

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1).

Found Faithful

Acts 9:32-43

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A verse that has greatly impacted me as both a Christian in general as well as a pastor is found in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 and says this,

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

The "case" that Paul refers to here is speaking about being a "servant of Christ" in verse one, the word "servant" literally meaning an under-oarsmen, one of the unseen men, under the deck, rowing the oars on an ancient ship. Such a servant is generally unseen and unnoticed. However, if he does not do his job, it will be noticed. The word "stewards" in verses one and two speak of responsibility to manage something that is given to you. Parents are called to be good stewards of the children God has given them. We are to be good stewards of the places we live in, the cars we drive, and even the building in which we worship. We are to be good stewards in our relationships, our ministries and in the jobs we have. And in all of this, we might go unnoticed and unseen, feeling at times like we are under-oarsmen, not getting a lot of credit or accolades.

This is not always a "fun" place to be, unnoticed unless or until you are not doing your job, but note that Paul tells us what is required regardless of whether we are noticed or not. He tells us there is but one requirement, that in whatever we have been given to manage, whether it be great or small, we be found "trustworthy." The word is "pistos" in the Greek. It means faithful; to be committed to seeing a job through. It is the root to the word for "believe or belief" as in Acts 16:31 when Paul told the Philippian jailer "Believe [pisteuson – trust in, follow through on] on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." According to 1 Corinthians 4:2, as you follow Christ, there is one goal, one requirement, just one thing to shoot for, faithfulness; trustworthiness. If people notice you, okay; if they do not okay. To be noticed is not the goal; to follow through and finish the task to the glory of God, that is the goal.

The Church Alive

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And this relates well to the text we find here in Acts 9:32-43. Let me remind you that Luke wrote his history of the very early church not so much to give insight as to what it was like to be a believer in these days, but rather to give us an account of how the gospel spread from Jerusalem to the remotest parts of the earth. We find here in Acts the fulfilling of the Great Commission given by Jesus to the making of disciples of all the nations. Remember that the book of Acts is about all the Jesus continues to do and to teach through His *people*.

And just what type of people did, and still does, Jesus use to advance His gospel and to build His church? There are many ways we might be inclined to answer this. We know God used and still uses all kinds of people, including men and women, husband and wife teams, and singles. He used believers locked into one location as well as believer he moved here and there. The book of Acts reveals to us that God indeed used "apostles" but He also used ordinary believers.

But I do not believe this answers the question as to what type of people God uses to spread the message of Jesus Christ, because behind all of these is one common denominator, one consistent characteristic that is seen over and over and that was of being "trustworthy" of being faithful to follow through on Jesus Christ regardless of who notices, knowing that God notices and requires this one thing, faithfulness. In our text, we have in Peter a good example of this very thing.

Let me remind you that Peter had been the focus in the book of Acts from chapter 1 through chapter 5. But then we hear nothing of him chapters 6-7 and then for just a moment in chapter 8 in Samaria. Acts 9 has predominately been about the conversion of Saul. Now, here at the end of Acts 9, Peter reappears.

We noted last week that Saul was sent back to Tarsus in Southeast Asia Minor and would be out of the picture for a time. And so, Peter is given the spotlight again and is used by God in the most dramatic of ways to bring both physical and spiritual healing. It would be through Peter that a man who had been paralyzed for some eight years would be made to walk again resulting in many turning to the Lord (v. 35). Next we find the Lord using Peter to literally raise from the dead a beloved church member, Tabitha. This also would result in many believing in the Lord (v. 42).

But if I might tease you; these two events, as extraordinary as they are, are simply preludes to what is about to take place in Acts 10-11 through Peter. And what is about to take place? While the gospel's spread to the whole world has been hinted at through the salvation of the Ethiopian Eunuch, we are about to be exposed to undeniable evidence that the gospel is for the *entire* world. Rather than a random conversion of Gentiles here and there, the church at Jerusalem is about to learn that Gentiles are abundantly included in the gospel blessings. And while we tend to think of Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles, it was Peter that got the proverbial ball rolling.

Peter was indeed the forerunner of seeing the gospel spread to the nations. It was through Peter that the gospel door was opened wide to the Gentiles. To be sure, it would be the apostle Paul who would do the lion's share in the spreading of the gospel among the nations (9:15), but Peter would have a key role in it all.

Now why do I share all this? I share it because although Peter would continue to play an important role in the church and while we will see some wondrous things yet to come, Peter will fade from the scene and Paul will come to have the more prominent position. And this is the

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point, the lesson we learn from the life and character of Peter, that the servant of Christ remains faithful even though he may not be in the spotlight. And as we will see, the reason for Peter’s faithfulness, is that he constantly remained Christ-centered rather than self-centered. So then, from the life of Peter in these verses, we find five things that are true of those who would be faithful servants like him.

I. **A faithful servant is not perfect.**

As we come to our text and consider the character of a faithful servant as seen here in the actions of Peter, let me first begin by stating what a faithful servant is not. A faithful servant is not perfect. This passage becomes for us all the more insightful when we remember Peter’s utter failure back when the Lord Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tried and crucified. The first lesson then is this, that there is always hope for those who have failed. For faith itself is the gift of God, not the result of our good works. Faith causes good works; good works are not the cause of faith. Or to put it one more way, faith is the root (planted by God); and works are the fruit (our experience of the faith).

When we look at the life of Peter back in the Gospels, we would be hard pressed to find anyone who failed along the lines and to the depth of Peter. Let me remind you of just a few of Peter’s lead roles in the category of “foot in the mouth” moments. Recall the time when Jesus said to Peter, “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). Lofty words, and what was Peter’s response as Jesus went on to describe the Father’s plan of the cross for His Son? Peter said, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You” (Matthew 16:22). To which Jesus responded, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (Matthew 16:23). In short, Peter failed miserably. He disappointed his Lord. And yet, by God’s grace, we find him all this time later being faithful.

But of all his failures, the greatest came as he denied the Lord three times after so brazenly boasting that he would remain faithful even if all the other disciples fell away from Jesus (Matthew 26:22). How close did Peter come to falling away? So close, yet he belong to Jesus and so the faith granted him brought Peter remorse and repentance along with the faith to believe God (see Luke 22:31-34; John 21:15-20). And so we find Peter far from perfect, yet oh so wondrously forgiven.

And here is the lesson for us; if we would be faithful servants like Peter, let us remember; that while we are far from perfect, filled with sin and sometimes failing the Lord miserably, if we be in Christ, we are also completely forgiven! We must experience forgiveness from the Lord. The Lord promises restoration. How many times did King David fail, and fail miserably, yet he was forgiven and then faithful? Think about how John Mark failed Paul, yet he was forgiven and then faithful. Remember what Jesus said of the woman who was a great sinner in Luke 7:47 -

For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.

Yes, our sins are many, but they are forgiven by faith in the work of Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. He died for sin, so that your sin may be forgiven. Do you believe this? If you do, then

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you will love much, for you know you have been forgiven much and that your imperfection has been swallowed up by the perfection of Christ.

II. A faithful servant is passionate (9:32)

Now as Peter was traveling through all those regions, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

In verse 32 we find Peter busy, busy as a shepherd, “**travelling through all those regions,**” meaning throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria as spoken of in v. 31. We see Peter’s shepherd’s heart as he visited, went to, believers. It would be safe to say that these believers had at one time been in the church at Jerusalem. These were the scattered ones as a result of Stephen’s stoning. Since they were now in other places, Peter reveals his faithfulness in going to them to shepherd them. Having learned from his Master, Jesus, Peter was passionate for the spiritual welfare of the people and sought out opportunities to minister to others.

Do you want more ministry opportunities? Do you want to make a godly impact upon the lives of people? Do you want to see people come to know Christ and come to know Him better through you? Then be involved in ministry! *For the faithful servant of Christ busies himself with things of spiritual value and this opens more opportunities to impact others. You cannot better serve others if you are not already busy serving others.* I like the way John MacArthur, one who may rightly be described as passionate for God and God’s people has put it saying, “*Those actively involved in ministry are usually the ones to whom God grants the most ministry opportunities. God has always seemed to entrust His richest ministries to the busiest saints. Just being wholeheartedly active in ministry places one in strategic opportunities.*”

Peter had a passion for the church, the people of the church and likewise, if we would be counted as faithful servants of Jesus, we will busy ourselves with the tasks of seeing to the welfare of other believers. This first takes place right here with one another and then is to spread to other believers.

Another thing you might note here from verse 32 is that Peter was visiting, “saints.” Contrary to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church which says that only the Pope and the RCC can declare someone a saint, and only after that person is dead, we see here that all the believers, who were alive at the time, were identified as saints. The word “**saint**” – literally holy ones, speaks of those as “set apart for the Lord and His work.” To be a Christian is to be saint and to be saint is to be a Christian. Every one of you, if you are in Christ, is a saint, and if we truly know and believe that, it should be demonstrated in a passion for Jesus and His people. This is the mark of the faithful servant, a passion for Jesus and His people.

III. A faithful servant is practice-oriented (9:33-34; 36-41)

33 There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years, for he was paralyzed. 34 Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed.” Immediately he got up.

In verses 33-34 and the account of Aeneas, as well as in verses 36-41 and the account of Tabitha, we find that the faithful servant is one who seeks to practice his faith; to demonstrate it before others. In the healing of a man paralyzed for eight years and the raising of a woman who had died, we see a person who believed God for that which was humanly impossible. And what I would like to point out is that Peter was focused on what was possible for *God to do*.

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We need to remember that in the event with Aeneas, this was not the first time that Peter seen a bedridden individual. Back in Acts 3-4 Peter had seen the lame man healed through him and this actually got him into trouble. But before this, in Matthew 9:1-8, Peter had seen Jesus heal a paralytic. What Peter had experienced *with* the Lord he now experienced *by* the Lord. The difference between then and now was that while the Lord was not visible here in Acts 9, He was just as present and just as real! Notice that Peter is clear that it was not his own hand healing this man, but rather Jesus who heals him. Here is proof for us that Jesus is continuing to work and to teach through His people.

There are a few things to note about this healing. First, our text does not tell us whether or not this man had faith. This reveals the grace and mercy of God. Second, the man is identified by name, Aeneas. This is an evidence of the truthfulness of the account. People could go and talk to this man or his family to verify the account. Third, and as I already alluded to, the man was healed by *Jesus*, not by Peter. In verse 34 Peter said, “**Jesus the Christ heals you.**” Peter gave credit where it was due. Peter had faith in the power of Jesus, not in his own ability. He had faith that he was to be a channel through which Jesus did His work. Too often with think more about what we can (or cannot) do and thus far too little of what Christ can do through us. Peter looked for his faith to be practiced and did so.

36 Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. 37 And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, "Do not delay in coming to us." 39 So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. 40 But Peter sent them all out 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; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

And if one account is not enough, we are immediately presented with the raising of Tabitha. Notice again we are given a personal name which strengthens the historicity of the event. I also think it is interesting to note that this miracle took place in Joppa, where some 800 years before, another man of God by the name of Jonah, was *not* faithful.

Tabitha, also called Dorcas, was a beloved and faithful member the church and her death was a great loss to the congregation. Evidently, the people needed her and the Lord was gracious to hear their cries. John Calvin commented, “*They humbly craved God’s help, not that they will make Tabitha immortal, but their only desire is to have her life prolonged for a time, that she may yet profit the Church...This turned to her greater good that she revived, that she might be a more excellent instrument of God’s goodness and power.*”

Notice the faith of these believers who sent an entourage to bring their pastor, Peter, to them. They had heard of the healing of Aeneas and thought it but a little thing by the power of God so have their friend raised from the dead.

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According to verse 37, they had prepared her body by washing but had not yet anointed it for burial. These believed in the resurrection and their own faith expected great things and therefore they attempted great things! We read in verse 39 that Peter did come and he was shown the garments that Tabitha had made for the people hoping to convince him to do anything he might to restore her. Peter sent everyone out and when he was alone, he fell on his knees and prayed. Why did Peter first asked everyone to leave? I do not have an answer. Maybe he knew that he had no power to raise Tabitha and so wanted to pray alone. Maybe he did not want an audience watching him so that he might focus upon his prayers. The point is, this was no show, but an exercise of faith.

Peter prays and then, in practice of his faith, he commands her to arise! Can you imagine Peter’s heart? Did he know she would rise? Was this to be God’s will? Yet we read that “opened her eyes,” looked at Peter and sat up. Was Peter as overwhelmed as the people were about to be? He practiced his faith and God blessed. Extending his hand, Peter helped her up and **“presented her alive”** to those who loved her. Can you imagine the cries of praise, “Amen!” and “Praise to the Lord Almighty!” The raising of Tabitha and of the healing of Aeneas were miracles, not of Peter, but of the Lord!

Beloved, let us take comfort that Jesus is able to do such extraordinary things. We might wonder why we do not see such healings and resurrections today. We only wonder that when we fail to remember that we get to participate in an even greater miracle called the new birth. When a person comes to faith in Jesus, there is a greater healing than anything physical; and a greater resurrection than what Tabitha experienced. Notice the parallels between what we see in these two accounts to the new birth. In both cases, the person’s body was dead, unresponsive and humanly speaking, in a hopeless condition. It is the name of Jesus made all the difference (Acts 4:12). Jesus is to be glorified through this, not an apostle. And this is what happened as many in Joppa believed in the Lord, not in Peter. This leads us to the fourth characteristic of the faithful servant...

IV. A faithful servant is productive (9:35, 42)

35 And all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord...42 It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

An intriguing result found in both accounts is the response of the people to each of the respective miracles. The people “turned to the Lord” and “believed in the Lord.”

The purpose of the miracles was to demonstrate what God would do through a faithful servant. As the servant, in this case, Peter, is faithful to the Lord, the Lord draws people to Christ, not to the miracle worker! Because Peter was faithful, God allowed that faith to be productive, allowing Peter to be fruitful; allowing him to see many people saved.

Beloved, we need to know that God blesses faithfulness with productivity. We ought to expect, as we faithfully share the gospel; as we faithfully engage in people’s lives, living out the precepts and principles of God’s Word, that lives will be changed. If we are not being productive, if we are not seeing people’s lives changed, it is because we are not living our faith as we ought. Our passion ought to be to do anything and everything we can to see people’s lives changed by Christ and for Christ. To be sure, it will be in God’s time and not always in ways or manners that we might expect, but we can expect lives to change if we are rightly living out our faith. Are you living out your faith? How can you know? Are lives being drawn closer to Jesus because of you?

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Will you labor and strive for others to be drawn closer to Christ? Paul would wonderfully capture this attitude in Colossians 1:28-29 saying,

28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Notice Paul’s expectation to “present every man complete in Christ” and to this productivity Paul says he labors (works with maximum effort) and strives (agonizes) but not in his own power but by the power of God at work in Him. Do you want to be more productive for Jesus, labor and strive to admonish, teach and present every man complete in Christ. This is to what you are to be a faithful servant. The pages of history are filled with believers who faithfully persevered in their service to Christ, regardless of any initial lack of fruit. Their faithfulness eventually resulted in abundant fruitfulness and productively to the glory of God. Our job is to labor and strive and God will take care of the rest.

V. A faithful servant is peaceable (9:43)

And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.

Finally, a faithful servant is peaceable. We find the word “peaceable” used by Paul to describe the qualification of an elder in 1 Timothy 3:3 and again in Titus 3:2. To be peaceable is a positive way of saying, “not a fighter”. An elder is not to be looking for a fight, but looking to be at peace with others. And this is what we find in the life of Peter.

This will be fleshed out more fully in our study to come, but what verse 43 does reveal to us is that a faithful servant needs to strive to be at peace with all people. After participating in these two great miracles, Peter leaves the scene and is found in the most obscure place, the home of a tanner. Why is this strange and obscure? According to the rabbis, the practice of being a tanner was an unclean vocation, dealing with the skins of dead animals. But here we find Peter, this one who had been a missionary to the Jewish people scatter because of the persecution, staying for a time in the home of a tanner named Simon.

I do not know if this would have shocked the Jewish Christians or not. And I do not know why Peter was here, but of this I am sure, the Lord brought him there to proclaim the gospel message which included that the times were changing and that old prejudices and walls between Jews and Gentiles were to be come down. What we do know is that all of this was a part of God’s purpose to open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles.

In closing, let me make this point. If we are going to be faithful and productive servants of the Lord, we must strive to be peaceable with all people, willing to go wherever and to whomever the Lord calls us. Peter would have to look past cultural differences and perhaps even skin color in proclaiming the gospel. We must look beyond such things as these, along with where people grew up, where they went to school, where they work. Our look upon people needs to be one of compassion, realizing that everyone is in need of the saving grace of God. We are to be faithful to tell them the blessings of the gospel. Peter would come to realize his own need to look beyond his own prejudices as we will learn in Acts 10.

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If we would be productive for Jesus, if we would be practice oriented with our faith and passionate, then we must also be peaceable, with one another as well as with those who need to hear the gospel from our lips. As Romans 12:18 so simply, yet so pointedly states,

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Why is this important? How else can we expect to share the gospel, to minister the grace and mercy of Jesus to one another and to lost souls unless we are first striving to be at peace with one another and with all men? There is but one requirement upon the servant of Christ, that he be found faithful, trustworthy – busy about the Lord's work, which is to spread the gospel message to people. Are you being faithful? If not, why not? What needs to change? What needs to be confessed, repented of and forsaken? What needs to be embraced? Let us labor and strive to be faithful servants of Jesus.

Soli Deo Gloria

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