

Proclaiming & Dispensing Grace

Acts 9:32-43

Main Point:

Jesus empowers His people to receive and dispense His redeeming grace to the world.

Introduction:

Good morning! Please open your bibles to Acts 9. If you are new to the Bible, you can find Acts 5 following the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John).

Orienting the Text: Where we are in the story

For the last few weeks, we have been taking stock of the radical conversion of Saul of Tarsus. I suggested that this event is one of the most significant events in world history (second only to the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth). However, for Luke's purposes as an author, Saul's conversion is one of several key moments which he highlights between the martyrdom of Stephen (chapter 7) and the beginning of the Gentile mission, which will come in chapter 13. Luke's purpose is to show us as readers how the gospel advances from Jerusalem out to the rest of the world. We saw the wave of persecution following Stephen's death lead to the scattering of the disciples throughout Judea, where they continued proclaiming the gospel. Philip, as we saw in chapter 8, takes the gospel into Samaria. As we saw the last couple of weeks, Saul, who becomes known as Paul, is destined to be the Lord's chosen vessel to bear the name of Jesus before both Jews and Gentiles, and even political authorities like kings. As we talked about last week, Saul is going to temporarily drop out of the story for a few chapters, but will return again as the main character once we get to chapter 13.

But today, we come to yet another key transition point in Luke's narrative with the return of Peter. We have not seen much of Peter since chapter 8, after he and John travel to Samaria to authenticate Philip's ministry by laying hands on the Samaritan believers when they received the Holy Spirit. Turning back to Peter now, we find him continuing his ministry of preaching the gospel and shepherding God's church as clusters of believers are now popping up everywhere throughout Judea. All of this will lead to chapter 10, which we will cover next week, when the first Gentile is converted, a Roman soldier named Cornelius. But today, Luke gives us yet another account of how the Lord Jesus empowers His servants to dispense His redeeming grace throughout the world.

Exposition of Acts 9:32-43:

Last week I briefly touched on this verse but want to return to it again as Luke describes what's happening in God's wider plan. Acts 9:31 - I want us to notice some key things about Luke's description of the church here. First, the church had peace. This probably means political peace (Saul's conversion, things died down) and God's protection. Second, it's built up, that is strengthened in its foundations. Third, it's increasing in numbers. It continues to grow! Now, we will hear about two accounts of Peter's ministry outside of Jerusalem along the coastal areas of Israel, not far from where Jesus's ministry in Galilee originated.

Acts 9:32-35 - Peter continues to evangelize and minister. He comes to a town called Lydda to encourage believers. There he learns of a paralyzed man, presumably well-known to the Jewish community there, named Aeneas (I-Nee-aas). One of Jesus's early miracles was the healing of a paralyzed man, and we have already seen how Peter healed a paralyzed man near the Temple back in chapter 3 (the first non-Jesus miracle in the New Testament). Peter goes to him, announces that in Jesus name he must get up, and he does so – perfectly healed! Notice the response: all the residents of Lydda and neighboring community of Sharon turned to the Lord, seeing this – again, probably well-known man, walking around the community because of Jesus. But Peter isn't done yet...

Acts 9:36-38 -

We don't know if they were inviting him to specifically heal her, or to just comfort and minister to the family. Probably the former, though possibly the latter. So, Peter goes – again, in large part due to the reputation of this woman for

how she lived out her faith.

Acts 9:39-43 - Here Luke gives more detail about the miracle. Again, similar to how Jesus raised the young girl Talitha from the dead, so Peter does here with this famed and beloved disciple, Tabitha. Again, note the result of this healing: many come to believe in the Lord!

Main Point: Jesus empowers His people to receive and dispense His redeeming grace to the world.

Application: Receiving and Dispensing God's Grace

What does it mean to "dispense" God's grace? First, let's go back to verse 34, and let's revisit the main message Peter offers to Aeneas. Do you see it? Jesus Christ heals you.

The Message of Dispensing Grace: Jesus Christ heals you

Now, we have to assume that Peter wasn't only doing miracles, but also teaching and preaching the gospel. The fact that so many were turning to faith in Christ because of the miracles suggested that they had previously hearing something about Jesus already – suggesting that the Christian communities there in Lydda, Joppa, and Sharon had already been sharing the gospel with the friends, neighbors, and out in public. The miracles then served to give credibility and confirmation to the witness of the gospel – the whole gospel – which can be summed up as the healing (spiritual/physical healing of God in Christ).

As we have mentioned before, the miracles we see Jesus doing in the gospels and the ones the apostles perform in Acts aren't just for the sake of showing God's power but demonstrating His wider purpose of restoring/redeeming a disordered creation marred by the presence and power of sin. However, with the death and resurrection of Jesus, sin's presence and the rule of Satan in the world has been supplanted by Him. The miracles, the healings, the casting out of demons, bringing the dead back to life, all serve as pointers to the redemptive reign of Jesus, and serve as a foretaste of the ultimate healing we will receive at the resurrection, in which we will have glorified bodies in the presence of God forever and ever, amen! But in this life, though we will all experience death (that is, the complete and total failing of our earthly bodies), there is still a healing that is occurring within us as we move closer to that future day when we see the Lord Jesus face to face in glory.

Listen to how Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

5 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3 if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

Friends, I want to remind you of your calling to be ambassadors for the kingdom of God, and the redemptive reign of Jesus Christ. As His ambassadors, we are called to be (literally) dispensers of God's grace to the world. And this is what the church has always been called to do!

Shall we talk about our current society? Note: collapse of social institutions which "buffer" the individual and a swelling bureaucratic government. The state, politics, was never intended to take on the weight of solving every human dilemma. But with the collapse of other "buffer" institutions, the church has virtually no competitors! The

opportunity in our day to dispense the grace of God, and tell lost, broken, depressed, anxious people that Jesus Christ heals you is, literally, unprecedented. All we have to do is take and seize it. The question for us is simply this: will we go like Peter, and dispense the grace of God to those around us?

This leads to the second point: **how do we dispense God's grace?**

Again, I want to take you back to the opening verse of this section (32). What is Peter doing? Going here and there among them. What for? To encourage, to minister, to share the gospel – in other words, to dispense the grace of God to those around him!

The Means of Dispensing Grace: (Intentionally) going here and there for the sake of Jesus

Think for a moment: you may be the only Christian that someone see on any given week. That's a little daunting I know, but is it not also the greatest of privileges and a wide-open opportunity? Are you seeking the Lord for these kinds of opportunities, remaining sensitive to the Spirit, looking for those open doors? They are there friends, if we would get out of ourselves (and the distraction of the rage of social media) and just look around.

Finally, as we prepare for communion today, I want to say that we only dispense God's grace as we first receive it. He gives the grace to us that we then dispense to others; it's not something we inherently have.

The Reception of Dispensing Grace: Receiving spiritual nourishment from the Lord Jesus

One of the purposes of public worship is for the purpose of serving, equipping and reminding you of your calling so that we all might be prepared and ready to go forth into yet another battle with whatever the week has for us. So today, we come here to this table not so much as dispensers but as needy ones, eager to receive from the Lord Jesus. I think sometimes as evangelicals we make too light of the communion table, and make it solely about something we recall from 2,000 years ago (like a holiday) rather than a foretaste of something greater yet to come; and be conscious that our remembrance is not just that the Lord Jesus died and rose again, but that He is present among us even now by His Spirit, and is coming again in glory in which we will join Him at His banqueting table.

Friends, I hope you came here hungry today – not for breakfast, but for the Lord Jesus and His grace. He is the ultimate dispenser of grace, and He wants to meet us now in this moment through these elements, to feed our needy souls with assurances that His promises are real, true, and that His grace is sufficient to meet us in our every need.

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Acts 9:32-43

Main Point:

Jesus empowers His people to receive and dispense His redeeming grace to the world

Exposition of Acts 9:32-43:

The Church experiences peace, strength, and increase

Acts 9:31

Peter heals Aeneas, resulting in many conversions

Acts 9:32-35

Peter raises Tabitha from the dead, resulting in still more conversions

Acts 9:36-38

Application: Receiving and Dispensing God's Grace

The Message of Dispensing Grace: *Jesus Christ heals you*

The Means of Dispensing Grace: *(Intentionally) going here and there for the sake of Jesus*

The Reception of Dispensing Grace: *Receiving spiritual nourishment from the Lord Jesus*

Life Group Questions:

- 1) What does it mean for the church to walk in the “fear of the Lord” and “comfort of the Spirit”?
- 2) Why do Peter’s miracles have such a dramatic effect on the populace of Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa? How important are miracles for helping people believe in Jesus?
- 3) Read about the character and piety of Tabitha. What lessons does her example have for Christians today?
- 4) How is the Lord calling you to “dispense grace” to others in your daily life?