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How To Be Faithful in Ministry

Acts 9:32-43

Keywords: Peter, Healing, Christian Ministry, Service, Faithfulness

PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: Luke turns his attention away from Saul and to the Apostle Peter. In doing so he records two more miracles done by Peter. It is easy to focus on the miracles but flowing through the entire passage is really a lesson on serving.

I. Introduction.

- A. Acts 9:32-43.
- B. The book of Acts is a book of transition.
 - 1. The moving from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.
 - 2. Because of these transitions you have a sudden influx of what we would call miracles.
 - 3. Another aspect of this transition in the book of Acts is the slow transition from the apostles and their work in Israel and, instead, the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing the gospel to the people of this world.
- C. Peter's real ministry.
 - 1. The ministry most of us think about with Peter is in the early chapters of Acts. Preaching the gospel, doing great works of miracles and seeing thousands come to believe in Jesus Christ.
 - 2. But he has not been in the picture for several chapters and so the question you might ask is, what is he doing during this time? We see Saul become converted but what is going on elsewhere?
 - 3. And so Luke brings the focus back onto the person of Peter and for the next few chapters he will be the focus again. Why? Because as the gospel went into the world of the gentiles some important questions were raised by the Jewish believers. Though Paul is called the Apostle to the Gentiles, Peter is the one who first makes major inroads with them, and this is part of what Luke records for us.
 - 4. Remember everything is new and so things are changing rapidly and a lot of questions are being raised. These are big things but they are not the normal, everyday things that were occurring as well. In the midst of the

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big events, millions of little, boring, mundane things are happening as well.

D. In this section, you see the power of God working through the Apostle Peter. But you also get a good glimpse into everyday life and ministry, not just of Peter but of others. And in this I think we can see certain marks of a faithful ministry that can benefit us today.

II. How to be faithful in ministry.

A. Principle #1: God determines the expanse of the ministry.

1. We find Peter in vs 32 simply going about helping the new Church grow and become healthy. And it is quite different than his early days of ministry.
2. Peter started big in chapter 2 and 3 but that was not normative for him or the early Church. Nor were the events of Acts 2-3 part of some clever marketing strategy to get the word out of this new church in the area.
3. So in the life of Peter we see a man who has done some pretty amazing things, but we also see here a man who simply seeks to serve as needs arose. And that is actually more valuable and important.
4. Discontentment is a major cause for a person not serving the Church of Jesus Christ.
5. Sometimes, like Peter your ministry and impact may be great and then other times not so much. But if you are content to serve as God enables, then you will not care.
6. Elijah the prophet can help us here (1 Kings 19:1-18).

B. Principle #2: God gives you ministry opportunities but you must chose to act on them.

1. So now we find him wandering about through the region visiting various gatherings of believers and seeking to strengthen them in the faith. Why? Because it was needed and so he acted.
2. And that is a basic principle to operate by: ministry doesn't just happen. You must learn to open your eyes and actively look for ways to serve.

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3. Too often we find ourselves waiting for the so-called right thing to come along. So often over the years I have asked various people to serve in a certain way and am turned down because they don't feel led toward that thing. My mind always goes to the thought that if your pastor's request is not seen as a "leading" then what is?
 4. We also often fail to see that small opportunities to serve are indicators to those who watch of your faithfulness. So Christ tells us that, "he who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much. . . ." (Luke 16:10).
 5. Some quick observations to make:
 - a. Stop waiting, act on what is needed by the church or those around you rather than what you think you should do.
 - b. Start serving right where you are at. The whole ministry of Honing Hospitality is designed to give you opportunities to open your house and practice.
 - c. Be content to serve as opportunities arise. Often these are not exciting, ground-breaking events. They are usually simple, mundane and useful for the moment. I remember John MacArthur telling the seminary students about how many hours he spent preparing to preach each week. But he then hastened to add that he did the same number of additional hours just taking care of basic needs in the church.
 - d. Pray for opportunities but pray expectantly. Then go look around, you will likely find more than you realized.
 - e. Die to self or you will never truly minister.
 - f. Stop asking why you should do something and instead ask why you should not. It will help push away many excuses that are acquired over time.
 - g. Keep your time flexible to some degree so that you can shift as needs arise. Fill your days and weeks with so many activities that you don't have time for serving the church will fool you into thinking you do much good, but in reality you don't.
 6. Listen, Peter healed twice here in this section because opportunities to do so were brought to his attention. He wasn't looking for these things, they came to him and he was willing to serve in that capacity.
- C. Principle #3: Make the ministry about Christ and not yourself.

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1. Again, today we see the driving question be how to monetize our activities. It is creating that brand. It is all about exposure.
 2. But notice vs 33-34. Aineas is healed but what is it that Peter made clear? It was Christ who healed him, not Peter.
 3. And what is the effect? Vs 35, many turned to the Lord. Again, not to Peter, but Jesus Christ. This only can make sense if Christ was at the center of everything Peter was saying and doing.
 4. Then notice in vs 42 as well. After praying for Tabitha we find her raised from the dead. But what was the effect? Many believed in the Lord. Again, how would that be the effect if it was all about Peter and his latest book deal?
 5. The goal behind effective ministry is to show the people Christ, not you.
 6. This is much like Acts 3 (vss 1-13).
- D. Principle #4: The potential effect of a ministry is not the basis of your deciding to serve.
1. We live in a day when the big and showy is what matters but also we live in a day when faithfulness to the mundane things of life is desperately needed.
 2. Peter was an apostle and therefore he was able to do miraculous things
 3. But what actually was his ministry?
 4. The ministry of Peter was calling people to trust in Jesus Christ as Lord of all things and then helping them learn to follow Jesus. The miraculous was never the norm nor the focus.
 5. Even here we see how limited those who could do these miracles were. For 8 years Aineas was paralyzed, no one else up to that point was able to heal him. Then Tabitha dies and no one can raise her, only Peter.
 6. Bill Johnson out of Redding, CA says that the supernatural is the natural state for a proper Christian. “People often come to me and ask me to pray for them, that they would discover God’s will for their life. I already know God’s will for their life – heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out devils, cleanse lepers. They say, ‘Yes, but I need to know if I should be a schoolteacher or a missionary.’ I say, ‘Well, just pick one, and then heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out devils, cleanse lepers.’ Or they will say, ‘I just don’t know whether I should be married or should be single.’ I reply, ‘What do you want to be?’ ‘I really want to be married.’ ‘Then get

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married... and heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out devils, cleanse lepers.”
- Bill Johnson, *Manifesto for a Normal Christian Life*

7. But that is not what you see here in Acts 9.
 8. Titus 2 is again a way forward to break out of the foolish thinking of big is always better.
- E. Principle #5: Look for ways to serve needs of others rather than to fulfill your own desires.
1. Tabitha/Dorcus was not just some lady minding her own business. Notice how she is described in vs 36 and 39.
 - a. Deeds of good works and charity.
 - b. The making of clothing.
 - c. These were done continually.
 - d. This is a woman marked by good works. This is likely what is meant by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:9-10 of a true widow deserving of support by the church.
 2. But she is not the only one serving as needed. You have others mentioned in vs 38.
 - a. Those who did not merely accept the verdict of her death but sought God’s intervention through Peter.
 - b. And then the men who stopped their tasks to take the time to journey to Peter in Lydda to find him and ask him to come—about 12miles away and a 10-12 hour round trip. The wording is not weak but actually rather forceful. They begged him to come without any delay.
 - c. This is service. This is ministry. Just that willingness to be sent and to go without complaint. Nothing exciting and yet without their willingness to serve in such a simple, basic way Tabitha would still be dead.
- F. Principle #6: Be like Simon the Tanner.
1. Tacked onto the end of this story is simple statement of where Peter stayed while in the area.
 2. But it defines the whole point of my message today. We want to be Peter but most likely we are called to be like Simon the Tanner.

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3. All the man did was make his home available to Peter while he was in the area.
4. This is simply a practical outworking of the command to love one another. We see it praised in 3 John, vss 3-11.
5. We don't know Simon other than because of this little statement. But what a blessing he was to Peter. And because he opened his home to the man, ministry of the apostle was able to take place as well.

III. Conclusion.

- A. This is a simple sermon so take it that way.
- B. In it is the basic exhortation to look around and see what is needed and then go try to fulfill it.
 1. Stop making excuses as to why you should not do it.
 2. Stop waiting for others to fill the need.
 3. If the Lord has given you the opportunity then seek to seize it and see what happens as you do so.
- C. But before you talk yourself out of ways to serve remember that the great example of serving is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He did not come to be served, but to serve.
 1. We are called to be like our Savior, to follow Him and in doing so, honor Him.
 2. And so Paul tells us that though we are free because of Christ's saving work in our lives, we are never to use that freedom for sin, but rather, through love to serve one another. (Galatians 5:13).

Benediction

May our God cause you to rejoice in the Lord, to be made complete in all aspects, and to be comforted by the Spirit. May He move in and among us to be like-minded in the Word and to live in peace with one another. Amen