

# Our God Who Heals: More Than a Glass Half-Full!

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Acts 9:32-43

**Sermon Series:**  
**God's Big Story**

*The central message is that Jesus Christ is alive, and he continues to work his transforming love in the world and in our lives.*

**A**re you a glass half-empty person, or glass half-full kind of person?

One of the most damaging attitudes in the Christian life is to see the world and life's circumstances as a glass half-empty. This morning, I want you to be encouraged by the truth of the Christian life. I want you to be encouraged by the truth that Jesus fills up your glass and turns things around. I want you to be encouraged and expectant that Jesus fills up your glass and turns things around, in the world, in your work, in your family and in your personal life. The God we find in the book of Acts is all about the hope and possibility that bad situations are going to turn around. The God we find in the book of Acts is all about the hope and possibility that difficult moments are going to turn around, perhaps even when you least expect it.

This is a glass half-empty life: It is the feeling that this is the way it is going to be, that nothing is going to change, and that's that. This is the way I am, the way my spouse is; this is the way my kids are; this is the way work is (or no work); this is the way society is, and that's that. It's not going to change. It will probably get worse and that's that.

The central message in the Acts of the Apostles is that this glass half-empty life is not true! Jesus Christ is not dead, he is not distant, he is not silent, he is not weak, and he is not uninterested in the world and in your life. The central message is that Jesus Christ is alive, and he continues to work his transforming love in the world and in our lives. Jesus turns things around. (John Piper, 1991)

Look at the early church in Acts. Look what happened to Saul. Saul, who "laid waste" to the church, Scripture says (Acts 8:3), dragging off followers of the Way to torture them and put them to death. Meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul-becomes-Paul and becomes the greatest missionary of the Way! Peter? He does the worst and denies knowing Jesus (which he said he'd never do). Peter becomes the Rock on whom Christ's Church is built. Jesus turns things around. Look at the first believers, Jews, then Gentiles, who, when they heard Christ-crucified and Christ Risen, were "cut to the heart." These timid believers, when filled with the Holy Spirit, became bold, tenacious and willing to lose themselves! Why? Because Jesus is alive and he turns things around.

This morning, Luke gives us two stories about Peter's ministry to

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show us how Jesus is still breaking in (seemingly out of the blue) and turning things around. In chapter 9, after Saul-becoming-Paul's conversion, Luke abruptly inserts two stories about two virtually unknown characters. Here is our story from Acts 9:32-42:

<sup>32</sup> Now as Peter went here and there among all the believers, he came down also to the saints living in Lydda. <sup>33</sup> There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, for he was paralyzed. <sup>34</sup> Peter said to him, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed!' And immediately he got up. <sup>35</sup> And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. [defining moment—first time in the post-Easter Early Church where one of Jesus' disciples, by Jesus' power, raises the dead to new life!] <sup>36</sup> Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. <sup>37</sup> At that time, she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. <sup>38</sup> Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, 'Please come to us without delay.' <sup>39</sup> So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. <sup>40</sup> Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned

to the body and said, 'Tabitha, get up.' Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. <sup>41</sup> He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed Tabitha to be alive. <sup>42</sup> This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."

Two miraculous healings by the Great Physician, using Peter. The first, the healing of Aeneas in the village of Lydda. Aeneas has been paralyzed and bed-ridden for eight years. Peter comes to him and says to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you." Jesus breaks into the drama of Aeneas's life and turns everything around. Jesus heals him. Imagine what it must have felt like to walk, skip, jump again after eight years in bed! Imagine how many were infected by this new-life contagion when they witnessed Aeneas dancing again!

The second healing is the coming-back-to-life of a disciple named Tabitha (or Dorcas), in the Mediterranean seaport town of Joppa (now Jaffa in today's Israel), about a seven-mile hike from Lydda, some 30 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Luke tells us one thing for sure about Tabitha. She was "devoted to good works and acts of charity." Why is this significant? Because Tabitha is a widow, and a widow would typically be on the receiving end of charity, not the one giving out charity. She is the poorest of the poor, the lowest on society's rung. Yet, she is most generous in her poverty; Tabitha gives from what little she has. This ought to cut to our hearts and

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convict us. For those who have much, much is expected. For those who have much, much must be shared!

Back to the story. Peter chases the mob of mourners out of the room. Peter kneels down and prays. The act of prayer is the act of taking a stand that Jesus is alive and turns things around. With this prayer in his heart, Peter turns to her and says, "Tabitha, rise." And Jesus steps into Tabitha's life and turns death around. And she lives. Peter calls upon the power of God to heal, because he knows he has no power on his own. God really does it! Tabitha rises, alive!

But why Tabitha? Why this poor, generous, widowed, community caregiver? Because God alone, the Creator of the Heavens and Messiah on Earth, God will use anyone and anything for God's glory and delight. As one preacher put it, "Tabitha was Jesus-with-skin-on for the needy of Joppa, and death could no more lay claim on her than it could on Jesus that Easter morning!" (J.Walton, 1st Pres NYC). So, take heart and watch out, you followers of Jesus! God alone will use anyone or anything for God's glory and delight. Watch what happens then: When God turns things around people turn to God. Verse 35: "And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw [Aeneas healed], and they turned to the Lord." And verse 42: "And [Tabitha's return to new life] became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord." Jesus turns things around so that people will turn to him!

Jesus heals so that we might be healthy for others.

What then should we do? Once Jesus turns things around in our lives, what should we do? Look at Tabitha's response to God giving back her life. Picture Tabitha, more in love with Jesus than ever before. There she is, opening up her doors to the abused or orphaned; dropping off Eggplant Parmesan or flowers; sharing an encouraging cup of tea, or spending an afternoon babysitting, all the while back to her knitting, sewing, and working her loom. She gives quiet, simple care to those who are down. Let's do more of this. In this frantic, frenetic place we call Northern Virginia, let us be contagious Christians with Christ's infectious love for others. Open up! Let Christ fill you and use you. Let Christ turn things around in someone's life, through you, using you!

The Psalmist testifies, "I waited patiently for God; God heard my cry. The Lord drew me up from the pit, out of the miry bog, and He set my feet upon a rock .... God put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God" (Psalm 40:1-3).

A few Sundays ago, Pastor Stan preached about this "PIT". Here at VPC, in our Stephen Ministry we use the image of a Mud Hole to teach about Christ's healing power. We all have times when we're in the proverbial mud hole, the pit, a place of despair, disappointment and discouragement (you or a loved one is chained to an addiction, a health crisis, loss of job, ruptured relationship). We train our Stephen Ministers to come up alongside a

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person in this kind of tough place. It doesn't work for the Stephen Minister to get down INTO the mud hole with the hurting person; BOTH would then be stuck knee-deep in the miry bog, with no way out! Getting into the mud hole together doesn't help anyone! Instead, we train our Stephen Ministers to hold on, with one hand, to the TREE that is on the bank overlooking that mud hole, while reaching down with the other hand to help. The apostle Peter himself writes, "Jesus himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by Christ's wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). The tree is Jesus Christ. That TREE is the leverage we need to help the person climb out of the mud hole. For a Stephen Minister, OR any one of us, when we grab hold of Jesus it will be impossible to stay forever stuck in that mud hole. This is what we keep seeing again and again in Acts—Jesus has the power, the desire, the LOVE, to turn my life, your life around.

A glass half-empty life. A glass half-full life. Just this past Thursday, I got a call about my only sister, Elizabeth. She was in the hospital after emergency surgery. Thankfully, she will be fine. And the way she is handling this crisis demonstrates for me what it looks like to live a "glass half-full" life—a life dependent upon God's ability to turn things around. It's true that she's in a fair amount of pain; that she's missing a long-planned trip for this weekend; that she'll have to miss work, and the list goes on. But Elizabeth, instead of dwelling on those negatives, is

focusing, by God's grace, on all the positives. Talking with her on the phone, her dominant emotion was one of gratitude! Gratitude that she listened to her body's pain and asked our brother to get her to the E.R. Gratitude that she has health insurance. Gratitude that she has access to an excellent hospital. Gratitude that her co-workers came by to visit. Gratitude that our mother arrived to help support her. And THAT list goes on! When we prayed together over the phone, we together thanked God for the healing grace that is filling her despite this most unexpected kind of mud hole.

Friends, maybe you're on the bank looking down into that mud hole. Maybe you're in a pretty strong and healthy place. Maybe you can leverage the tree of Jesus Christ and help someone out of the mud hole. Tabitha does this in her simple, practical ways. Keep looking to Jesus to fill you to live this way. But maybe you're mired in the mud hole. Maybe you can't even remember what it was like to stand on solid ground. If that's you this morning, hear this: we trust in a Savior, who has the unique ability to turn your life around. We trust in His Power to take that half-empty glass of your life and fill it with Himself. Maybe not all at once. Maybe not today. But Jesus Christ can and He will fill you up. In a moment, we're going to offer healing prayers. If you are in a position to help others turn their lives around, pray for even more of Jesus' strength. And if you're the one needing that life-changing turnaround, come before Jesus and ask. He is only and surely always faithful.

