

## ~ACTS~

## Lesson 30- The Edification of the Church

We have been in chapter 9 for the past few weeks and last week we ended with Saul the persecutor of the Church being transformed into the great Apostle Paul. And we learned about the three years he was taught the revelation of Jesus Christ in Arabia as God was preparing him for ministry to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. And in this, we saw Paul's unstoppable character shine through in even the most intense persecutions in Damascus and in Jerusalem as people were intently trying to hunt him down and kill him. But we saw how Paul escaped the hand of the enemy in both Damascus and Jerusalem and went back to his hometown of Tarsus. Now beginning in verse 31, Luke shifts his focus back to Peter for the next couple of chapters. And in the rest of chapter 9 we see something special begin to take place in Peter's ministry. Today we will be looking at verses 31-43, and within these verses we are going to see something Peter do that is dear to my heart and that is the edification of the body of Christ. Let's start with verse 31...

**31) Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.**

Verse 31 begins by saying, "**Then the churches...**" but it's even more emphatic in the Greek because it says, "Then **indeed** the churches... had peace and were edified..." By now the Church has grown to 10's of thousands of people within the body of Christ and even among this intense persecution, the Word of God has spread. In fact, it was the persecution that became the catalyst to spread the Gospel to the world, and as a result, many have to come to faith in Jesus Christ. And now that Saul the persecutor of the Church has died on the road to Damascus, and that old man has been reborn into the Apostle Paul, there is peace among the churches. This just show the tenacity that Saul had in persecuting the church. It's not a coincidence that when Saul stopped pursuing the Church, that its then that the Church had peace. I'm sure there was still persecution, we saw this from the Hellenists in Jerusalem trying to kill Paul and later we will see Herod Antipas kill the Apostle James and arrest Peter, but that was nothing compared to the zealous drive that Saul had in creating havoc on the Church, Acts 8:3; Gal 1:13-14. So now that this intense persecution has subsided for some time, the churches continue to grow, but not only in numbers, but they begin to grow by being built up and edified within the body of Christ. The text says, "**Then indeed the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified.**" The persecution had scattered the Christians throughout the world, even beyond these regions, but here Luke focuses his attention within the Israeli borders because he is focusing on one man's ministry, namely the Apostle Peter. Peter had grown up in Galilee in Bethsaida and Capernaum, John 1:44; Matt 8:5, 14, and he was raised as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, but now he isn't going back to Galilee to fish, but to train up the body of Christ.

Luke says these churches **had peace and were edified**. This word edified is, *οικοδομέω*. It literally means "to build a house." An *οικοδόμος* is a builder or an architect that builds a house, and we know that it is the Lord Jesus who is building and adding to His Church. Jesus says in Matt 16:18- "...and on this Rock I will build My Church." Acts 2:47 says *the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved*. John 2:20; Acts 7:49. But the building up of the house of God isn't built by sheer numbers, it's built on relationship. His house, the Church, the body of Christ is built up as we grow in Him. And I believe that is how Luke intends for this word to be used here. The churches are being edified, they are growing in their relationship with Jesus by growing in the knowledge of Him and His Word, **Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:5**.

And notice their posture that causes this growth in verse 31, **walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit**. This is the heart of a chosen vessel. One who has positioned his heart to seek God and has yielded his heart to do His will. What does it mean to walk in the fear of the Lord? This word

fear is φόβος, we get the word phobia. There are some who try to soften this and say this is a fearful reverence of the Lord. And I can understand why they say this, but I think that translation candy coats this to the point that we lose the force of what this really means. I'm reminded what Jesus said to His disciples in **Matt 10:28**. But we as Christians shouldn't be scared of God. Why? Because we have Jesus, the Mediator between God and man, the Man Jesus Christ, 1 Tim 2:5. So what does this mean to **walk in the fear of the Lord**? It doesn't mean you're scared of God. But rather to walk in the fear of the Lord is to walk and live life with an understanding of His Holiness and His Righteousness. It's the understanding that without Jesus, God is so Holy and so Righteous that no one can stand before Him. This is walking by faith... the Just shall live by faith, Rom 1:17. It's walking in complete dependence on Jesus Christ knowing that without Jesus, no one can stand our Holy and Righteous God. And it is the fear of His Righteousness that brings us into humility toward Him. It is Righteousness that shows us the need of a Savior and it is this fear of His Righteousness that makes us hold on to Jesus Christ with everything we got. This is why it says in Proverbs 9:10, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*" This is the understanding that without Jesus no one can stand before the Holy God. For the Christian, there is extreme comfort in understanding His Righteousness. Because understanding His Righteousness gives us the means to understand His Love and the good news of the Gospel. Because it is in His Holiness, and because of His Righteousness that He sent His Love to bear the Righteous wrath for our sin. When you truly understand the fear of the Lord, this is when you can truly understand His deep love for us. Proverbs 14:26- *In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge.* When we understand His Righteousness and the Love that came out from His Holiness, then we can have confidence to stand boldly in the Day of Judgment because we know that we have refuge in Jesus Christ, **1 John 4:17-19**. We walk in the fear of the Lord by believing that Jesus is our Savior, that He is the propitiation for our sins and that God's Righteous wrath will pass-over all those who are covered by the blood of the Lamb, this brings the Christian comfort. This is why Luke says the churches were **walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit**. This word comfort is παράκλησις, exhortation, encouragement, and comfort. And it's the comfort of the Holy Spirit because the Spirit is our παράκλητος. He is the One who bears witness with our Spirit that we are the children of God, Rom 8:16. He is the Spirit of Truth that will guide us into all Truth of Jesus Christ, John 16:13.

And notice the last phrase of verse 31... **they were multiplied**. I don't think this is specifically saying that their numbers were multiplying, although that certainly is happening as well, but in the context of this edification and the Church being built up and encouraged and comforted, I believe this is a multiplying as in an abounding in abundance and being filled up in the knowledge and Fellowship with Him. Peter starts both his epistles using this same word and he says in 2 Pet 1:2, "*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*"

So this is exactly what Peter decides to do. Now that there is a reprieve from the persecution, he decides to leave Jerusalem and visit all the churches in the region to check on them and build them up as a shepherd would shepherd his flock.

**32) Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda.**

Notice who Peter's primary focus is, **the saints**. This isn't an evangelical mission, it's a mission to build up and edify the body of Christ, and he is doing this by personally visiting all the churches in the region of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Notice what it says in verse 32... **Peter went through all parts of the country**. The Greek says it this way... Peter διερχόμενον διὰ πάντων, he thoroughly went through all. Peter is visiting all the churches as a shepherd would tend the flock after a ravenous wolf had scattered the sheep. This is exactly what Jesus told him to do in John 21:17 "Feed My sheep." And he wrote about this personally in his first epistle, 1 Peter 5:1-4.

So after Peter had traveled through Galilee and Samaria, he comes to the small town of Lydda. This is the ancient city of Lod in the Old Testament, not far from Jerusalem, about 22 miles. And notice that Peter seems to be looking for one person in particular.

**33) There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed.**

It seems to me that the Spirit told Peter to look for this man because Luke says, **he found a certain man named Aeneas**. This word found is *εὕρισκω*. And it is primarily used when someone is earnestly seeking something or someone, as in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, Luke 15:5-9. I believe the Spirit told Peter to seek this person out and heal him. So Peter arrives in Lydda and find Aeneas...

**34) And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” Then he arose immediately.**

Notice Peter gives all the glory to Jesus. He says, **Jesus the Christ heals you**. Just like with the lame man in chapter 3 when he said... *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.* All the glory goes to Jesus because it is Jesus working in and out through Peter by the power of the Holy Spirit. And then look at the results... **Then he arose immediately**. And just as the lame man’s healing was a sign that pointed to Jesus, so was this healing of Aeneas.

**35) So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.**

This turning to the Lord is Salvation. It’s the word, *ἐπιστρέφω*, to turn upon. This is turning away from sin and turning upon Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, **Acts 3:19; 26:20**. Luke says all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon. When Luke says “Sharon” he is referring to the plains of Sharon that extend all the way up the coast to Caesarea. So just like the lame man in chapter 3, this healing had major effects to spread the gospel. Notice how this works, Peter went to Lydda to edify and build up the saints, and in the meantime, hundreds of people come to the Lord. This is being used by God as a chosen vessel. News of Peter being in Lydda spread to the saints in the next city over in Joppa.

**36-38) <sup>36</sup> At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. <sup>37</sup> But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. <sup>38</sup> And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them.**

Tabitha was a faithful Christian woman who was full of the Spirit. How do we know this? Because she **was full of good works and charitable deeds**, but it wasn’t because of the good works that she was a Christian. These good works were the fruit of her being a Christian and filled with the Spirit and her ministry was taking care of the widows and making them clothes, Acts 9:39.

But Tabitha **became sick and died**. And as the custom was, they washed the body and prepared it for burial, but notice what they did with the body... **they laid her in an upper room**. So instead of immediately burying her, they bring her to the upper room and look to Jesus. And hearing that Peter was nearby Joppa, which was only about 12 miles away from Lydda, the disciples send two men to bring Peter back to the house. By this time its about 8 years after the Day of Pentecost, 40ad, and news had no doubt spread about Peter healing the multitudes over the past 8 years. Remember back in Acts 5:14 there were multitudes of people coming to see Peter, even from the surrounding cities, *“so that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.”* Some of these disciples in Joppa may have even been there when this happened, so they send for Peter to come quickly.

There some very similar parallels between this event and the healing of Jairus’ daughter in **Mark 5:21-24**. Both Jarius with Jesus, and the disciples with Peter, begged earnestly, imploring him not to delay.

Mark and Luke use the same Greek word, *παρακαλέω*. They are earnestly calling Peter alongside to come heal the woman. So Peter, being moved with compassion by the Holy Spirit goes with them just as Jesus followed Jairus.

**39) Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.**

Notice Peter doesn't get caught up in the remorse of the crying. The widows are weeping and trying to show Peter the clothes that Tabitha had made, and even though I believe these were heartfelt tears, Peter does not pay any attention to the weeping widows. In fact, notice what he does...

**40) But Peter put 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.**

Notice the first thing Peter does is get rid of the distractions. He puts the weeping widows out of the house so he can pray. And I'm sure he is remembering Jesus doing the same exact thing in the house of Jairus, **Mark 5:35-42**. Just like Jesus, Peter doesn't allow himself to be distracted by the weeping and wailing and puts them all out. And notice what Peter does immediately after throwing the people out, he prays. His back is turned to the dead body, I think he does this so that his emotions don't get ahold of him. It is very possible that Peter may have even known Tabitha personally. So he kneels down with his back to Tabitha and he prays. He puts his full attention on Jesus Christ. And in this moment the Lord speaks to him and tells him what to do... **And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.** This is the first time in the New Testament we see someone other than Jesus raising the dead, but in Truth, in every occasion in the Bible, Old and New Testament, it is always the power of God working in and out through God's chosen vessel to raise the dead, or heal the sick, or any other type of miracle in the Bible.

**41-42) <sup>41</sup> Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. <sup>42</sup> And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.**

Peter was on a specific journey through the cities in Israel to edify the body of Christ, and notice that on this journey, both in Lydda and Joppa, not only were the saints edified, but the Gospel was proclaimed, and many believed in Jesus as a result.

Our edification in Jesus Christ is the best avenue to fulfill the great commission. When we are loving one another, and coming alongside each other, and building each other up, and helping each other to focus on our Lord Jesus Christ, *it is then that all will know that we are His disciples*, John 13:34-35. Remember what Jesus said in John 17:21... *"that they all might be one in Us, so that the world might believe that You sent Me."* Our oneness in Him and our Fellowship with each other is the greatest witness to the world. And that is exactly what we see Peter doing. His mission was to edify the body of Christ, and in doing so, the body of Christ was built up in Jesus, and hundreds more were brought into the Kingdom.

As a result of this Kingdom building mission, Peter stays in Joppa as their shepherd, no doubt teaching and building them up in Christ.

**43) So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.**

Luke says Peter stayed "**many days**," *ἡμέρας ἱκανὰς*. And Luke said the same phrase in Acts 9:23 when Paul spent 3 years in Arabia and Damascus. Luke also used this term when Paul spent 1-1/2 years in Corinth in Acts 18:18. So these "many days" could be as many as 1-2 years that he spent in Joppa. And notice who he is staying with, **Simon, a tanner**. To us Gentiles, this seems like an insignificant statement, but to a Jew, the profession of a tanner was despised because they were constantly handling the skins of dead

animals which made them ceremonially unclean and they were looked down upon; Lev 11:39-40. And according to the Mishnah, the oral tradition of the Law, a woman has the right to divorce her husband if he has the profession of a tanner; Mishnah Ketub 7.10. And Peter is now staying with this man in his house.

Notice that God is continuing to tear down these walls of separation. First it was the acceptance of the Hellenists into the body of Christ, Acts 2:41; 6:1, then the Samaritans received Christ and the Holy Spirit was given at the hand of Peter and John, Acts 8:17. Now he is living in the same house as a tanner for 1-2 years, which is all leading to the ultimate barrier coming down in the next chapter when the Gospel is given to the Gentiles, and they too are given the Holy Spirit. So notice how God continues to break these barriers down, and He is working out these major milestones through the hand of Peter.