

The Life God Blesses  
Acts 9:31-43  
April 26, 2015

*Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.*

The violinist Paganini stood before a packed house and played a number of difficult pieces. During the last concerto, one of the violin strings broke. Paganini continued on three strings. Then another string broke, and he played on only two strings. When a third string broke, Paganini finished the piece on just one string. The audience stood and wildly applauded. If a mere human could accomplish such a feat, imagine what God can do with one man or one woman whom he blesses and uses.

That's what we are going to look at today; the life that God blesses. Before we begin, we must understand the blessings of God. When God blesses your life, that doesn't guarantee wealth and fame. God blessing your life means that the things you do in his name will bear the fruits of his kingdom. When God blesses your life, those blessings have an eternal value. The question we want to answer is, "What things bring God's eternal blessings into our lives?"

The first requirement is a life of ministry. Peter was a go-getter. He took the Gospel everywhere he could. God seems to use busy people. Think of some of the busy people God has used: Martin Luther, Mother Theresa, Billy Graham. But, you don't have to be famous, just busy.

An elderly shut-in widow was eager to serve Christ. After praying about it, she realized that she could bring blessing to others by playing the piano. The next day she placed a small ad in the newspaper: *Pianist will play hymns by phone daily for those who are sick and despondent – the service is free.* When people called, she played their favorite hymn. In a short while, her playing had brought help and encouragement to hundreds of people.

God is also looking for lives marked by humility. In Lydda, Peter found Aeneas, who had been bedridden for years. Peter told him: *Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat* (Acts 9:34 NIV).

For Peter, the goal of Aeneas being healed was to glorify God. God uses the humble, not the proud. If you are self-impressed and self-centered, don't look for God's blessings. If you allow God to work through you and you give him the glory, God will honor you. Only one man was healed, but that healing affected the people of two cities.

George Washington Carver, the scientist who developed hundreds of useful products from the common peanut said, 'When I was young, I said to God, 'God, tell me the mystery of the universe.' But God answered, 'That knowledge is reserved for me alone.' So I said, 'God, tell me the mystery of the peanut.' Then God said, 'I will, George, that's more your size.' Then he told me the mystery of the peanut.'

Another quality of a life that God blesses is a life marked by availability. Peter moved from the healing of Aeneas to the resurrection of Tabitha. The second miracle was a result of being available for the first one. If Peter hadn't gone to Lydda to preach the Gospel, he wouldn't have been available to go to Joppa where Tabitha lived.

Walking with God is always an adventure. We start in one place and end up in another because one opportunity leads to another. Peter made himself available to do God's work. He followed the Holy Spirit wherever he led. That's how he found himself in Lydda. That's how he found Aeneas. That's how the people could take him to Tabitha. All because Peter was available for God's service.

James Hudson Taylor was a 19<sup>th</sup> century English missionary to China. He served there, quite successfully, for 51 years. How did he get to be a missionary? That is best answered in his own words. "I used to ask God if He would come and help me. Then I asked if I could come and help Him. Finally, I ended by asking God to do His own work through me."

A life marked by dependency draws God's blessing. When Peter arrived at Tabitha's house, he needed something he couldn't provide. The job at hand was greater than Peter's abilities and resources. Realizing this, Peter did the best thing he could do. He got down on his knees and prayed for God's help.

We need a spirit of dependency on God. We need to see our human limitations and pray, "Lord, if you don't do something here, nothing's going to happen." I wonder if Peter physically felt God's power flowing through him when he said, *Tabitha, get up* (Acts 9:40 NIV).

A sign, hanging in a textile mill, read, "When your thread becomes tangled, call the foreman." There was a young woman, who was new on the job, working in the mill. Her thread became tangled and she thought, "I'll just straighten this out myself." She tried, but she only made the mess worse. When she finally called the foreman she said, "I did

the best I could.” “No you didn’t,” he replied. “To do your best, you should have called me first.”

The Lord told King Solomon: *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land* (2 Chron 7:14 NIV).

To receive God’s blessings on our work for him we must be flexible. Verse 43 of our text says: *Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon* (Acts 9:43 NIV). That simple sentence says a great deal about being flexible.

Peter was raised knowing and accepting traditional Jewish prejudices. To stay in Joppa was to be in the company of Gentiles. Jews didn’t associate with Gentiles. Peter had to learn to deal with people he had been taught to hate.

However, that isn’t the most drastic adaptation Peter had to make. The verse says Peter stayed with a tanner, named Simon. According to Jewish ceremonial law, anyone who touched dead things was unclean. Tanners dealt exclusively with dead things.

To a Jew, a tanner was an outcast from the synagogue and society. Peter woke up every morning to see stinking animal skins hanging around the house. God was teaching Peter that the legalistic life was over. Now, in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile.

The famous architect, Frank Lloyd Wright was given the impossible task of building the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. Nothing like this had ever been tried before. Patiently he laid plans for the immense building to be constructed in a land of earth-quakes and tremors. After carefully studying the situation, he found that eight feet below the hard surface of the ground lay a sixty-foot bed of soft mud. He thought, “Why not float the great structure on this and in some way make it absorb the shock of the earthquake?”

After four years of work, enduring the ridicule and jeers of skeptical onlookers, the most difficult building in the world was completed. Before long, came the inevitable day of testing. The worst earthquake in fifty-two years caused houses and buildings to tumble and fall in ruins. But the Imperial Hotel stood, because it was able to adjust itself to the tremors of the earth.

God can do great things through people who push aside the natural human tendency to be rigid; locked into the way things have always been done in the past. God is a God of change, and he is always doing something new. People who seek God’s blessing must remain open enough to adapt to the present environment in order to move the Gospel message forward.

Our last point is God’s blessing brings a life of productivity. When we are doing the things of God, there will always be a positive consequence. We won’t always see the good, but it is always there.

Peter was doing God's work. Here's what happened. Verse 35 reads: *All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw [Aeneas, the man, who had been healed] and turned to the Lord* (Acts 9:35 NIV). Verse 42 tells us that Tabitha's resurrection from the dead: *became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord* (Acts 9:42 NIV).

When people do God's work, God's way, their efforts are blessed. I know of a small church that decided to make an intentional outreach to its surrounding area. The church was in an economically depressed portion of the city, so the people based their outreach on the parable of the Sheep and the Goats from Matthew chapter 25; especially the Jesus' words: *I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me* (Mt 25:40 NIV).

The church provided food and clothing for its neighbors. A second worship service, designed with the church's neighbors in mind, was started. Programs, services, and parties, that directly touched people's lives, were instituted.

Did God bless this work that was done in his name? In less than two years, church attendance had grown by over 40%. People who hadn't been in church for years, and people who had never been in church, found themselves worshiping the Lord. Lives were being changed. People began turning from their former lives, and began living for Jesus. There were numerous baptisms and professions of faith.

You know this small church, because it's Peace Lutheran on Warren Avenue in Detroit. Peace Lutheran's work for God was been blessed over and over again. Not necessarily blessings that pay the bills or make life easier, but blessings that have eternal value. The outreach of that church has changed the eternal destiny of some of their neighbors.

God blesses a life marked by ministry, so we need to be constantly serving God.

God blesses a life marked by humility, so we need to give all glory to God for the wonderful things he does through us.

God blesses a life marked by availability, so we need to be willing to go wherever God sends us.

God blesses a life marked by dependency, so we need to be in constant prayer while we are working for him.

God blesses a life marked by flexibility, so we need to be open to carry out his mission even if it means doing things we have never done before.

God blesses a life marked by productivity, and if you don't believe that, just consider what God did at Peace Lutheran Church in Detroit.