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This morning we begin our sermon series that will be focused of the mission statement of our church which states: *“We seek to passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people.”* In other words: *“It is the greatest desire of our hearts to glorify God, by sharing the gospel with everyone we meet, so they might know the supreme joy of knowing Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.”* This is how we at Arrowsmith Baptist Church have determined to accomplish our call from God to fulfil the Greatest Commandment to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and with all our souls and with all our minds and with all our strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31) – and also fulfill the Great Commission to go, with the authority over heaven and earth that has been given to us by Jesus, and make disciples of all nations, by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded us.

Our text for this sermon series is the book of the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament, which was written by a Greek physician named Luke, who had come to know Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. We are using the book of Acts because it is a written record of how the first Christians on earth shared the good news of the gospel of salvation by knowing Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. And we are also using the book of Acts because Luke chronicles the birth and growth of the first church as they sought to spread the gospel by passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people. We are not going to start this sermon series at Acts 1. Because we already had a sermon series on Acts 1-9 three years ago where we learned, after Jesus resurrection and ascension into heaven, about the anointing of the Holy Spirit and the ministry and witness of the apostles We also learned about Saul of Tarsus, the great enemy of Jesus, murderer of Christians and destroyer of churches – and of how Saul was then conquered and subdued by the powerful presence of Jesus, and how he came to faith in Christ and became the apostle Jesus would use to spread the good news of the gospel of far beyond Palestine. As a result Acts 9:31 tells us *“the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”*

Today we begin our walk together through the rest of the Acts of the Apostles, so we might learn how to passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people. In Acts 9:32, after writing of Paul’s conversion, Luke picks up the activity of the apostle Peter. Peter was last mentioned in Acts 8:25, when he and John returned to Jerusalem after sharing the gospel in Samaria. Peter now moves west to the partially Gentile territory of the Mediterranean coast of Palestine, specifically to the cities of Lydda and Joppa. Known as Philistine country in earlier times, it was in this area that Samson, empowered by the Holy Spirit, picked up the doors of the city gates of Gaza, lifted them to his shoulders, and carried them up to a hill, thus demonstrating to the Philistines the power of the Spirit of the living God.

Peter was coming to that same region to demonstrate the power of the gospel to save sinners. Despite the previous times of persecution by Saul and the Jews, the gospel was making steady progress as it spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, Galilee and beyond. Our adversary, the devil, is powerless to resist the conquering Christ and the progress of his gospel. Peter came to personally understand that. When we first meet Peter in the gospel accounts, he comes across as pretty weak in character. But God has a plan to transform everyone who surrenders their hearts and lives to Jesus, So when Peter was brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew, “*Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter)*” (John 1:42). Both Cephas and Peter mean “rock” which means Peter would become a “rock” in his faith - strong and mighty - through the work of Jesus Christ in his life. We see this in Peter’s life in Matthew 16:15-19 when Jesus asked his disciples, “*Who do you say that I am?*” and Peter then declared that Jesus was “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*” – to which Jesus then told Peter, “*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*”

By this it is clear that Jesus chose Peter to be the prominent apostle among the twelve apostles. Peter was commissioned by Jesus after he rose from the dead to feed Jesus’ sheep/disciple Jesus’ followers. He was also one of the three who were present during Jesus glorious transfiguration. Peter also had the distinction of being the only apostle – probably the only human being other than our Lord Jesus Christ – to ever walk on water. But Peter was also treated just like the other apostles. He was baptized in the Holy Spirit with the other apostles at Pentecost, and in Acts 1-8 we read Peter became a bold witness for Jesus Christ like the others. He also fearlessly told the religious leaders of the day: “*We must obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29) when they told him to stop proclaiming the gospel.

By the time we catch up to Peter in our text for today, we find that through God’s working in his life, he was now a true rock of the Christian faith. We see this in our text as we find Peter following Jesus’ commission that he and the other apostles are to go and proclaim the gospel. And as he does so, we read of two stories where God used Peter mightily - first to heal a man who had been paralyzed for eight years; and, second, to raise a woman from the dead. Why did Luke include these two stories? Well, because he wants us to view these miracles as spiritual lessons of the power of the gospel to transform hearts and lives. Like Jesus’ miracles, these two miracles were signs, pointing to something deeper, beneath the surface of life. Luke included these miracles to show us how God mercifully imparts spiritual healing and a new transformed heart and life to those who are helpless and dead because of sin. The Word of God is telling us today that *the mighty power of our Sovereign God that causes the lost to turn to a saving faith in Jesus Christ - should encourage us to proclaim the gospel.*

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In our text for today Luke teaches us four lessons about *the mighty power of our Sovereign God that causes the lost to turn to a saving faith in Jesus Christ that should encourage us to proclaim the gospel.*

1) The mighty power of our most Sovereign God that causes the lost to turn to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, should encourage us to proclaim the gospel – in knowing that *sickness and death are pictures of the spiritual condition of lost people.* It is clear that Dorcas (Greek), or Tabitha (Aramaic), whose name means “Gazelle,” was a believer. She is called “*a disciple.*” We do not know about Aeneas’ background, but the fact that he is only referred to as “*a man,*” not “*a disciple,*” seems to indicate that he was not a follower of Jesus. But the physical condition of both Tabitha and Aeneas represents different pictures of the spiritual condition of every person without Jesus. By nature we all are born as sinners, spiritually dead. We are as unable as a “*paralyzed*” man, to take a step toward God. We are as unable as a dead corpse to make a decision to free ourselves from our sins and to live in a manner pleasing to God.

The apostle Paul wrote of this in Ephesians 2:1-3: *You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*” The Bible is telling us here that fallen humanity is radically depraved. Because of sin, we are deaf blind and dead to the things of God. Our hearts are desperately deceitful and corrupt. Our wills are not free, but in bondage to our fallen nature. Given the choice we will not, choose good over evil.

That reality tends to offend those who believe in human free will. But the truth is, our free will is never truly free. It is always, to varying degrees, being influenced by our radically depraved nature. That is true even after we come to faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul reminds us of that from an example in his own life in Romans 7:21-25: *“I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*

It is the mighty power of our Sovereign God through Jesus Christ who rescues us from our free will in the midst of our battle with sin. Without God’s will we would not surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. In John 6:44 Jesus said: *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”* In John 15:16 he also said: *“You did not choose me, but I chose you.”* In John 1:12-13 the apostle John wrote: *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

Humanity’s rebellion against God is total *not* in its depth but rather in its width. Most human beings are not intensely sinful, but sin has extends into our entire being. The effect of the fall is that sin has extended to every part of our personality – our physical body, our thinking, our emotions, our spirits and our will. Even when it appears that we are doing things which are morally good - because sin has infected our hearts and souls - our motives and our thoughts and our intents and our agendas are always somewhat bent away from God towards the fulfillment and satisfaction of self. It is crucial to affirm this reality because if we deny it we will pridefully boast in what our will could accomplish.

The apostle Paul affirms this in Ephesians 2, right after telling us that we all have a spiritually depraved nature. *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ . . . For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”.* (Eph. 2:4-5; 8-9). In knowing that sickness and death are pictures of the spiritual condition of lost people and of our fallen, sinful nature- we should be seeking to passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people.

2) The mighty power of our most Sovereign God that causes the lost to turn to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, should encourage us to proclaim the gospel – in knowing that *Jesus uses born-again disciples like us to bring His divine healing to spiritually sick and dying people.* Peter was God’s instrument to bring divine healing to Aeneas and resurrection to Tabitha. God used Peter because God uses those who trust in the power of God rather their own ability. Peter didn’t say, “Aeneas, in the name of Jesus Christ, I heal you.” Rather, he said, “*Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you.*” Peter gave all the glory to Jesus and took none for himself. With Tabitha, Peter did not claim to have any power to perform a miracle. Rather, he humbly knelt down and prayed, depending totally on God’s power to do what only God can do.

Think of how Peter could have abused the power that the Lord gave him to perform these two amazing miracles. He could have taken all the credit and everywhere he went, he would have attracted attention. But Peter gave God all the glory and God was pleased to use these miracles to bring many to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Whether God uses us to perform a miracle or bring a soul to salvation, we cannot rely on our ability or take any credit for ourselves. We can only say what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7: “*We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.*” It is striking that these two miracles closely parallel two miracles that Jesus performed before. The healing of “Aeneas” is reflective of the four men who brought a paralytic man to Jesus in Matthew 9 - and the raising of Tabitha from the dead is reflective of the raising of Jairus’ daughter in Mark 5. Peter was able to imitate Jesus because he had been with Jesus when He performed these other miracles. Although we have not physically been with Jesus, if we have spent much time with him in His Word, He will use us to be His instruments in bringing His healing and saving power to those who are spiritually dead.

It is also noteworthy that Peter set aside any human prejudices he might have had in order to be an instrument of healing and salvation. We don’t know if Aeneas was a Gentile, but we do know that the region where Peter was traveling was heavily populated by Gentiles. In Acts 10 we will read of God stripping Peter of any Jewish prejudice against the Gentiles by sending him to Cornelius’ house. But here we read that after these two events, Peter stayed in Joppa with a tanner named Simon. This is significant in that the Jewish rabbis considered tanners to be unclean because they were constantly in contact with the skins of dead animals. Tanners’ homes were smelly; tanners had to live at least 50 cubits outside of town. Rabbinical law stated that if a young woman discovered that her fiancé was a tanner, she could break the engagement. But here Peter shows no prejudice and stays with a tanner. We all have certain prejudices, but if God is going to use us in sharing the gospel, we have to lay them all aside. There may be certain races or certain types of sinners that we do not naturally like. But if we don’t turn away from our prejudice, it will be a sinful hindrance to God’s using us. We must put away our prejudices in order to passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people.

3) The mighty power of our most Sovereign God that causes the lost to turn to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, should encourage us to proclaim the gospel – in knowing that *human inability and death are no hindrance to the mighty power of our most Sovereign God.* The name of Jesus is able to do what no amount of human persuasion or human power can ever do. He alone can impart strength and give sensation to paralyzed legs. His power alone can raise a corpse from the dead. He alone can call a soul out of spiritual bondage and impart eternal life. We are only His instruments, and if we think that any of the power depends on us, we misunderstand how God works. In fact, it is only when we sense our complete inability, that God can use us. Peter surely did when he met *Aeneas, who was paralyzed and bedridden for eight years, when Peter looked at Aeneas and said: “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.”* And Peter surely also sensed his complete inability when he knelt and prayed for Tabitha to be raised from the dead. That is the place God where wants us. If you have any confidence in your ability to lead a soul to faith in Christ, it is misplaced confidence. But if you desperately cry out to God in utter dependence on Him – He will work wonders. It is only by the mighty power of our most Sovereign God that we can passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people.

4) The mighty power of our most Sovereign God that causes the lost to turn to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, should encourage us to proclaim the gospel – in knowing those who are healed and saved by our Sovereign God's mighty power will always give evidence of their healing and salvation. Peter commanded Aeneas to stand up, and Aeneas did! And then Luke wrote: “*And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.*” They saw the evidence of the miracle: a man had been bedridden for eight years now walked. The same was true with Tabitha. After she rose from the dead: “*Calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.*” It is extremely difficult to keep a miracle of God quiet – whether it be a healing or a raising from the dead or a heart and life surrendered to Jesus. There is always unmistakable evidence when a lame man gets healed or a dead body is raised to life or a depraved soul saved by the gospel. There will be evidence if we seek to passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people.

The mighty power of our most Sovereign God that causes the lost to turn to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, should encourage us to proclaim the gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ healed the sick and raised the dead - and he also did the very same through the apostle Peter. That is still Jesus' ministry today. There is no greater healing than saving people from their sins, and no greater resurrection than regenerating those who are dead in trespasses and sins. God the Father sent Jesus Christ His Son into the world, in the form of a human being, to sacrifice his life on a cross, in our place, for our sins – so we when we surrender our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior – we are then forgiven and redeemed and healed and restored back to God – and be given a new life here on earth and an eternal life with Jesus in heaven forever. This is what we have to offer to everyone we meet! Amen.

God's power in healing and saving lost people should encourage us to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in our churches, in our families, in our schools, in our workplaces, in our community, in our country, and our world - knowing that sickness and death are pictures of the spiritual condition of lost people and our fallen, sinful nature; knowing that Jesus uses born-again disciples like us to bring His divine healing to spiritually sick and dying people; knowing that human inability and death are no hindrance to the mighty power of our most Sovereign God; knowing those who are healed and saved by our Sovereign God's mighty power will always give evidence of their healing and salvation; knowing when we passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people, many will be transformed and saved - and knowing that when we fulfill this call of God to share the gospel, Jesus will say to us: “*Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your master!*” (Matthew 25:21).

The Christian poet Edwin Markham once knew a banker whom he entrusted with the settlement of an estate. The banker betrayed him, and Markham lost all his money and was rendered penniless by the deed. It made him bitter and for several years he could write no poetry. Then one day as he was trying to write he was sitting at his desk aimlessly scrawling circles. As he doodled, making these circles, suddenly the thought struck him of the great circle of God's love, and of how God's love takes us in through the crucified and risen Christ. He was struck with inspiration and he wrote these words:

I drew a circle and shut him out;
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But Love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in.

Markham forgave the banker and was able to resume his writing. After that came some of his greatest poems. This is what Jesus Christ can do. He can heal a dead spirit, raise it to life and restore it. He can heal the bitterness that may be in our lives, rendering us cold and indifferent to the needs of others.

The two miracles Jesus did through Peter must have taken everyone by surprise. There was no human hope in either situation. But where there was no human hope, God miraculously broke through with the might of His sovereign power and accomplished in an instant what no one else could ever do. Our Lord Jesus is waiting for us to join him in living out our faith in the mighty power of God to save. Let's go!