The Marks of a Minister of the Gospel

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Date: 25 July 2018

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[0:00] Now, as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.

There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed. And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which translated means Norcus. She was full of good works and acts of charity.
In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, Please come to us without delay.
So Peter rose and went with them, and when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Norcus had made while she was with them.
[1:12] But Peter put them all outside 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.

And he gave her his hands and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon a Tanner.
And so here in those verses that we just read, we find six marks of a minister of the gospel.
And so these six marks should characterize anybody who is a minister of the gospel. So that includes those who are pastors here at our church, any pastor for that matter.
Those who serve as elders. Those who serve as deacons. Those who serve in any way in the church, in ministry. These six marks should characterize them.
[2:14] And so it's also good for you to know so that you can hold them accountable because that's biblical as well, right? And so to begin with, I wanted to share a story about John MacArthur.

Dr. MacArthur came to Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to preach a series of sermons. This was at least a couple years after I graduated.
I was impressed. I couldn't believe we had a new president at the school who was doing really well for the school. Still is. And he got Dr. MacArthur to come and to preach. And so that was something that I never anticipated would happen while I was going to seminary there.
Somebody always wanted to hear preach, but never thought that he would actually come to preach at the school that I went to. And so it was neat to have him come and to listen to him in the evening and one night.
And then the next day he spoke during chapel. So most of the people who came outside of the school to hear him came the night before. This day, the next day, was really spent with the seminary students.
[3:17] And I went to be there a part of that. And I was really interested to not only hear him but to see how he interacted with people afterwards. Because a lot of times when they have those guys come in, they're busy.

They have other commitments. And so they whisk them out to the back door and they're gone and we never get to see him. And I always remember hearing Dr. MacArthur say that, you know, people are surprised.
Because obviously when he preaches, he's very bold. He's very convicting. He speaks the truth. And he does so unashamedly.

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And so I think a lot of times you get the impression of him that, well, he must be like that everywhere he goes. That he's constantly, you know, bold and in people's faces and doing these types of things. But he says, no, it's all about grace when I'm not preaching.
You know, grace and my interactions with my people and likewise. And so I was interested to see, okay, is that really true? And it was. He was there. He preached. Like I said, a lot of times those guys, they're whisked right out of the building.
[4:15] But he stayed right there at front. He was surrounded by all different kinds of students. He was taking pictures with them. He was signing their books, which I was surprised by. And one thing he did that I learned later, the seminary president told us, is that he signed one of his, I have one, a study Bible.

And so this really kind of shocked the president. And he's like, you sign people's Bibles? And Dr. McCarver looked at me. He's like, I had to sign whatever they put in front of me. So it was neat because he truly is that kind of a person.
He was, he speaks obviously to a big church, to large crowds. He's a sought after speaker. But he doesn't see himself. You can see in that interaction, he's not too big for the little guys, I guess we should say.
He doesn't think himself in that way. He's a humble man. And it's easy to tell in that experience that he cares about people as individuals. Another guy who is like that, who I admire, is Charles Spurgeon.
Spurgeon was a huge personality and very well known during his time, mid-1800s in London. As a pastor, he spoke to huge crowds.
[5:28] He was sought after by all different kinds of churches. And yet he spent so much time with individuals. He started a school for kids who couldn't read.

He started an orphanage. He started a seminary. I mean, he did all these different things. He had a ministry for widows. They took care of all these widows. And it said that he knew all these students by name. He knew all those orphans.
He didn't see himself as being too big for individuals. And so we see the same thing here with Peter, is that he also spoke to large crowds. He also was a person who was sought after in the church.
Yet he didn't view that his time was too valuable or that he was too important to deal with individuals and their problems or their issues.
He took time out for them. No wonder, because he followed the example of Jesus Christ. All of these men are following the example of Jesus Christ, who also spoke to large crowds of people, but who spent time with individuals.
[6:27] And he did not view himself as being too important or them too unworthy to go and to speak with them and to have personal relationships with them. If you remember Stephen, who was martyred, had been engaged in the personal care of the widows.

Paul, whose conversion we just spoke about, though he was consumed with reaching cities and nations and spreading the gospel, he endeared himself to those whose names were all over his letters.
He refers to people in these churches by name. He knows who he's writing these letters to because he cared about them on an individual basis. Peter, again, had preached to large crowds.
He preached at Pentecost. He preached twice before the Sanhedrin. And this passage reveals the other side of Peter's ministry, which was his service to individuals.
And so the main idea for our study tonight is this. This passage of Scripture reveals six marks of Peter's ministry that all Christians, especially leaders within the church, should possess.
[7:29] Six marks of Peter's ministry that all Christians, especially leaders within the church, should possess. The first one is this, that Peter was attentive.

He was attentive. In verses 32 and 33, again, we see that it says there that now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda.
There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And so those two verses characterize the attentiveness of Peter in his ministry.
He was not cooped up in some denominational headquarters somewhere, some office building. He was moving around. He was interacting with the people in the church.

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And the more involved he was, the more opportunities that were presented for him to minister to people. Lydda, that city, was located about 10 miles southeast of the seacoast city of Joppa. [8:30] It was an important place since the roads from Egypt to Syria and Joppa to Jerusalem passed through that town. Today, it's the location of Israel's international airport, if you're interested to know.

So when Peter arrived there, he found a man named Aeneas, and this man was bedridden for eight years. He was paralyzed. The Bible doesn't say what the cause of his paralysis was, only that it was something that he had been afflicted with for eight years.
And the prospects for the rest of his life was that this was the way he was going to live until he died. So there wasn't much hope for a cure for Aeneas. But Peter's attentiveness in ministry gave him an opportunity to minister to this man.
The miracle, besides its obvious impact on the life of Aeneas, was used by God to bring large numbers of people in the surrounding region to faith in Jesus Christ. So Peter was attentive in his ministry.
The second mark is that Peter gave the acclaim to Christ. He gave the acclaim to Christ. Verses 34 and 35. And Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you.
[9:42] Rise and make your bed. And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. So the purpose of his work in ministry was to acclaim, was to exalt, was to promote Jesus Christ, not himself.

And so likewise, as ministers in the church, our objective is not to promote ourselves, but to promote Jesus Christ. Amen?
Okay. So one thing I noticed in thinking about this is I like to go to bookstores, especially Christian bookstores, and I've noticed that there are authors who are pastors and theologians, and a lot of times their books, the cover of the book is just the title with some kind of a nice picture maybe, or sometimes it's just plain.
And there's not much to look at. On the other hand, you have a group of teachers and pastors who write books as well, and their face is prominent right there on the front of the cover.
You guys know who I'm talking about, Joel Osteen. I won't make you guys guess. T.D. Jakes is another one. And there are. You see them. You see. They're just, they got that big old cheesy smile, and they're there looking nice, and they want to make sure that you know that this is their book, and you're buying it because of who they are.
[11:04] Okay, let's continue. So Peter understood that his ministry wasn't really his ministry. He wasn't in it for himself.

Coming to Aeneas, Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ, right? Not me, not somebody else, not Peter. Jesus Christ is the one who heals you.
He gave all the acclaim to him. Peter's selfless humility stands in sharp contrast to many in ministry today. Many of who I just mentioned. Today we seek to make, many people, I should say, seek to make names for themselves.
They seek their own fame. They seek to exalt their own name over the name of Jesus Christ. Peter took the words that the Lord spoke to the disciples in John 15, 4 and 5 to heart.
And this is what those verses say. There Jesus says, Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.
[12:06] I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing. Peter understood that well. In his first epistle, he echoed those words very clearly.

In 1 Peter 4, 11, he writes, Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God. Whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies. In order that in everything, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.
To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. So Peter was always in it for Jesus, not for himself. Then he heals Aeneas, and his next words to Aeneas is this, Rise and make your bed. You know, you think, well, is Peter some kind of a neat freak, right? He's really upset about the bed not being made. No, I think what he's saying to Aeneas and to those who are hearing is, you don't need to be in this place anymore, right?
You make your bed because you've got things to do. You've got places to go out and do now because you have been healed by the name of Jesus Christ. And so he's making it clear that this

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healing is not just momentary or temporary, it's permanent.
[13:18] Aeneas' life is going to be different now as a result. An interesting note here is that the New Testament knows nothing of progressive healings. Knows nothing of progressive healings.

All healings recorded in the scripture of the New Testament are instantaneous. They're total. They're complete. When somebody was healed, they were healed totally, instantaneously, and there was no reverting back reverting back to their previous condition.
This miracle had widespread and dramatic repercussions. We see there that all the residents of Lydda and Sharon, they saw him, and as a result of that, they turned to the Lord in belief.
Not only in Aeneas' own hometown of Lydda did this happen, but in the surrounding plain of Sharon, the people heard of the miracle, and they turned to faith in the Lord because of it.
So all these miracles that we see in scripture have a purpose, and the purpose is to reveal, as we'll talk about even more in a second, that Jesus Christ is Lord. These miracles are taking place because Jesus of Nazareth was not just some man.
[14:27] He was the Son of God, and that He died on the cross, and He rose again on the third day, and He ascended into heaven where we await His return. They were proof that the gospel message was true.

Third, Peter was available. He was available. The third mark of a minister of the gospel. Verses 36 through 39.
Now, after these things happened, there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which translated means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days, she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.
Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, please come to us without delay. So Peter rose and went with them, and when he arrived, they took him to the upper room.
All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas had made while she was with them. So Peter is available. Peter's availability led to an even more astounding opportunity here.
[15:30] Aeneas was healed, but Dorcas was dead, and she would be raised from the dead. While Peter was at Lydda, tragedy struck the church in Joppa because one of its most prominent members, this woman named Tabitha, or Dorcas, her Greek name, by the way, both of those names mean gazelle.

So all those times you were picking on kids when you were in school and you were calling them a Dorcas, you were calling them a gazelle. So if you have, like, you know, if our kids ever get teased, we can say, well, a Dorcas is a gazelle, so it's not really that big of a deal.
Okay. She was characterized by her loving generosity. This woman was loving. This woman was generous. Specifically, she was known to make clothes for those who were poor and in need.
Clothes were a very expensive item back then, as, well, they are today. I'll hold my tongue, okay? I was going to say, as many of you husbands know, right?
Clothes are still expensive things today. Her death was a serious blow to the believers in Joppa. This was a woman who they loved. This was a woman who did great things for that church, and they were hurt by her loss.
[16:40] So much so, you see, that they prepared her body for burial, which was customary, but they did not bury her. Instead, they put her into an upper room because they had other plans for what they were going to ask to have happen here.

They had great faith. They knew Peter was in town, and they were going to go and call him. Evidently, they had something else in mind. Again, that was because they were knowing that Peter was in Lydda, and they were going to go and seek him to bring him down to Joppa to heal their friend.
Again, they probably heard of his healing of Aeneas, which gave them an idea, and so they sent people to Peter, urging him that he come down to Joppa without delay, and he was available, and so he went.
Despite his consuming duties, Peter rose, it says, and he went with these men. He did not consider himself to be too busy or too important or unavailable.
He didn't have the time or the miracle too great for the Lord to accomplish. He was available to listen to the request, and he went, and he made himself available to go to wherever the Lord had

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called him to go, wherever he wanted him to be, whatever people he wanted him to minister to, Peter was available to those people.
[17:53] And when he arrived, it said they took him to the upper room where they had laid Tabitha's body. Peter saw for himself how much this woman was loved and what a loss her death was for the church at Joppa.

He could see that clearly. And so when he entered the room, he was joined by a group of widows who showed him all of the clothes that Tabitha had made for them. Employment opportunities for women back in this time were scarce, especially for widows.
And if you didn't have, as a widow, if you didn't have family to provide for you or take care for you, you had nothing. And so we see in Scripture that that's still something that we as a church need to meet those needs, and that wasn't any different back then.
And so these widows were taken care of by Tabitha, primarily by their Christian brothers and sisters in Joppa. And so the loss of Tabitha was very serious to them, and it was something that they were grieving very much over.
Tabitha wasn't a pastor. She wasn't an elder in the church, but in no way did not having those titles, in no way was she limited in her ministry and effectiveness for the Lord and for His work in the church.
[19:04] This was a very important woman who did a very important work for the Lord, and she had a very powerful impact that endeared her to all who were there.

Fourthly, the fourth mark, Peter prayed and made appeals for others to the Lord. Peter prayed and made appeals for others to the Lord.
So a minister of the gospel will pray for Christians, for others, and he will make appeals on their behalf to the Lord. As he had seen the Lord do when he raised Jairus' daughter, Peter sent all of the people who were in the room out.
He would not put on a display to draw any kind of attention to himself. He wanted a quiet place so that he could pray. You might think that Peter, who had been involved in many healings, should have simply commanded Tabitha to rise.
Get in and get it over with. Tabitha, get up. Let's go. However, he knew, however, he never presumed anything about the will of God, and he knew that God was the source of his power.
[20:11] And so he knew that he needed to pray for what was being asked, what he felt like the Lord was calling him to do, because he could not achieve any of this in his own power.

Successful ministry is dependent upon prayer. Prayer changes us because through it, we are reminded of our need for God and our need to be totally dependent upon him all the time.
And so Peter understood that he needed to pray. As a matter of fact, Jesus, right, the sinless son of God, the second person of the Trinity, felt like it was important that he pray.
And if Jesus needed to pray, how much more so do you and I need to pray, right? And so Peter understood this. He had seen Jesus often go and pray.
He had heard Jesus often praying with him, and he understood that prayer was an important part of the ministry that God had called him to be a part of. Because I've talked about him before, I thought it'd be good to share another story about Charles Spurgeon.
[21:20] He was a man of tremendous prayer, and he led his people to pray and encouraged them to pray. There's a story about a time where five college students came to London, to the Metropolitan Tabernacle where Spurgeon preached, his church.

They wanted to hear him preach, and they got there, and the doors were locked. And so they waited, and they sat on the steps, and this person came to them, a stranger, they didn't know who he was. And he saw them, and he said, guys, do you want to see what heats this building?
Do you want to see how we heat this building? And so they didn't really care to see that, but they had nowhere else to go, so they went with him. And this man led them into the church, led them down the stairs and through a hallway, and he opened the door where 700 people, 700 people were praying.
And he said to those guys, that right there, that is what heats this building. And the man, the guide, who showed them that room was Charles Spurgeon.
And so again, you see the humility of that man as well, but he understood how important prayer was for his ministry, how important prayer was for his church, and it hasn't changed.

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[22:39] It's still as important then as it is today for Highland Park Baptist Church. So having finished his prayer, Peter turned to Dorcas, and he called to her to arise.

For those who love this woman so much, they must have been filled with a tremendous amount of joy to see her return to life. However, God did not raise her solely for their benefit.
Let's look at verse 42, and there we see the fifth mark of a minister of the gospel. Peter's ministry advanced the gospel. Peter's ministry advanced the gospel.
Verse 42, And this miracle became known throughout all Joppa, and many, again, as a result, believed in the Lord. So God has a purpose in all that He does.
God's purpose for raising Tabitha was now clear. It was to help him or to encourage those in the city who heard of it to hear of this miracle, to know that He is the one true God, that the gospel is true.
[23:51] He also used these kinds of miracles to authenticate the apostles, His messengers, who He sent to share the gospel. And so God uses the raising of Dorcas as the spark for the salvation that took place for many in that city.

So there was a reason. There was a purpose, and that was to advance the gospel. And so as ministers of the gospel, whatever we are doing, the work that we do in the name of the Lord, its objective, one of its objective is to advance the gospel, to take the name of Jesus to those who haven't heard it yet and to make it well known.
Number six, Peter wasn't afraid to associate with those whom religious people despised. The sixth mark, and there are others.
There's just six in this passage, but the sixth mark is that Peter was not afraid to associate with those whom religious people despised, who they thought were unworthy of being saved by God. They were unworthy of their time. They were unworthy of their association. Peter began to change. So this is a footnote here. At the end, verse 43, it says there, and he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon a tanner.
[25:06] It's a footnote, but it's important. It bridges this portion of Scripture to the next portion of Scripture, chapter 10, where we have the account of the conversion of Cornelius and the bringing in of the Gentiles into the church.

This is a very big moment in the life of the church. Peter's prejudice against non-Jews had been tumbling downward for some time since he had met Jesus.
First, if you remember, there came the conversion of the Samaritan woman at the well, who many of the disciples thought was unworthy of salvation, even unworthy of being associated with Jesus. Jesus was talking to that woman. They couldn't believe it. But if you recall, again, at that time, Jews had no dealings with Samaritans, and so that was shocking for them to see Jesus speaking to her. It was shocking to them to see Jesus saving her, her going back to her community, her sharing the gospel and bringing people to hear more of what Jesus had to say.
[26:13] So he was beginning to understand that God is not just the God of Jews, that salvation isn't just for the nation of Israel, but that there was a bigger plan that God had.

And so he noticed that with Samaritans, who were, they kind of viewed them as being half Jews, half breeds. Soon after, an even greater shock shock was going to happen, as we talk about in chapter 10, with the Gentiles now entering the church.
And so this footnote is significant because it serves as another example of how the Lord had been changing the way that Peter viewed others. Now he's a sinner, and he's going to have problems, as we'll see in Galatians with the Jerusalem council that Paul talks about, where Paul had to confront him because he was showing prejudice against the Gentile believers, and that caused a big problem, and Paul had to confront him to his face.
So he wasn't perfect by any means, but he was beginning to understand, and his view of other people was changing. And so he is staying with a tanner. This is significant because tanners were despised in first century Jewish society because they dealt with the skins of dead animals.
And so if you know the law of the Old Testament, right, that that made a person unclean, and so tanners were unclean people. And if you were a Jew, you wouldn't associate with people who were unclean.
[27:40] And so this tanner was an unclean person. He would have been shunned from the local synagogue, yet Peter chooses to stay with him. And so we see in ministry there is no place for prejudice.

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If we're going to be effective in our ministry, we cannot be prejudiced against others. The once zealous Jewish nationalist Paul, remember, he learned this lesson after his conversion as well. In 1 Corinthians 9, 19 through 22, he expresses how he learned this lesson. For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.
To the Jews, I became as a Jew in order to win Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law, though not being myself under the law, that I might win those under the law.
To those outside of the law, I became as one outside the law, not being outside of the law, but God under the law of Christ, that I might win those outside of the law. To the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak.
[28:43] I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. So Peter possessed these marks of an effective personal ministry.

Because of that, the Lord blessed his ministry to individuals as much as his ministry to large crowds of people. And it would be through his ministry to another individual in Acts chapter 10 with Cornelius that the final barrier would be thrown down and Gentiles would be admitted to the church. So, now you know. Write them down and think about your leaders. Think about me and Dan and do we possess these marks. If we don't, first of all, pray for us before you rebuke us, okay?
We'd appreciate it. Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you again for this time that we've had to be able to spend together. We thank you, Lord, for the privilege that you give us to be a part of what you're doing in this world, redeeming lost people, bringing them to salvation in Jesus Christ and using us to do that.
God, we know that this is a tremendous task. We know that you have gifted us with all the things that we need to go and to share this good news. God, we pray that we would bear these marks of the minister of the gospel that Peter was, that others are, that we would be attentive, that we would be available, that we would give all the glory, all the acclaim to Jesus Christ, that we would go where you call us to be, that we would not be unashamed, or that we would not be ashamed, I should say, of whomever you call us to go to, Lord, but that we would be unprejudiced as we go to them because we know, Lord, that you're in the business of saving all different kinds of people, all different types of people.
[30:35] So, Lord, we pray that we would be diligent in what you've called us to do and we pray that as ministers we would bear these marks and again, that the results of our efforts would bring glory to the name of Jesus Christ and that people would know that the gospel is true.

That Jesus is in fact the way, the truth, and the life that there is salvation in no other. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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