

Examples of Service in Times of Peace

Acts 9:32-43

Halifax: 8 April 2012

Introduction

Last week we saw that the church was blessed with a season of peace (v. 31)

- Peace ensued because of:
 - Saul's conversion
 - Paul's escape to Tarsus
 - Political changes (Vitellius replaced Pilate)

We focused on v. 31 and looked at how we ought to handle times of peace...

- Ought to be times of edification
- Ought to be times of walking in the fear of the Lord (#1)
- Ought to be times of walking in the comfort (par-ak'-lay-sis) of the Holy Spirit
- Ought to be times of multiplication (missions/evangelism)

This week, I want to continue looking at how we should live in times of peace.

- This is an important topic for us because *we* are living in times of peace...
 - need to make the most of them!
- This week, we will look at *Examples of Service in Times of Peace*.

I. The first example is that of Peter

- **He uses the time of peace to edify the churches through itinerate ministry.**

A. His extensive ministry is described in verse 32...

- It says,
 - **(Act 9:32) Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda.**

1. The idea here is that he went all over the place

- a. We saw him going to Samaria during the persecution to help out when the Samaritans were converted.
 - persecution did not prevent him...
 - but it can—imprisonment, blocked borders, etc...
 - But as there was freedom to move about, he took advantage of it.

b. Now he is going all around

- The little maps in our study Bibles only show the places mentioned.
- It appears that he was going to many places to make sure the churches were getting off to a good start.
 - that officers were being duly appointed
 - that sound doctrine was being preached
 - that the saints were encouraged and walking in the truth

- c. Note how it mentions in particular that he went to *the saints*...
 - All professing believers are called *saints* in the Bible.
 - That means holy ones—those set apart to God by grace.
 - Peter’s attention was on shepherding those who had come to faith.
 - The sheep are to be given our greatest attention.
 - If they are flourishing, they will produce more sheep.
2. Here you see the diligence of this man who loved the Lord Jesus!
- a. Jesus had said, “If you love me, feed my sheep.”
 - so that is what he does...
 - He pours out his life in service for others and for Jesus.
 - b. Our labours are an expression of our love for Jesus.
 - It is true that people can serve out of wrong motives—pride, making a show, envy—
 - It is possible to labour for the wrong reasons,
 - but it is not possible to do nothing if we truly love Jesus.
 - Are you serving the Lord with the gifts and opportunities he has given you?
 - There are **many** opportunities in these times of peace!
 - Those who love Jesus find these opportunities.
 - Those who don’t are always waiting for opportunities.
- B. Note that attention is given to two particular miracles that Peter performed.
- 1. He did miracles all the time, but Luke seems to have reasons for giving attention to the two he does...
 - a. First, we note that one of the persons who is healed is a man and the other is a woman.
 - If you study Luke’s gospel and Acts, you will find that he often mentions women in his writings.
 - When Jesus is born, he tells of the visitation of Gabriel to Mary.
 - When Jesus is presented at the temple, he tells not only of Simeon the prophet, but also of the widow Anna the prophetess.
 - He speaks of the many women who ministered to Jesus and provided support for Him.
 - He speaks of the women at the resurrection and how they were the ones who brought news to the eleven disciples.
 - And then in Acts,
 - he tells of the women in the upper room in Acts 1:14.

- He tells us not only of Aquila, but also of his wife Priscilla who instructed Apollos.
- He tells of the conversion of Lydia.
- This stands out because in the literature of the day, it was not customary to reference women by name.
 - We need to understand that the Bible does not look upon women as inferior or unimportant...
 - but it assigns to them a different role than men.
 - In fact, men are called to give special honour to women.
 - In places saturated by the gospel, this is always done, but not, as in our society, giving them the place of men!
 - We do not honour women by putting them beside men on the battlefield, but by refusing to allow them on the battlefield.
 - Men, you are to take the bullets for them as Jesus took the bullets for us.
 - This is our creator's design and it is good!
- b. Secondly, we note that the two places mentioned where miracles were done were Hellenistic cities.
 - Luke seems to hinting that Peter is moving closer and closer to the Gentiles.
 - Joppa is the second place and it was more Hellenistic than Lydda.
 - His next recorded stop will be at Caesarea which was Roman.
 - And look at the end of chapter 9...
 - It had Peter staying with a Tanner at Joppa—
 - Tanners were considered unclean because they worked with the skins of dead animals.
 - No Pharisee would have stayed there!
 - The Lord is preparing Peter for the opening of the gospel to the Gentiles that comes in the next chapter.
 - As we minister in obedience to Him, He moves us in His providence into new things.
 - I first came to Halifax to help out with a summer mission team at Dal. I had no intention of ever preaching.
 - Then I stayed and began to personal bible studies on campus.
 - Then group Bible studies
 - Then preach
 - Then God called me to be a pastor here.

- Peter's love constrains him to move into new areas of service for his Lord.
 - The Lord only knows how much that was my motive.
- c. Thirdly, these two miracles may be mentioned because of the beautiful contrast in them...
- 1) One shows the Lord making a man whole who was alive, but unable to serve—
 - which is a picture of the greater healing Jesus does in our souls...
 - We all have areas of spiritual paralysis, but Jesus is at work in us by the power that delivered this paralysed man so that we can serve!
 - Peter says, "Aeneas, Jesus the Christ is healing you."
 - The idea is that he was doing so at that very moment.
 - Jesus is doing that for all of you—
 - At this very moment, He is healing you of your spiritual paralysis that keeps you from serving the Lord.
 - It is so moving when Peter tells him rise up and make his bed!
 - This was an every day task for most people—they would roll up their bed and put it away...
 - but Aeneas had not done this for eight long years!
 - And now, just like that, he is able to make up his bed!
 - He does not need it for the rest of the day!

TRANS> so you see, this first miracle shows the Lord making a man whole who was alive, but unable to fully serve.

- 2) The second miracle shows the Lord raising a woman who was a very capable and faithful servant, but had died...
 - reminding us that the power that raised her will raise all who have died at the last day to serve forever in paradise!
 - I will have more to say about this later.
 - But suffice you see the contrast...
 - One is made whole.
 - One is restored to life.
2. I want you to consider how God particularly uses Peter to perform these miracles.
- a. We have seen that apostles were not the only ones who were given the ability to do miracles at this time—Philip did miracles...
 - but we have seen that a certain primacy was given to the Apostles.

- b. That is because the purpose of these miracles was to confirm the word that the apostles were proclaiming!
 - They were bringing new revelation into the world!
 - Whenever God has servants doing that, He always proves that they are sent by Him by giving them signs and wonders.
 - He did this with Moses—with his rod—with the plagues.
 - He did this with Elijah and Elisha.
 - He did this with all the prophets.
 - He did this with Jesus!
 - This purpose for miracles is emphasised in the ministry of Jesus.
 - He says things like,
 - “If you do not believe me, believe the signs.”
 - In Hebrews, this purpose is expressly set forth in Heb 2:4 when it speaks of:
 - **(Heb 2:4) God also bearing witness [to the Apostles] both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?**
- c. You can see in both of these miracles that there was no good way to deny what had been done!
 - 1) Concerning Aeneas, everybody in the area knew this man.
 - They knew that he had not walked for eight years and they knew that Peter who preached Jesus had healed him in Jesus’ name.
 - It would have been very difficult to come up with another explanation.
 - It is definitely a sign that confirmed that Jesus as alive and that He was with Peter.
 - 2) And of course with Dorcas as well...
 - She had died and Peter was not even there at the time.
 - They called for him and he came and raised her from the dead.
 - It would have been very hard to deny that this was the finger of God!
 - It confirmed Peter’s authority.
 - If these miracles had not been done, the gospel would not have spread as it did in these regions.
- 3. It was very important to Peter’s ministry in these cities outside of Jerusalem to have his authority confirmed...
 - As an apostle, the people needed to follow his directives in setting up the church and believe his doctrine!
 - The miracles helped them to do just that.

- In reading about these miracles, they ought to have the same impact on us!
 - We too ought to give total assent to the word of the apostles and prophets, since God has borne witness to them with miracles.
 - We must receive their writings not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectively works in all who believe.
 - We need to believe the word and act differently because of what it says!
 - It comes with all the authority of God.
 - Nothing had done more harm to the church than the denial of the complete authority of the Scriptures!
 - It is nothing but rebellion against the Lord.
 - We need to call a spade a spade!

TRANS> There is no doubt that Peter’s coming to these churches was a great boon to them—to help them get off to a good start.

- He had a tireless ministry of edification.

C. And you can see that there was another effect of his labours as well...

- There was an evangelistic impact on the community at large!
 1. In Acts 9:35, Luke says of the healing of Aeneas that
 - **“all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon (the valley that extended from Lydda) saw him and turned to the Lord.”**
 - Luke certainly does not mean every person in these regions, for there were many Gentiles among them and they have not trusted the Lord yet,
 - but he probably means that virtually all of the Jews turned to the Lord.
 - At this time, for a Gentile to convert, they had to first become a Jew and be circumcised.
 - Anyway, the miracle confirmed that Peter was speaking the truth when he proclaimed the gospel to them.
 - And God opened their hearts to believe!
 - What a blessing—
 2. You can see in Acts 9:42 that Peter’s raising up of Dorcas has the same effect at Joppa...
 - **(Act 9:42) And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.**
 - We need to pray that the Lord would work among us today.
 - We do not have such miracles in our midst, but we have them recorded in scripture...
 - And we have remarkable prophecies that have been fulfilled.

TRANS> So you see what a fine example of faithful ministry during times of peace Peter is.

- Like his Master before him, he went about everywhere doing good.
 - May we share his love for the Lord and for each other and may it put a spring in our step.
- Now we will turn to a second example of faithfulness in times of peace.

II. Dorcas is an example of a woman who walked in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

- God was supreme in her life, and she lived by the power of His Spirit.

A. See how she had devoted herself to good works!

1. When she died, widows came from all around showing (wearing) the garments that she had made for them.

- Verse 39 says:
 - **(Act 9:39) And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.**
 - Making clothes was a very laborious and expensive task in those days.
 - We don't appreciate it because clothes are so easy for us to get.
 - But it was a big deal in the first century.
 - She must have been at it night and day!

2. How like Jesus this is!

a. She identifies the need and then does what she can to meet it!

- Excuses are so easy for us—service is so hard for us!
- Service doesn't happen spontaneously.
 - If we don't plan to do good deeds, they are not likely to ever happen.
 - Is that not right?
 - If you have nothing but a few intentions about things you ought to do some time, but you don't get out your calendar and set down a time to do them,
 - your intentions no better than dust in the wind.
 - And if you talk about them, they are empty talk!

b. Jesus came in the fullness of time.

- He had an appointed time to come into the world and an appointed time to go to the cross...
 - There was an appointed time because it was something that He had purposed to do... not just to think about doing.

3. There is so much good that some of you could do for the Lord!
 - It doesn't have to be big and elaborate...
 - There are mothers in the church who could use help with cooking and cleaning and watching their children.
 - There are all sorts of ways that some of you could bless others.
 - Some of you might take on a second job—and devote all your earnings to support missions!
 - or volunteer at the hospital or go and visit the elderly and help them with their shopping or their cleaning.
 - The point is, you will look for ways to serve if you love the Lord.
 - This is what James calls pure and undefiled religion.

B. And you see that Dorcas was greatly loved because of what she did.

1. There are a lot of people in our selfish age that want to be loved just because—just for who they are.
 - a. Who doesn't want that?
 - What husband wouldn't want his wife to just totally adore him and think he is the greatest without him ever doing a thing for her...
 - just loving him because of who he is!
 - Some mothers ruin their little boys by treating them this way—
 - always making excuses for them,
 - always catering to them and picking up the slack for them,
 - never putting demands on them.
 - And what woman would not want a man that would just think her perfect and worship her like a queen, asking nothing of her.
 - And if she could also have friends who come by and tell her how wonderful she is and who give her things and expect nothing from her in return.
 - I guess we would all like that!
 - b. And the truth is, that is practically how the Lord treats us!
 - He declares us to be righteous when we are so far from righteous.
 - But of course He does make great demands on us—not in order to be justified—but in order to train us to live as His sons.
 - He calls us to rigorous discipleship.
 - But he accepts us despite our many failings.
 - And there is a real sense in which we ought to do that for one another.
 - The commitment ought to stay there no matter what!
 - The devotion and love for each other ought to remain.
 - but we also need to hold each other accountable.

- The doting mother doesn't really love her son—she ruins him.
 - Our selfish hearts want to be loved even though we have done nothing to deserve it.
 - Yes, you ought to do something to deserve it.
2. You see that with Dorcas, she was loved because of what she did.
- a. She was greatly missed because she had cared for others!
 - She was loved because she first loved.
 - She was not looking to see who would love her—
 - She was looking out to others to see what she could do for them.
 - And because she was so kind to everyone, she was greatly loved!
 - b. It is a great irony, in a way, that those who devote themselves to loving and serving others are the most loved people of all.
 - And those who spend all their time looking for the love of others and trying to win their love end up with the least love.
 - I saw a DVD and read an article about Marie Ens, a woman from Saskatchewan, who has totally devoted herself to the care of orphans.
 - She is in her 70s and still going strong.
 - It was amazing to see all the love that comes back to her from the orphans and widows she cares for!
 - I have told you before about a lady at Riverside that realised a lot of busy mothers did not have time to iron clothes.
 - So she took on the ministry of doing all the ironing for them.
 - She is a greatly loved lady!
 - She could be very lonely, but instead she is in the homes of her friends serving them and being a blessing.
 - c. But I do not mean to set you up for a fall!
 - If you go out serving in order to be loved, you will crash because there will be times when you are not loved and when you get very little recognition.
 - The motivation for Dorcas was not that she might be loved, but that she might love...
 - because she had already been so greatly loved by Jesus!
 - If you are going out to serve, think about how much you have been loved to spur you along.
 - Think about that, not only when you are doing good works, but also in your everyday calling.

3. An example like this reminds me of the song our Lord Jesus gave us about His love for the church for whom He gave His life:
 - **(Psa 122:6-9) ⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. ⁷ Peace be within your walls, Prosperity within your palaces." ⁸ For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, "Peace *be* within you." ⁹ Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good.**
 - Let us join with Jesus in using our strength to do good for His house!

TRANS> But alas, the LORD took Dorcas away! She died!

- And that brings us the third thing I want to look at...

III. Why did the Lord take Dorcas away only to give her back again?

- **There are lessons for us to learn through this.**

A. First, by taking her away and giving her back, He shows that He is the resurrection and the life.

1. Jesus has the power and authority to raise us all up and He will do it!
 - He will do it at the last day when He comes in His glory.
 - Nothing is ultimately lost in the death of a saint.
 - We have each other for keeps.
2. So we do not need to sorrow as others who have no hope.
 - If there are those we have loved in the body of Christ, we know that we will get to be with them again and to know their love again.
 - If there are those who have served us, we know that they will serve us again.
 - Your father's strong hands will reach out again.
 - Your mother's gentle touch will sooth you once more.
3. And let this challenge you to be all you can be for the LORD.
 - The thing about the resurrection is that you never lose your identity.
 - Jesus talks about doing good works here, in this world, in order to lay up treasure for the next.
 - We do not teach reincarnation where your identity is lost, but resurrection where it is preserved.
 - Yes, all will be forgiven, and yes, we will be perfected,
 - but Jesus makes it clear that what we have been here in this age will have a profound effect on our reward in glory.

B. Second, by taking Dorcas away and giving her back, the Lord shows that He is the One who gave Dorcas to the church in the first place.

1. We need this lesson because although we know this as a fact, we don't really take it to heart!

- Your husband and your wife and your parents are God's gifts to you.
 - Women like Dorcas and men like Peter are also His gifts.
 - They are an expression of His love and care for us and we need to remember that...
 - Jesus had put Dorcas in the church to care for all these widows.
2. The death of Dorcas followed by her return to serve again made the church at Joppa powerfully aware of that fact!
- She was there because the Lord had put her there!
 - But we need to learn from what happened to Dorcas that this is just as true of everyone God has given us in our lives.
 - We need to be deeply thankful for these gifts!
 - How our Lord loves us!
 - Children, think of all your mother does for you each day.
 - Do you ever notice it?
 - When is the last time you thanked her?
 - When is the last time you thanked Jesus for her?
 - He gave her to you, but He can also take her away.
 - Husbands, how about your wives?
 - Are you thankful for them? Do you say so?
- C. Third, by taking Dorcas away and giving her back, the Lord shows that He is the One who gives us power to serve.
1. Whatever strength you may have to serve is from the Lord.
- You could not do another act of service unless He gives you life to do it.
 - Remember that you only have so long here to serve.
 - That means you must not squander away the opportunities you have.
 - You need to get started right away—while you have strength because the day will come when you will not have strength—not to serve in this present world at least.
 - The opportunity will be gone forever.
2. So pray that God will continue to give you strength to serve each day, and pray that you will make the most of whatever strength He gives.
- Peter and Dorcas are our examples.
 - Jesus is our supreme example, and He draws us into His service so that we become servants to others by His grace and strength.

Conclusion

So my brothers and sisters, what will you do in this time of peace?

- Will you give your life in service to others as Peter and Dorcas did?
- See that you do, for the honour and glory of your God and Saviour Jesus Christ who loves us all so well.