitha, and he rose and went. That's what Philip does first as he goes to Samaria, he rose and went, and then an angel of the Lord commands him to rise and go to Gaza.

Paul is told, rise and go into Damascus and find a man named Ananias. And Ananias is told, rise and go and find a man named Paul.

And in chapter 10, Peter is about to rise and go to meet Cornelius and tell him of the risen Lord.

Again and again in these chapters you have this pattern of rise and go, rise and go, rise and go.

And so what can we make of that as believers? We can rise and go. There are multiple ways that we can do that.

We could be like Peter and Paul and we could do cross cultural ministry going across physical country borders. We could be like Tabitha. We could faithfully honor God in our work, being full of good works and charity.

[29:19] we're not apostles. We can't plan for miracles, but we can plan for faithfulness. We can plan to live lives that honor Christ, transformed lives that honor Christ, and we can live lives that make him known as we rise and go.

Jesus said we do not hide our light under a bushel, but we let the light shine to those who are around us so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven.

Jesus is actively, to this day, building his church. He's healing and he is restoring lost sinners. And as those who are healed and restored, our lives are being transformed by his spirit.

And so we do want to honor him. We want to serve him. We want to make him known to the ends of the earth. we want to see his church continue to be built as more and more turn and believe in him. Let me pray for us.