

3-7-21 Ordinary, Everyday People, Used by God.

Acts 9:32-43.

I. God Cares for the Nobodies. Aeneas the Paralytic – vss. 32-35.

- We don't know much about Aeneas. We do know that he lived in Lydda, and that he had been bedridden for 8 years.
- Can you imagine what his life was like? 8 years of not being able to do the things we take for granted and complain about.
- I think it would be fair to assume that Aeneas could do nothing productive. He just lied there. He could not contribute anything to society. He probably also had no friends. And it doesn't say anything about his parents, his siblings, or even a wife. Most likely, he was abandoned by everyone and he was all alone. Imagine what it must have felt like to be Aeneas.
- Aeneas probably didn't offer much if not anything, but that didn't matter to God. God cared and loved him anyways.
- God cared for him and God sent the apostle Peter to this town to heal Aeneas.
- Peter goes up to Aeneas, looked him in the eyes and said, **"Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed."**
- What did Aeneas do? **"he arose immediately."** Whooo!
- God cares for people who do not seem to be able to make any contribution to society. The worth of a person is not measured in God's eyes by how much they can do or contribute to society, or even to him. A person's worth is determined by God simply because He loves them, and they are his creation/children.
- Aeneas was determined worthy to be healed because God loved him and said so.
- Maybe you know someone that has no friends, not as smart, different looking or acting, not as good looking, not as much as a physical specimen as you, or handicapped.
- Or maybe you feel like you are a "nobody." Maybe you feel that you have nothing to contribute to society. Maybe you feel like an outcast or worthless. I am here to tell you that you are not worthless. You matter to God. He cares for you. He made you. And he will never forget you.
- Even if other people may look past you, God does not. He wants to help you. He loves you. And he cares for you.
- And as the body of Christ on earth, as the church, we should have the same attitude. We should not think someone is worthless just because they can't do too much or contribute as much as someone else.
- God cared for someone with nothing to contribute to society, and we should too.
- And the surprising thing is that God can use the person who seems to have nothing to contribute but use him or her in an amazing way. **Read verse 35.**
- Because of Aeneas' healing, hundreds if not thousands of people became Christians.

- His simple words and testimony made people turn to Christ.
- God can use a worthless, paralyzed person in a mighty way.
- We can't look down on people who seem to be weaker than we are. There is great potential in them that God wants to bring out.

II. **God Cares for the Somebodies: Tabitha the Helper – vs. 36-42.**

- **In vs. 36-42**, we find a person who had made a lot of contributions to society.
- Her name was Tabitha in Aramaic and Dorcas in Greek. I prefer to call her "Tabitha" since "Dorcas" sounds in English like "dork" and nobody wants to be a "dork".
- She was a helper/doer. That was her spiritual gift. She saw that poor people and widows did not have enough clothing, so she made them robes and other clothing that they needed. She loved doing it and it made others feel good.
- She was a seamstress; she knew how to sew. And she used that spiritual gift from God to contribute to her society. As a result, she had lots of friends. Unlike the paralytic, Tabitha had many people who loved her.
- That's why when Tabitha got sick and then died, people missed her.
- Some of them had heard that the apostle Peter was in the next town, so they sent people to ask Peter to come to where Tabitha was.
- They had faith to believe that Peter could help to raise her from the dead. They probably had heard that Peter had healed a paralyzed man, and they made the jump that perhaps Peter could even make a dead person rise.
- Now, this was an act of faith. So far, no apostle had ever raised someone from the dead. They had healed people of certain illnesses, but to expect that the apostle could raise the dead - that was a much greater act of faith.
- **Verse 40**, Peter came and got on his knees to pray. **"Tabitha, arise."** What happened?
- And just like the paralyzed man, she immediately responded and got up. She first sat up, and then she stood up.
- And Peter called everyone back into the room and presented Tabitha, now alive, to all of them.
- Imagine the joy and celebration by everyone! Their dear friend, who had done so much for them, was now alive and back with them!
- Oh, how we wish this were true for all those who make great contributions to society. We want them to be around forever. We want to have them around to continue to do good, to help others, to be an example for us and for the world.
- But other times, God takes them away from us after a while. Not all of them are raised to life, although for all those who trusted in Jesus Christ, will be raised to life one day.

- What I want to point out is that people like this also impact others. When Tabitha was brought back to life by a miracle, **vs. 42 says that “This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.”**
- Both miracles had nothing to do with the worthiness of the individuals, nor the power of the apostle. Both miracles were done by the power of God! He is full of grace and mercy!

III. God Cares for the Undetermined: Simon the Tanner – vs. 43.

- In **verse 43** we find another person. One verse, 14 words to describe him; his name was Simon, and he was a tanner.
- What is a tanner? A tanner is someone who takes the hides or skins of animals and dyes them with different colors and then sells the animal hides. So, people can have black leather or red leather clothing to wear or boots to wear. According to **Leviticus 11:40**, a tanner would be ceremonially unclean.

According to a Wikipedia search for the occupation of tanner in ancient times:

“In ancient history, tanning was considered a “smelly” trade and relegated to the outskirts of town, amongst the poor. Tanning by ancient methods is so foul smelling that tanneries are still isolated from those towns today where the old methods are used. The ancients used leather for waterskins, bags, harnesses, boats, armor, scabbards, boots, and sandals.

Skins typically arrived at the tannery dried stiff and dirty with soil and gore. First, the ancient tanners would soak the skins in water to clean and soften them. Then they would pound and scour the skin to remove any remaining flesh and fat. Next, the tanner needed to remove the hair fibers from the skin. This was done by either soaking the skin in urine, painting it with an alkaline lime mixture, or simply letting the skin putrefy for several months then dipping it in a salt solution. After the hair fibers were loosened, the tanners scraped them off with a knife.

Once the hair was removed, the tanners would bate the material by pounding dung into the skin or soaking the skin in a solution of animal brains. Among the kinds of dung commonly used were that of dogs or pigeons. Sometimes the dung was mixed with water in a large vat, and the prepared skins were kneaded in the dung water until they became supple, but not too soft. The ancient tanner might use his bare feet to knead the skins in the dung water, and the kneading could last two or three hours. Depending on the type of dung used, the mixture might be rather acidic, causing irritation or minor burns during its prolonged contact with human skin.

It was this combination of animal feces mixed with decaying flesh that made ancient tanneries so smelly.

Children employed as dung gatherers were a common sight in ancient cities. Also common were ‘piss-pots’ located on street corners, where human urine could be collected for use in tanneries or by washerwomen.” And some of these exact same tanning methods are still used in third world countries to tan hides.

- Yummy! Anyone signing up to be a tanner and using this method?
- So, we know that tanners make some contribution to society. But people did not really like them or be near them. So, their contribution to society was unclear, undetermined.

- Maybe some people we know are like that. They have a job, but it's not a great job. It pays ok, but that's it. They might be a student who does decently in schoolwork - some B's, but mostly C's. They are adequate in basketball or soccer, drawing or writing. Not great, but not bad. Somewhere in between. Nothing spectacular. Very ordinary. In other words, their potential is undetermined.
- Yet, God cares for people like that too. God cared enough about Simon the tanner to have his name and profession recorded in the book of Acts as a lasting record. And God cared enough about Simon to have the leader of the church, the apostle Peter, stay with him. Wow, that must have raised Simon's stature among his neighbors. Maybe that's why God sent Peter to Simon's house to show that God cares for Simon.
- God can use people like Simon the tanner too.
- Remember I said that there are only 12 words said about Simon? Well, that is not the whole truth.
- If you go down to **chapter 10, vs. 6**, you also read some additional words about Simon. **"whose house is by the sea."**
- What is the significance of those words? The significance is that since his house was on the outskirts of town, by the sea, Peter could get into a boat and sail quickly up to other places. And God had a reason for Peter to stay there.
- God was also preparing Peter for his next assignment, which was to go to Caesarea, to share the gospel to a man named Cornelius and his family. (Gentiles)
- We also don't know how God is going to use us. We might feel we have nothing to contribute to society, we might feel we have a lot to contribute, or we might not know what we can contribute.
- But don't worry. God knows. And God will use each of us, with whatever we have, to contribute to society and to the kingdom of God.
- Everyone has a place in the kingdom of God.
- And sometimes, those who think they have nothing, like the paralytic, wind up bringing hundreds and thousands to know Christ.
- And sometimes, those who don't know what they can contribute are used as channels and agents to make a large impact.
- So, don't get discouraged if you don't have a lot now. God will bring your potential out. He will bring out from you all the potential he has placed in you.
- That is also living by faith. Living by faith is to live believe in what God can do even when you don't see it yet.
- So, start with faith. Believe that God will use you. Believe that God has a purpose for you. And then live with your life open to him and watch how he will use you.

Conclusion

No matter what category you are in, been told you are in, or believe you are in, God cares for you.

If you choose to allow Him to have his presence in your life, He will do miraculous things, things no one can even fathom. He can and does miraculous stuff in spite of us.