

A New Year's Resolution:

John 3:30 “He must increase, but I must decrease”

Happy New Year!

Introduction:

For those visiting or for you who have been out during the holiday, we are studying the book of Acts. We have seen how the Lord has used Saul to persecute the church in Jerusalem and to disperse them and the gospel to all Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Saul, believed he was serving God, He pursued those who belonged to the Way and dragged men and women from their homes, bound them and brought them to Jerusalem.

We covered the conversion of Saul where he was blinded on the way to Damascus and called out to Jesus whom **he did not know** saying, “**who are you Lord?**” Saul had a personal encounter with Jesus that was witnessed by the men traveling with him. His personal calling **by Jesus himself** establishes Paul's credibility as an apostle. Saul was blinded for 3 days and nights. He ate no food and prayed to the Lord. In a vision, the Lord called Ananias and he responded to **his Lord, “Here I am Lord.”** Ananias was instructed by the Lord to go to the house of Judas on a street called Straight and you will find Saul. Lay your hands on him so that he would regain his sight. Ananias did as he was instructed and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;

Following Saul's conversion, he was strengthen and Bryan told us about Paul receiving **dunamis power**. A “multiplying” power from the Holy Spirit. A multiplying power that caused thousands to respond to his preaching. The Jews heard of Paul's conversion, and they sought to kill him. Paul escaped the city by being lowered over the wall in a basket. He returns to Jerusalem where Barnabas had to convince the disciples that Paul's conversion was genuine. Paul continued to preach Jesus boldly in Jerusalem and the Scripture says,

“he disputed against the Hellenists.” Paul had to be an argumentative and abrasive personality such that the Hellenistic Jews also sought to kill him. So, the disciples took him down to Caesarea so they could ship him off to his home in Tarsus. And so, with Paul out of Jerusalem, peace was restored as we read:

Acts 9:31 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.

Bringing us to our Scripture for today.

Acts 9:32-43 Peter gives us a vision for personal ministry in two encounters.

- Today, I wanted to pick up from Matt’s testimony last week. Matt shared his story of praying in the hunting stand for God to **fan the flames of the Spirit in Him** and allow the Spirit of the Lord to work through Him to minister to other people. And he prayed that he would **get an axis**. Matt received the word to **continue to pray and it will come to pass** and when he opened his eyes the Lord provided two axis deer giving assurance He would answer Matt’s prayer.
- In our own little church, there are literally hundreds of personal encounters where we have had the opportunity to minister to one another. We have prayed for babies to be conceived, prayed during difficult pregnancies, prayed through physical illnesses, career crisis, financial crisis, marriage crisis and also encouraged one another and celebrated God’s goodness in the answered prayers and also in those that have not been answered.
- Today’s message is about Peter’s personal ministry. From Acts 2:41 we know that following Pentecost, Peter preached and 3,000 were saved. Then Acts 4:4 tells us following the healing of the lame beggar, Peter preached and 5,000 were added. Reaching thousands with a message may be one way the Lord calls people, but the vast majority of people who come to know the Lord come from **one-on-one personal ministry**. Personally, sharing their story and inviting other individuals to know the

Lord. Jesus chose 12 men to disciple. As followers of Jesus, we are also called to

Matthew 28:18-20 “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded

Go, and make disciples. We are called to **one-on-one personal** ministry. To share your life, your gifts and your talents with others. This can be lived out in many forms. You can join the **ministries of the church**. There are opportunities to be on the prayer team, lunch team, offertory, teach children, join the worship team, missions, share your testimony, men’s and women’s ministry, one-on-one discipleship, there are many opportunities to **jump into the “STREAM OF MINISTRY.”** We need people to reach out to people that have visited the church to invite them back and make them feel welcome. We have people who have been a part of VCC and have not been here in weeks or months. We need people to connect with them to check in with them let them know they are missed. Jumping into the stream of ministry will naturally put you in position to develop and practice your personal ministry. To share your story, to encourage others and make it part of your everyday life to serve others, encourage others, invite them to pray, to “Go and make disciples.”

I will be covering 12 verses about 2 encounters with Peter and will take them one at a time.

First we will cover the healing of Aeneas (“I-neas”)

Acts 9:32-35

Verse 32 ³² Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

- **“Peter went here and there among them.”** In these first few chapters we have come to know Peter’s personality. Peter was always moving. He was busy doing the work of the Lord. I am sure he was being pulled to meet this person or teach to this group. He was the leader of the

church, he was in the flow of ministry and in the day to day flow of the lives of people in his community.

- Because Peter has been involved, because **Peter was “tuned in,”** to the Spirit and actively going here and there being **available** to others and **available** to the working of the Spirit, He found himself participating with the working of the Spirit in the lives of all those he met.
- How many opportunities pass us up because **we are oblivious** to that which is going on around us? The needs of the people around us. Peter was in the stream of ministry and took notice of those around him.
- So Peter leaves Jerusalem and travels south to Lydda. Lydda was a mostly Gentile city about 25 miles from Jerusalem. The Scripture tells us he went to visit the “saints at Lydda.” He went to visit the believers in Lydda.

Verse 33 ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed.

- We do not know much about Aeneas. We don't know if he was a Jew or a Gentile. All we know is that he was bed-ridden and had been paralyzed for 8 years. He was crippled and helpless. He was a burden to himself and others and there was no hope he would ever get well.

Verse 34 ³⁴ And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” And immediately he rose.

- Peter practiced what had become natural to him. He sees Aeneas, he recognizes the need and knows he has the power of the Holy Spirit in Him to heal. The same Holy Spirit that lives in you and in me. Do we realize the power that resides in us if we would just call on the Lord to work?
- Note: He says, “Jesus Christ heals you; arise, and make your bed.” Peter did not heal Aeneas. If we try to do the work of the Spirit on our own power, we will fail every time.

Verse 35 ³⁵ And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

- It says that All the residents saw him. Saw Aeneas, the one who everyone knew to be paralyzed was now restored and walking.
- and they turned to “Peter.” No, **they turned to the Lord.**
- The greater miracle was not that a paralyzed man was healed, but that many turned to the Lord and received eternal salvation.

Jesus said,

John 12:32 ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.”

- Get involved in the work that the Lord is doing. **Be available, be aware, be intentional, be in the stream of the work that the Spirit is doing in the lives of people you encounter in your everyday activities.**
- Live to lift up Jesus Christ. **We can call upon the Lord in faith in any situation or need. We can also thank our Lord for providing a new client, a new friend, or even to give thanks at lunch with a friend, vendor or client.**

John the Baptist said, **John 3:30** “He must increase, but I must decrease” – John the Baptist got it and emphasizes what really matters.

The focus of Peter’s ministry is to **lift up Jesus**. In the flow of our lives, we can practice making it LESS about me and my interests and **MORE** about magnifying Christ and the interests of others.

A Greater Miracle: The Raising of Dorcas/ Tabitha from the dead.

Acts 9:36-43

Verse 36 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.

- Has anyone been to Jaffa? Joppa, the modern city of Jaffa is a seacoast town about 10 miles from Lydda. This is an important city in Bible history. Joppa is the city in which Jonah fled from God. Jonah went to Joppa to avoid going to the Gentiles. Peter goes to Joppa and receives

his call to go to the Gentiles. Because Jonah disobeyed God, the Lord sent a storm. Because Peter obeyed the Lord, God sent the “wind of the Spirit” to the Gentiles and they experienced salvation and peace.

- **What do we know about Tabitha?** First, she must have been a fast runner because Dorcas also means “gazelle.” We also know she is a disciple. A follower of Jesus. And, she was full of good works and acts of charity.
- She fits the description of a **Proverbs 31 woman** describing the characteristics of a woman who fears the Lord. **Proverbs 31:20** says, “She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.” Tabitha served the widows and made them their clothes. She had an important ministry in the church to serve the widows. Every role in the church is an important role. Did you know that we have a prayer team that comes early to pray for you over the seats you are sitting in? We have people teaching our little ones right now. Someone prepared the communion bread for us to share. Someone took reservations and ordered the lunch for us to enjoy. Someone set up the tables and will clean up after we leave. **Every role in serving the body is important** and we are introduced to “Tabitha” was a servant full of good works and acts of charity.

Verse 37 ³⁷ In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.

- She had died and it was the Jewish custom to first wash the body and then to anoint it with spices for burial.

Verse 38-39 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 and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.

- Peter being as he is, was busy preaching, teaching and meeting people. Two men come and tell him about this one poor lady in another town who died. It does not say that these were friends of Peter or that she was an important dignitary. It would have been easy for Peter to

overlook Tabitha and continue on with the important meetings he was being called to attend. He could have said, “I am so sorry for your loss, I will be praying for you.”

- It is easy to look past the people that we interact with every day as if they may not have significance to the kingdom. Who are we to judge, the **multiplying power** of the Lord to use one person to influence the world for the kingdom. The two men came in **faith** asking Peter to come, and he went. He must have felt the affirming call of the Spirit and immediately left to go Lydda. **When you feel the nudge.** When the Lord puts someone on your mind to call or text with a word of encouragement. Or when you feel the Spirit calling you to pray for or with someone, even someone you don’t know, submit to the call and allow the Lord to include you in the work that He is doing in the lives of others.

Verse 40-41 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.

- Notice the similarities with the way Jesus raises Jarius’s daughter. Mark 5:34-43.
 - In both cases the mourning people were asked to leave the room.
 - The words spoken were almost identical. “Tabitha arise.”
 - Jesus took the hand of the girl not afraid of becoming ceremonially defiled and Peter took the hand of Tabitha after she had come to life.
 - In both cases it was not the faith of the deceased, but the Power of God who raised them from the dead.
- Notice, the **difference**. In the account of raising Jarius’s daughter, Jesus simply took the hand of Jarius’ daughter and said, “Child arise.” Jesus called her from the dead in the power of the Spirit in Him in His name. Peter did not come in and command, “Tabitha arise.” **As if he had any power.** The difference is **He knelt down and prayed.** He acknowledged the power of God and called on the power of the Spirit to come and work through him.

Paul says.

Ephesians 3:7 ⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of **His** power.

Ephesians 3:20 ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to **the power** at work within us.

Now the real miracle:

Verse 42 ⁴² And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

- The act of God certainly spared Tabitha and was certainly welcomed by all the widows she served. Amazing miracles of healing and raising of the dead happened. But DON'T miss the **REAL RESULT**. Don't get distracted by the miracles or the person God used to accomplish His work. The **REAL RESULT, the REAL Miracle** was that “**many believed in the Lord.**” Restoring a paralyzed man to health and even raising someone back to life are miraculous acts. But bringing many to eternal salvation is **the GREATER miracle and REAL RESULT** of Peter's obedience to go to Lydda and Joppa and follow the example **demonstrated to him by Jesus as** how to act when confronted with these circumstances.
- How easy is it also for us to lift up the person who the Spirit worked through?
- How easy is it for us to **desire the power of the Spirit more than we desire Jesus?** Remember Simon the magician who offered money, ¹⁹ saying, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” And Peter says, “your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness of yours.”
- Peter was an apostle of Jesus and operated in the power of the Spirit whereby people were healed and thousands were saved. As you read about Peter's ministry you learn **he always identified Jesus** as the source of **power**.

- In **Acts 3:6** Peter says to the lame man, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the **name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth**, rise up and walk!”
- **Acts 3:11-16**, ¹¹ While he (the lame man who was healed) clung to Peter and John, all the people, **utterly astounded**, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. ¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, **why do you wonder at this**, or why do you stare at us, as though by our **own power** or piety we have made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant **Jesus**, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the **Author of life**, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And **his name—by faith in his name**—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is **through Jesus** has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.
 - **Peter emphatically directs their attention to Jesus**
- **The dunamis power, the Holy Spirit Power working through Peter continued to draw crowds to Peter. Acts 5:12** says, many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people, In **5:15** it says, “they even carried sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them.”
- And here again, in this chapter he heals a paralyzed man and raises Tabitha from the dead. You can see how natural it would be to elevate Peter. This is dangerous territory for Peter. This is dangerous territory for us. We all know people who have been used by the Spirit for kingdom purposes. Be careful not to lift up these people **as if there is any power in them**.
- “Spoiler alert” in Chapter 10 this also happens to Peter. **Acts 10:25-26** “When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him. But Peter lifted him up saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” Peter always turned the attention to Jesus.

Verse 43 ⁴³ And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

- We might just close with verse 42 that “many believed in the Lord.” But you don’t want to miss this nugget that could easily be lost.
- No Jew would ever have anything to do with a tanner. A tanner is someone who worked with the skins of dead animals. He would have been considered “ceremonially unclean.” Peter had gone to **Samaria** and embraced those who were despicable to the Jews. Coming up in chapter 10 he will now go to **Gentiles** and even have a dream where the Spirit instructs him to kill and eat animals prohibited by Jewish dietary laws. You can’t be effective in ministry if you are prejudiced.
- In our culture there are many people that are different than us.
 - People that may speak with words that offend us
 - People that may have an appearance that disturbs us
 - People that may have beliefs and convictions that we wholly disagree with.

As followers of Christ we are not called to condemn them, but we are called to love them. Jesus spoke with the woman at the well, Jesus touched the leper, Jesus healed the crazed, naked and possessed man screaming at him from the hills. When we encounter those in our community that are different from us, kids at the school who look to be trouble, or even our own kids, or people in the grocery line that may expect judgment from us, **but instead** receive acceptance and love through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is then that we open the door to the Spirit to work through us. We are **ineffective witnesses** for Christ in our prejudices. We are **ambassadors for Christ** when we accept all people where they are.

- This is not in our nature. This is not in my nature. This is counter to what we were probably taught and counter to the normal behavior in our culture. Peter, demonstrates this for us in this obscure little comment at the end of the chapter,

“And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.”

A man who worked with the skins of a dead animal. In the Mishna, the oral laws of the Jews, it gave permission for a woman to divorce her husband if he

practiced in the trade of tanning animals hides. Not only did Peter associate with Simon, A TANNER, but he stayed with him.

Matt shared his story of praying in the hunting stand for God to **fan the flames of the Spirit in Him**. To allow the Spirit of the Lord to work through Him to minister to other people. That is exactly the same example given to us by Peter, **to lift up the name of Jesus and bring more people into the kingdom. 1 Corinthians 12** encourages us to “earnestly desire the gifts of the Spirit.” Peter models the obedient application of allowing the Spirit to work through him; to heal Aeneas, and even raise Tabitha from the dead. Peter was **NOT focused on the gifts**, but **focused on serving others and lifting up the name of Jesus**. In doing this he **responded to the call** of the Spirit and **acted in faith** as Jesus had demonstrated. Miraculous healings occurred but **the real result** of Peter’s obedience was the **lifting up of the name of Jesus and bringing many more into the kingdom**. It was not for his personal gain or recognition, but as an obedient steward of the power of the Spirit given to him.

What could be our new resolutions for 2025?

1. **Get involved in the work that the Lord is doing in others.** Be available, be aware, be intentional, be in the stream of the work that the Spirit is doing in the lives of people you encounter in your everyday activities. Find a place to plug into the ministry of VCC.

2. **Lift up the name of Jesus Christ.** We can call upon the Lord in faith in any situation or need. We can also lift up His name and acknowledge Him by giving thanks for providing a new client, a new friend, or even to simply give thanks at lunch with a friend, vendor or client.

3. **Like Matt prayed that God would fan the flames of the Spirit in us:**
 - **Submit to the nudge or prompting of the Spirit**
 - Pray that we would be included in the work the Lord is doing in another life.
 - Even another life that is Not Like Us.

John 3:30 “He must increase, but I must decrease”