

Acts 055
Good Works Desired
Acts 9:36-43
October 16, 2024
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Let us take our Bibles if we could, and open them to Acts 9:36. Here we are in Acts 9, having finished the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Now Peter moves center stage. There is a reason for that: Peter has to move center stage in order for Paul to become Paul. Paul is the apostle to the The Gentiles, but it was Peter who was given the keys of the Kingdom. Peter must lead the first Gentiles to Christ—which he will do in the next chapter, Acts 10. It is going to be such a major movement that the church is going to have a meeting about it in Jerusalem to see if it really happened (Acts 11).

Peter is going to turn that key one more time. He already led the first Jews to Christ, the first Samaritans to Christ, and now he is going to turn the key one more time and lead the first Gentiles to Christ. All the converts up to this point in time are Jewish or Samaritan. Once the door is open, it stays open.

Paul, who we have already been introduced to, Saul also called Paul is going to move into a prime position to fulfill his role as the apostle to the Gentiles. That is why there is an order that you see here. We have to discuss Peter's ministry first, so Saul, who has just become Paul, can have his ministry.

Peter has healed a man named Ananias in the place called Lydda (Acts 9:32-35). We have talked about that. Now he is about ready to raise someone from the dead—her Greek name is Dorcas. She is going to be raised from the dead in nearby Joppa. The chapter ends with these two big miracles of Peter, leading us into Acts 10, which is an even bigger miracle where a Gentile actually gets saved.

Here is our outline for Peter's ministry in Joppa (Acts 9:36-43):

Saul's Conversion (9:1-43)

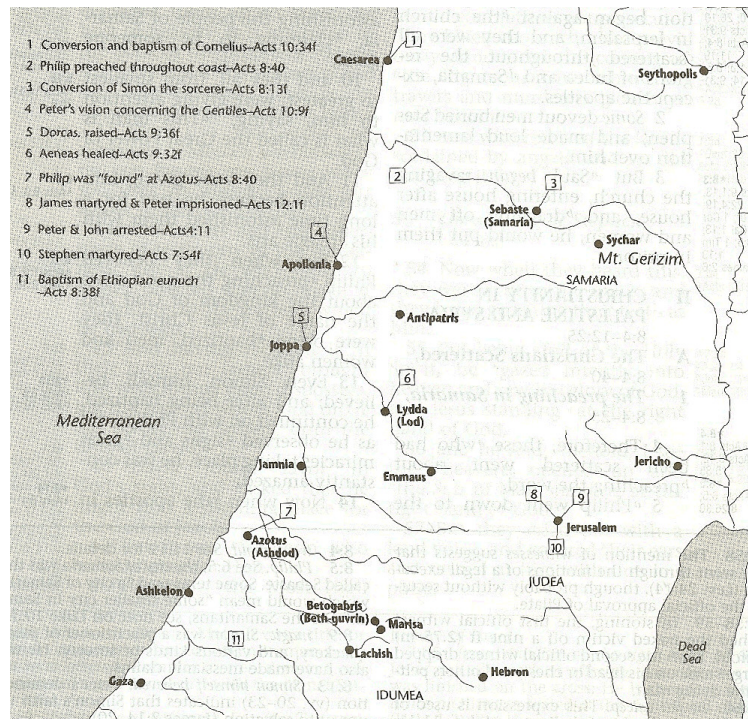
- I. Saul (9:1-31)
- II. Peter (Acts 9:32-43)
 - A. Lydda (32-35)
 - B. Joppa (36-43)
 - 1. Place (36)
 - 2. Dorcas' death (37)
 - 3. Peter fetched (38)
 - 4. Peter & mourners' response (39)
 - 5. Miracle (40-41)
 - a) Isolation (40a)

- b) Resuscitation (40b-41)
- 6. Word spreads (42)
- 7. Peter stays at a tanner's home (43)

First of all, notice the place where this raising of the dead happens:

"Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman abounded with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did" (Acts 9:36).

Notice how Luke elevates women constantly, not only in the Gospel of Luke, but also in the Book of Acts. Here is a very devout woman. She was actually famous in her little circle, a devout disciple of Christ, and a Jewish woman. This miracle is going to take place in Joppa.



Lydda is where Peter raised a man who had been bedridden for eight years. His ministry is going to move a little further up north to Joppa on the coast, and you see how Peter's trajectory is moving north, ultimately to Caesarea. The big conversion is going to take place in Caesarea where Cornelius' household is going to be led to Christ—the first Gentile salvation that we have.

Joppa, where we are going to study tonight, there was a famous prophet who did not want to do what God said. God said, "Go preach to Nineveh." Instead he went to Spain. Nineveh is in the east and Spain is in the west. When he did that, his first port city, as he was trying to book a flight, so to speak, to Spain, was Joppa. That goes all the way back to the ninth century BC.

"But Jonah arose up to flee to Tarshish [modern-day Spain] from the presence of the Lord and found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah 1:3).

This is where Jonah fled from God. It is interesting that when Jonah fled from God, it says, *"he went down to Joppa."* Then you keep reading Jonah 1:3 and it says, *"he paid the fare and went down into it."* It keeps saying, as he was running from the Lord, "He went down, he went down, he went down." That is a pretty good description of what happens to people, myself included, when we run from what God wants us to do. We keep going down, down, down, because God has a way of getting our attention through divine discipline.

That is why Joppa is famous. Joppa is very near Tel Aviv, the airport there in Israel. When you take an Israel tour, usually you get off the plane and the first place they show you is Joppa. They tell you that Joppa is biblically significant. There are, with all of these strategic places, artifacts and things like that set up. But Joppa is famous because that is where Jonah fled from the Lord. Joppa is also famous because this is where Peter is going to resuscitate Dorcas from the dead.

You will also notice here in Acts 9:36 that the name Dorcas, a Hebrew name, is given to Tabitha: *"which translated in Greek is called Dorcas."* Why would Luke give us the Hebrew name and then the Greek name? Because he is writing to a Greek, a Gentile whose name is Theophilus. That is why he says that; he does translation for Theophilus.

Remember, Luke and Acts go together—prequel and sequel.

"It seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3).

"The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1).

He is writing to a Gentile, probably in Rome, who was saved. The way he is described here in Luke's prologue (Luke 1:1-4), it looks like he is saved, but he is having doubts about whether Christianity is for him because he is really not Jewish—he is a Gentile. So Luke puts this whole two-part historical study together. Part one: The Life of Christ, featuring Jesus as the Son of Man. Part two: the birth and growth of the church. "Theophilus, you were always contemplated in God's plan. God always intended to get the gospel to you, so therefore you do not have to have doubts about whether Christianity is for you or not, after reading this powerful, two-part historical account."

That is why Luke is translating this Hebrew name, Tabitha, and explaining what her Greek name is. Dorcas is introduced here. You will notice that Dorcas is a person of good works. She is a disciple of Christ, and she is known for her good works:.

"This woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did" (Acts 9:36).

She was not one of these disciples of the Lord that only did things unto the Lord when it was convenient, or when she felt like it. She was one of those very aggressive servants of the Lord that served the Lord constantly—that was her lifestyle. Luke, here in Acts 9:36, calls our attention to that.

Can bad things happen to good people? Yes, because this very devout disciple, this woman who is famous at least in her circle, dies. Her death is recorded in Acts 9:37:

"And it happened at the time that she fell sick and died" (Acts 9:37).

There is a belief in modern-day Christianity called the prosperity movement, that if you are a child of God, you are a kid of the King. You should never get sick and your bank account should always be filled with money. If you do not have those things, then you are really not walking in the promises of God. This is the prosperity movement. They teach this on so-called Christian television almost around the clock.

Obviously, that doctrine cannot be true, because here is a very devout woman; she is praised for her good deeds and her discipleship; and she got sick. After she got sick, she died. Does God bless people financially? Yes, He can. Does God physically heal people? Yes, He can. That is why Pastor Jim was up here praying for everybody on our list. We want to see the hand of God move in people's lives, but the truth of the matter is, this side of eternity, there is no divine promise that we will not get sick and that we will not have financial trouble.

Paul talks at the end of 2 Timothy about a man named Trophimus who he left sick in Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20). This is Paul who raised people from the dead. He left a man sick in Miletus. Paul himself, according to the Book of Galatians, suffered from frequent illnesses or frequent ailments (Galatians 4:13). The truth is, we are living in a cursed world, and bad things do happen to good people.

This disciple gets sick and she dies. The last time I checked, the mortality rate was still 100%. Every person in here is going to die if we are not the Rapture generation. I know there are some exceptions to the rule: Elijah was taken to heaven before he died (2 Kings 2:11). But those are exceptions to the rule. The general rule is, if we are not the Rapture generation, we are all going to die.

In 2024 it has been rough for me. As the calendar was changing there from 2023 to 2024, I felt the Lord impressing upon me that this year is going to be different from anything I had ever experienced. My wife and I were just talking about this earlier today

and boy, it has been different. We have had two major deaths in our family. My father, Anne's father—my father-in-law—I had the cancer scare. I am not the only one that has problems. I read the prayer requests. There are people here walking through heavy, heavy waters. Here comes death into all of our lives.

"And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

If you hang out in a funeral, you are wise.; If you are always hanging out where people are getting married and having weddings (not that going to a wedding is wrong—we had one here on Saturday that was really good), but if your whole diet consists of going to weddings and you never go to a funeral, then you are considered foolish (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4). Solomon wrote that—the wisest man that ever lived, other than Jesus, as far as I can tell.

*"It is better to go to a house of mourning
Than go to a house of feasting,
Because that is the end of every man,
And the living takes it to heart.
Sorrow is better than laughter,
For when a face is sad a heart may be happy.
The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning,
While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure" (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4).*

The interesting thing about funerals and memorial services and people that you love passing, it forces you to look at your life and say, "I am not going to be here forever, and I better use what little time I have left wisely." There is no better sermon to communicate that than going to a memorial service.

At a wedding, it is different. Everybody is happy and a new couple is formed and a new family has started. You are not thinking about death. Maybe you are, but that is a weird wedding. You are thinking about the future and life, and your thoughts do not go to the temporal nature of life. Death, funerals, and memorial services, have a way of bringing those things to our mind, reminding us that we are living all of us on borrowed time. You could hear a sermon on it, or you can go to a memorial service for one of your loved ones just past. That is probably a more powerful sermon, seeing it happen.

Dorcas, this beautiful woman in the Lord dies.

"And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they washed her body, they laid it in an upper room" (Acts 9:37).

Do not confuse this upper room with the Jerusalem upper room. This is an upper room—I guess most cities in ancient Israel had what we would call an upper room.

"What are you guys going to do now?" "We are going to fetch Peter." Peter is fetched there in Acts 9:38: *"Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there..."* How did they know he was there? Because he just brought someone out of their sick bed who had been there for eight years. Word travels fast.

"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'" (Acts 9:37).

There is Peter in Lydda. They say, "Come on up to Joppa. We need some help." Peter's northern trajectory eventually takes him to Caesarea where the big conversion of Cornelius is going to take place. As Peter arrives there in Joppa, you see his response to the death of Dorcas, and you see the response of the mourners.

Just like in our Genesis study that we are doing on Sunday mornings, which is filled with geography, the Book of Acts is the same way. There are tons of geographical places. God is trying to show us that these things really happened. This is not "VeggieTales" or something; this is not "Jack and the Beanstalk." This is real history that you are reading here.

"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" (Acts 9:39).

They are crying their eyes out, and the reason they are crying and upset about it is because here is a woman that was a blessing to so many people. In fact, as Peter makes his debut there, they keep pointing out all the tunics and the garments and works of service that Dorcas was involved in. Acts 9:36, you will recall, says she was involved in those things *"continually."*

Dorcas was a woman of good works. That is what God has for all of us. We are not saved by good works, but He wants us to be productive for Him while we are here on the earth.

"But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" (James 2:20).

This is a little bit different than reformed churches. We do not say that if you do not have good works, you are not a Christian. We do not hold good works over people's heads as some kind of motivation to get them to try harder because maybe they are not saved. You will get that constantly in Armenian churches and Calvinistic churches. Arminius says: You lost your salvation. Calvin says: You never had salvation.

Our perspective on good works is that good works are not automatic, but they are desired—they are desirable. God wants us to be people of good works. He wants to use

us to expand His purposes upon the earth. We did not get saved to have our fire insurance paid up. Not going to hell is a wonderful thing; I will take that any day of the week. But there is more to it than that.

We are not saved by good works, but we are saved unto good works. God desires to do good works in us. If a person does not have good works, what it means is they are not really maturing in the middle tense of their salvation. It could mean that they are not saved, but that is not the only option. There is another option on the table: that they are saved, but they are just not growing up the way they should. They do not have a birth issue; they have a growth issue.

That is how we look at this subject of good works. It is desired—something God wants—but it is not guaranteed nor automatic. You have to start taking steps of faith and obedience in the middle of your salvation, which is your growth.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as the result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Now most people, in their Bible memorization programs, will only memorize Ephesians 2:8-9. We like Ephesians 2:8-9 because it is very clear that we are not saved by good works, but the last time I checked, verse ten follows verse nine. Can I get an amen on that? The rest of the passage says:

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

"Walk" ("peripateo" in Greek) is in the subjunctive mood, which is the mood of possibility. In other words: Am I going to walk in good works or not? That is up to me, how I respond to God in the middle tense of my salvation. It is not automatic; it is not guaranteed; it is a possibility. It certainly is desired.

Here is this woman named Dorcas. She obviously made tremendous strides in the middle tense of her salvation. She is called a disciple. She abounded in good works (Acts 9:36) to the point that when she died, all people could do was cry and point to all the garments and tunics that she had made, as a blessing to so many within the church (Acts 9:39).

This furnishes the environment for a miracle, where Peter is going to take this woman and bring her back from the dead. That miracle is described in Acts 9:40-41. The miracle has two parts to it: there is an isolation, and then there is a resuscitation. Notice the isolation: *"But Peter sent them all out..."* All of whom? All the mourners. Why did he do that? Why did he isolate himself with her? He did that because that is what Jesus did in one of His miracles.

"They began laughing at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child's father and mother and His own companions and entered the room where the child was. Taking the child by the hand, He said to her, 'Talitha kum!' (which translated means, 'Little girl, I say to you, get up!')" (Mark 5:40-41).

When Jesus did this dramatic healing of this child, He emptied the room. I think that is why Peter is doing it here, and I think the reason Luke is documenting that for us is that Luke is trying to show us that the miracles that are happening through the apostles are still the miracles of Jesus. It is just that Jesus is now performing the identical miracle, not on the earth, but at the Father's right hand in His position as High Priest. That is how you look at all these miracles in the Book of Acts. It is still Jesus doing them, but He is doing them through the church.

All of this is very instructive to Theophilus, who is understanding that Christianity is real. The work of the church that got the gospel to Theophilus is absolutely real, because Jesus is still doing these miracles from the Father's right hand. That may be the reason why Luke records this incident of isolation.

Next you have what I would call a resuscitation. I do not call this a resurrection because when she was brought back from the dead, I am assuming she was brought back from the dead in her natural non-resurrected body, and that she died again. There are a lot of people in the Bible, like Lazarus, being brought out of the grave (John 11). He was not brought out of the grave in a resurrected body, so we assume that he died again. There is that scene in Matthew 27 where, at the crucifixion of Jesus, there are people that started to come out of the graves in Jerusalem. I would call that a resuscitation because they were not brought out of the graves in their resurrected bodies, so they died again.

I am assuming that is what is going to happen here to Dorcas. She does not get her resurrected body until the Rapture. At the point of the Rapture, the dead in Christ will rise first, as Paul tells us (1 Thessalonians 4:16). They receive their resurrected bodies first. The deceased Church Age saints who are in the presence of the Lord begin to descend.

Let us assume the Rapture happens in our lifetime. Are you guys hoping that will happen? I sure am, because dying ain't for sissies. All you have to do is watch people die. It is just one of the most painful things that you can see. So I am hoping that the Lord is going to come get us before we die. If that does happen—and I cannot promise it—we are going to be caught up second, as those folks are coming down. We are going to be put in our resurrected bodies, and the two groups meet in the air. That is when Dorcas gets her resurrected body. Here she is brought back in her non-resurrected body. That is why I am calling this a resuscitation.

"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. And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and

calling on the saints and the widows, he presented her alive" (Acts 9:40-41).

This is an authentic miracle. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, in his commentary on the Book of Acts, points this out with every miracle that happens in Acts:

"Again, it should be noted that while other believers were around, none of them performed the miracle. In Acts, only the apostles and their [de]legates (Acts 6:8; 8:6) perform signs and wonders."¹

With the apostles you had these signs and wonders at the beginning of the Apostolic Age that were just tremendous. Those were given for a lot of reasons, but one of the reasons those were given to the apostles—those abilities—was to confirm the new dispensational move of God as we are now transitioning out of 1,500 years of God's people under the Law into this new man called the Church Age. Every time God does a miracle, particularly early on in Acts, He is confirming to everybody through signs and wonders, that this dispensational change is really of Him. That is why the apostles perform miracles at a level that you do not really see throughout church history.

"The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles" (2 Corinthians 12:12).

Notice it is called *"the signs of a true apostle."* When I talk like this, a lot of people get mad and they say, "Are you saying God does not do miracles today?" Let me tell you something: God does whatever He wants, whenever He wants to do it. He never really has to ask my permission. If God did not do that, why in the world do we waste our time praying? Pastor Jim had all of these prayer requests. We are praying for God's hand in this person's life and that person's life. It is a total waste of time to be involved in that enterprise if God does not do miracles.

Of course God does miracles. It is just that, in our time period, when He does them, He does them directly rather than indirectly through someone that was an apostle. So when these apostles were doing these things, they were functioning as apostles. These were actual signs that this new move called the Church Age, which has broken God's people away from 1,500 years of Mosaic Law—which is a long time when you think about it. How are they supposed to know that this church, which is just getting off the ground here, is of God? The signs and wonders confirmed it. There was a special miracle-working power in the Apostolic Age that I do not think you see in the same way today.

We are a cessationist church. When I say cessationist, I mean selective cessationism because there are some gifts that are still here, or else why would you guys show up and listen to me at Bible study? There would be no point, if you did not think I had the gift of teaching. There are edificatory gifts that continue, but sometimes we make that

¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 224.

case so strongly that we give people the impression that God does not do miracles today.

Of course God does miracles today, or else there would be no point in praying. Did not Pastor Jim pray for the election coming up? That is going to take a miracle to get that one right, with everything I am reading in the newspaper. We want God to intervene; we want God to heal people. Yes, I am a selective cessationist, but it does not mean I am somehow non-miraculous in my perspective. I am not a deist or something that thinks God wound up the universe like a clock and just left it alone. That is not what Christianity teaches. But it is true, when you see these miracles coming through the hands of people—it is always by the apostles in the Book of Acts, or those like Stephen—they are functioning under their delegated authority.

Notice also that these people in Joppa that watch are called "saints." First Corinthians 1:2, to the most carnal church of the first century of which we have record, says:

"To the Church of God, which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling" (1 Corinthians 1:2).

The most pragmatically, practically carnal Christian is called by God "saints," because that is what they are positionally, it is just that their behavior is not consistent with their position. That is the tragedy of carnality: you are not acting according to what God has decreed about you. In Ephesians, Paul talks about sexual immorality and coarse jesting, things *"which are unfitting"* (Ephesians 5:4). He says these things are unfitting for God's holy people. He does not say, "You guys are not Christians." What he is saying is: You are not acting according to your position.

There are a lot of people right now on planet Earth, as I am speaking, that are trying to do good works so they can evolve, or however they do it, into sainthood. They are behaving so they can become saints. Notice the opposite in the Bible: the Bible says you already are a saint—Jesus made you a saint. Jesus' righteousness has been transferred to you at the point of faith. When God the Father looks at you, He looks at you just as if you are positionally righteous as His Son (Philippians 3:9).

Since that is true about us, maybe we ought to behave differently. I behave differently not because I am trying to become a saint; I behave differently because I already am a saint, and I am learning to figure that out. Do you see that? It is very different from Roman Catholicism or all of these other works-oriented religions where people are engaging in good works, trying to reach sainthood.

Word travels fast, as you can expect if someone comes back from the dead. It is not a big town.

"It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord" (Acts 9:42).

Notice here that sometimes miracles produce faith. It says: "*many believed*" all over Joppa. Why are they becoming believers? They are becoming believers because Peter has just raised up someone from the dead. Word is traveling fast. Sometimes miracles produce faith, but be very careful about that, because I could show you examples in the Bible where countless miracles occur in front of people and they do not produce faith. Look at the Exodus generation.

I cannot think of a group of people that saw more miracles than the Exodus generation. They are the ones that saw the Red Sea part. They saw the ten plagues in Egypt. They saw the manna and the water and all the provision of God as they made their way to Mount Sinai. They are the ones that got the Ten Commandments. Deuteronomy 1:2 says they had 11 days. All God is saying to this group that saw these miracles is: "You just have to trust me for 11 stinking days and you are into Canaan."

They got to the southern border of Canaan at a place called Kadesh Barnea; they saw the giants in the land; and they lapsed into unbelief other than two—Joshua and Caleb. God said to the rest of them, "I am done with you. I will work with your kids. Now, Joshua and Caleb, you are going to go in with the 20-somethings—you are going to be seasoned citizens. But the rest of you, I am done. I am going to let you guys die out here in the wilderness, because you would not even believe Me to conquer some giants when I had shown you all these miracles all this time." Miracles can produce faith, but miracles do not always produce faith.

Why am I even bringing this up? Because there is a movement within our evangelical Christianity called "power evangelism." The progenitor of it is a man named John Wimber who started the Vineyard Movement. His book is actually entitled "Power Evangelism." He got this view when he was a student at Fuller Seminary, sitting under a teacher named George Ladd. George Ladd taught the "already not yet" view of the Kingdom. It is very similar, if not identical, to Darrell Bock and his group who are now teaching at Dallas Seminary. The kingdom is here partially. Since we are partially in the Kingdom now, we need to see the miracles of the Kingdom.

From the "already not yet" view of the Kingdom, John Wimber developed this idea listening to George Ladd. In my book on the Kingdom, I give you the exact quote where Wimber does this. Wimber attributes his view of Power Evangelism to what he learned from George Ladd at Fuller Seminary through the "already not yet" view of the Kingdom.

What is Power Evangelism, with Wimber building on a foundation given to him by George Ladd at Fuller Seminary? Power Evangelism is the idea that if people are not seeing signs and wonders, then they cannot be saved. Yes, you have to hear a proclamation of the gospel, but unless it is accompanied by a sign or wonder, that is not true Power Evangelism, and you cannot have salvations. The proclamation of Scripture is not enough. The proclamation of Scripture has to be followed by a sign or wonder, or salvations will not occur. That is Power Evangelism.

That makes sense, if you believe we are in the Kingdom in part. John Wimber would gravitate towards a passage like this which says that Peter did this miracle—this woman is brought back from the dead—and many people believed. I am saying that, yes, it did occur here, but it does not always occur. Miracles do not always produce faith, or else the first Exodus generation would have made it into Canaan and conquered the giants believing in God.

There is this view that if you are preaching the gospel and there is no sign or wonder accompanied with it, then it is not legitimate. I am here to tell you that that is not true. There are countless people that get saved by hearing the gospel and never see a miracle, and they come to Christ. I reject the premise that the gospel has to be accompanied by a miracle, or else it is not true evangelism.

*"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there without watering the earth
And making it bear and sprout,
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it"* (Isaiah 55:10-11).

The Word of God, independent of any sign or wonder or experience, has power. I am telling you, I stand on Isaiah 55. You would not believe how dependent I am on Isaiah 55:10-11, because when you are up here trying to teach the Bible, you have no idea what is happening. You have no idea what is happening in people's hearts. You have no idea if people are listening, particularly as you try to put this out on media and things like that. I have to trust over and over again that, "Lord, I am going to stick with Your word. I am not going to give an editorial. I am trusting You to do Your work through Your word, because You made a promise that when it goes out, it does not come back empty."

That is why the emails people send us are so valuable—people that have been touched and blessed, by our ministry, other ministries—because it is confirmation that Isaiah 55:10-11 is true. I do not have any miracle for anybody. I wish I did. It would not be bad to be an apostle for a week, but I am not an apostle. I am just a Bible teacher. If John Wimber is right, he is saying my ministry is illegitimate.

"Is not My word like fire?" declares the Lord, 'and like a hammer which shatters a rock?'" (Jeremiah 23:29).

God's word is powerful, independent of anything—miracle or non-miracle.

Do you remember the rich man that died and went to hell in unbelief? Do you remember what he wanted?

"And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him [Lazarus] to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not come to this place of torment'" (Luke 16:27).

"Just do a miracle. I am in hell; I cannot change that. But send somebody out of here—Lazarus or whoever—back to my brothers. I have got five of them that are just as steeped in unbelief as I was. I do not want them to come here."

"But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets [that is the word of God]; let them hear them.' But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead'" (Luke 16:28-31).

A miracle is not going to help them. They are an unbelief. They need to respond to the word. Moses and the prophets have power independent of miracles. These are all texts that John Wimber does not incorporate at all in his work.

"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

There is nothing there about a miracle.

Here, Paul writes to Timothy: *"And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings..."* That would be the Bible, right? In this case the Old Testament, because the New Testament is just being developed at this point.

"And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

Timothy is saved because of the word, but there is nothing here about a miracle.

"In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures" (James 1:18).

This was written by the same guy that did this miracle here in Acts 9:

"For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23).

Do not feel, if you have a ministry focused on the word and there are not a lot of accompanying signs and wonders associated with your ministry, that somehow your ministry does not have a place or cannot bear fruit. The Word of God tells us over and over again that people are constantly converted through the Word of God. Can people

get saved through miracles? Apparently, but it is not as common as you would think. In fact, if it was an automatic formula, it did not work well for the Exodus generation.

Our focus here is not on the latest sign or wonder. It could not be because I do not have the ability, or we as elders do not have the ability, to do signs or wonders. The focus here is on the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. That is where the power is. That is where salvations occur. That is where discipleship occurs. If God wants to send some kind of confirmatory sign or wonder, that is His business. He does not need to check in with me if He wants to do that. It is not mandatory the way John Wimber presented it in his Power Evangelism.

You come to Acts 9:43, where Peter stays at a tanner's home. Most people are on their one-year Bible reading program. Those are good, but as we are trying to fill our quota for the day, we have a tendency to rush through verses that are very important, not understanding their importance. Acts 9:43 is huge, but most people rushing through would not know that. Verse 43 says,

"And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon" (Acts 9:43).

What is a tanner? A tanner is someone who worked with the skins or the carcasses of deceased animals. Under the Mosaic Law, such a practice was unclean. It was unclean for 1,500 years.

"Also if one of the animals dies which you have for food, the one who touches its carcass unclean until evening. He too, who eats some of its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening, and the one who picks up its carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening" (Leviticus 11:39-40).

In other words, under the Mosaic Law, you did not mess around with tanners who trafficked in working with these carcasses. You certainly would not touch one yourself. Do you see what God is doing with Peter here? He is breaking him away from the Mosaic Law by having him stay at the home of a tanner.

By the way, he is not just in and out for the night. He is there many days. What is God doing with Peter here? He is breaking him away from the Mosaic Law because the Mosaic Law is no longer functioning. We are in the Church Age now where we follow the law of the Spirit (Romans 8:2)—the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2). We do not follow the Mosaic Law.

People write to our church and they say, "How come you guys meet on Sunday? You are supposed to meet on Saturday." The answer is, "We are not under the Mosaic Law. We have not been under the Mosaic Law for 2,000 years." "But, Pastor, how come you do not preach tithing?" "The same reason: we are not under the Mosaic Law."

If you want to go under the Mosaic Law for tithing, you need to start forking over three tithes—twenty-three and one-third percent of your income. (I will be right up here receiving collections afterwards, if that is what you want to do.) There were two annual tithes under the Law of Moses. There was one tithe every three years. We do not preach tithing. We are under the principles of grace giving, because we are in the Church Age (2 Corinthians 8 and 9). If you want to know the principles of giving in the Church Age, you will find it in the epistles, not in the Mosaic Law.

"Why aren't you practicing the feast days?" I like the feast days, but when you start to make something, not just something you study and understand, but something compulsory, mandatory, you just took the church and you put it under the Mosaic Law.

We are under a completely new system. Our system looks like the Mosaic Law at points, but it is not the Mosaic Law. Our system says do not murder; the Mosaic Law says do not murder, but our system is different from the Mosaic Law. If I commit a crime in California because I am from California, I am not going to be tried in Texas for the same crime. Let us say that I steal something or I embezzle or something like that. If I do it in California, I am going to be prosecuted in California. I am not going to be prosecuted in Texas, not because Texas does not have embezzlement laws, because it is a system that looks like California in certain respects, but it is a totally different system. We are under the law of the Spirit, the law of Christ, which looks like the Mosaic Law sometimes, but it is a completely different system. Peter has to be weaned away from that system.

"For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law [Mosaic Law] but under grace [the law of Christ]" (Romans 6:14).

You can jot down 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, which talks about the *"ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones."* The Mosaic Law was glorious, but it was fading. The Jews—Peter, being a Jew—were under the Mosaic Law for 1,500 years. He is going to have a tough time with this adjustment. In Acts 10, which is the big conversion, he is going to see a sheet with animals on it, and he is going to hear a voice that says, *"Get up, Peter; kill and eat!"* (Acts 10:13). Do you remember Peter's answer when he saw that?

"A voice came to him saying, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat!' But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean'" (Acts 10:13-14).

Now if he is your Lord, how can you tell Him no? That is an oxymoron. It is like saying jumbo shrimp, government intelligence, Microsoft Works. They are two ideas that really do not go together. Peter is going to have such a tough time breaking away from the Mosaic Law, to the point where God is going to give him a command and he is going to tell God, "No, I cannot eat that. I am a Jew. We have been under the Mosaic Law for 1,500 years."

But God is going to do a work in this man, Peter, and wean him away from that. The weaning process is going on right here in Acts 9:43, where he is staying at the home of an unclean tanner—someone you did not hang around with under the Mosaic Law. God can take our legalism (and we all have it, do we not?), and He can work in our hearts to wean us away from legalism.

You might be sitting here today with so many legalistic thoughts and structures—"This should be that way, and that way should be this way." God is saying to you, "I am going to start changing your heart. I am going to start weaning you away from legalism." One of the ways He does it is that He starts putting people in your life that do not respect your legalistic standards.

You might have in your belief system that a Christian should never touch a single drop of alcohol. Keep in mind that I am not in favor of abuse of alcohol or intoxication, but there is no verse in the Bible that says, "Thus saith the Lord, 'No alcohol.'" You might think that, so God suddenly has you have dinner with somebody that is a sipping saint, shall we say? What is going on? He is breaking us away from legalism. God does that, and that is what God is doing to Peter.

This is a wonderful section here on Peter's miracles. He did a second miracle here with Dorcas, and he is going to keep moving north to Caesarea, where the big miracle is coming: the conversion of a Gentile. Can a Gentile really get saved? We are going to see in Acts 10 that it does happen. They are going to have a big meeting about it in Acts 11 to figure out, "Did this really happen?"