

## **See and Believe (Acts 9:1-19)**

*We long that people would see Jesus and come to believe in him. How does that happen? Acts shows us disciples who are constantly pointing people to Jesus. In this talk Claire Coleman shows how two disciples, Peter and Dorcas, point others to Jesus.*

I'm renowned in my family for not seeing what is right in front of me. There was a particular instance in recent years where I was visiting my Aunt, Uncle and Cousin and we were in their back garden having tea. Folkestone has over the years had many air shows and it's not uncommon to see red arrows flying over the town. As we were eating I heard the planes, but I could not see them - my family have no idea how I missed them flying over and to be honest I'm not sure either - I couldn't see them. I believed they had been there but hadn't managed to see it for myself. Another time when I was trekking in New Zealand there was an open grazing pasture with a forest tree line at the back of it. Everyone I was with was exclaiming how beautiful the deer were. Like these were the best deer you could ever hope to see. I couldn't see a single deer in this big expanse of green. I felt like I was missing out, I even thought they might be messing me around and that there wasn't really any deer in the field at all. It took me saying to my friend that I couldn't see the deer and for them to patiently point out the tree line with about twenty beautiful deer in front of it for me to see, believe and know for myself that the deer were really there. I needed help to see. My friend, having seen the deer himself, was able to point out the deer to me.

I don't know what you make of this picture here on the screen - what do you see? Do you see pink shapes on a white background or do you see something else? This was made for me years and years ago from some ladies in the church where I grew up. If you ignore the pink shapes and focus on the white, then the pink becomes the background with a white border around it and the word Jesus inside it. Sometimes we need help seeing Jesus, sometimes we need to help others to see Jesus for themselves.

These might be slightly silly stories to share. But in our passage from Acts today we see two miraculous events that are seen by people and because of what they see many come to believe in Jesus.

5 mins

As we look at the passage we'll explore what it is that is being seen, how that leads to belief in Jesus, the Son of God, saviour of the world and What part we can play in helping others to see Jesus more clearly.

The book of Acts starts with the disciples in ch 1 v4 being told by Jesus after his resurrection to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit and then in v8 that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them and they will be Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.' And the book goes on to tell how the disciples did just that. They tell what they have seen Jesus do. Peter starts off as the main one preaching and witnessing to what Jesus has done by his words, he and John healed the lame man in Jesus' name, they are arrested, on a number of occasions in fact but that doesn't stop Peter witnessing to his fellow Jews about Jesus.

Which is why we find him in ch 9 v32 travelling about the country, going here and there visiting with the brother and sisters wherever he went (in the NIV the Lord's people). Peter can't help but share the good news of Jesus with others. In this travelling about the country we have these two stories where Peter is involved in the healing of Aeneas from paralysis and Tabitha from death.

These miracles parallel some of Jesus' own miracles. We can read of when Jesus healed a paralytic man who was lowered through the roof by his friends in Luke 5 and when Jairus daughter was raised from death in Luke 8. Peter is doing nothing that hasn't been seen before. However when Jesus performed these miracles they were signs of God's coming kingdom and of Jesus being the son of God, the promised king who had power over sin, illness and death.

When Peter is involved in these miracles - Luke communicates clearly to us that it is Jesus Christ who healed Aeneas. It is not Peter in his own abilities. Peter says that in v35 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed (get up and roll up your mat). Peter is clearly saying this isn't because of me, this is because of Jesus. Peter is relying on and trusting in Jesus' power. When he is invited over to Joppa with Tabitha Peter dismisses everyone from the room and turns to prayer - he's on his knees praying and only after prayer does He tell her to get up. She opens her eyes sits up and he helps her to her feet, taking her to the other believers and showing her to be alive. This became known and many believed.

The detail of him being on his knees to pray is really interesting to me and again shows that Peter was doing all he could to let others see Jesus through him. It was not Peter's power but Jesus'. kneeling is a sign of submission of realising it's not in our own strength, of recognising who is really in charge and who has the power, namely Jesus. No one could see him doing this he'd sent them out but I think Peter's reliance on Jesus through prayer must have shone through him. His attitude could be seen and pointed to Jesus.

How do we show our reliance on Jesus? What habits do we cultivate behind closed doors that shows an attitude of surrender to God. Is this something we need to develop. Time with God in prayer.

In Peter's actions of healing of knowing it is Jesus working through him, he is being a faithful witness to Jesus. He's pointing those who witness these miracles and who hear about them, to the truth about Jesus. That it is Jesus who truly has the power over all things. The miraculous has a way of witnessing to Jesus' power it can bring people to see the power of Jesus and to believe.

But It is not only through the miraculous that people come to believe in Jesus in these passages.

The miraculous healing of Aeneas started with Peter being obedient to God's call to go and make disciples - he was travelling about meeting with other believers to encourage them in their faith (I'm sure he would have been encouraged in his own faith too). And it was from this obedience to talking about Jesus that he met Aeneas and the miraculous occurred. Peter knew that Making disciples involved teaching and sharing with others to obey all that Jesus commanded. That was his starting point.

There is something we can learn here of the importance of meeting with each other, visiting each other, encouraging each other in our faith. Sharing how we've seen Jesus at work in our lives. Is there something this week we can give thanks to Jesus for? Do we think about sharing that with others? Part of our journey as brothers and sisters involves not only supporting each other in the tough times but encouraging each other with the good stories of God being at work in our lives. Do we take enough time to do that with each other, to tell each other about the goodness of our God.

That is one of the good things about annual church meetings - not only with the opportunity of a shared lunch - but we get an opportunity to look at all the good things God has been doing in the life of our church in the past year and get to look towards good things to come.

These passages have shown that people see and believe through the miraculous, through faithful obedience as a disciple in sharing about Jesus and In the story of Tabitha we see another aspect of living life as a disciple. Witnessing through every day life and the care of others.

This story of Tabitha is full of more detail than the healing of Aeneas. We're given Tabitha's name in both Arimean and Greek both of which mean gazelle and we're told specifically that she's a disciple. The word used actually specifically means female disciple. To some of our modern ears having it pointed out that she was a female disciple might sit uncomfortably female dr, female clergy. I don't feel that way I am a female member of clergy and Luke's intention was not to be on the negative side of a gender equality debate, he wanted to encourage it. by using this phrase Luke actually wants to show the importance of women in the church. Tabitha was a follower in her own right. Not because of any men in her household but because she knew Jesus personally and it affected her life.

How do we know that? Well as we read on we see that she cared practically for others - she was doing good and helping the poor. V36. The widows show Peter the clothing that Tabitha had provided for them v39. That she'd made for them.

Her love of God and the practical ways she lived out her faith led others to have faith in her God of miracles - when she died they washed her body but instead of anointing her body for burial they laid it in the upper room and sent for Peter. It is almost like they are anticipating the miraculous. The everyday faith of Tabitha made way for the miraculous and for many to see Jesus at work and believe.

How different might it have been if she wasn't living out her faith. Good works don't earn Gods love for us but it is a response to Gods love and a huge witness to those around us.

The way we take care for each other as brothers and sisters as well as the wider community is a massive witness - showing others Jesus.

Examples of seeing this in action...

How are we witnessing to Jesus. How are we letting others see him in our lives through what we say, through our attitudes and in what we do?

These miracles and the lives of both Peter and Tabitha all helped others see Jesus and believe in him. Let us too live our lives pointing others to Jesus and knowing his love more and more for ourselves.

Lord God open our eyes to see you more clearly. To see you at work in our world. Help us to see where we can join in. We pray that we would grow in our love for you and your world and we would follow you more closely in everything that we do. Help us in our love and care for others to witness to your love and truth.