Faithful Disciples
Acts 9:36-43
SS Lesson for 02/18/2018

Devotional Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON
Key Verse: Acts 9:40
Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary
Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND
From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

FAITHFUL DORCAS (ACTS 9:36-37)
Faithful by living a Good life (36-37)
God created us to live a good life (Eph 2:10)
A good life is obvious (1 Tim 5:25)
A good life includes being generous and willing to share (1 Tim 6:18)
We should encourage each other to live a good life (Heb 10:24)
A good life results in the glorification of God (1 Peter 2:12)
A good life so that others will praise God (Matt 5:16)
A good life so that we are a good example to others (Titus 2:7-8)
A good life is doing things done out of a pure and loving attitude and spirit (Luke 6:45)
A good life begins by practicing and using the truth of God's word (John 3:21)
A good life is always helping others (Heb 6:10)

FAITHFUL FRIENDS (ACTS 9:38-39)
Faithful in hope of the resurrection (38-39)
Hope of the resurrection because Jesus' resurrection was witnessed by many (Acts 2:32)
Hope of the resurrection because it is a goal (Phil 3:10-11)
A reality because the resurrected body will be imperishable (1 Cor 15:42)
A reality because it is an elementary doctrine (Heb 6:1-3)
A reality because it is a trustworthy truth (2 Tim 2:11)

FAITHFUL PETER (ACTS 9:40-43)
Faithful reality of the resurrection (40-43)
A reality because Jesus was the firstfruit of the resurrected (1 Cor 15:20-23)
A reality because it is a goal (Phil 3:10-11)
A reality because the resurrected body will be imperishable (1 Cor 15:42)
A reality because it is an elementary doctrine (Heb 6:1-3)
A reality because it is a trustworthy truth (2 Tim 2:11)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH
Peter’s Progressive Change of Mind: Luke Sets the Scene (9:32-43)
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY
PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY
Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson examines how God rewards Faithful Disciples. The study’s aim is to appreciate the position of Dorcas, the mourners, and Peter as the story unfolds. The study’s application is to show that God desires that we serve as faithful disciples, using the abilities He has given us.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Acts 9:40

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

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

9:32-35. Peter was last mentioned in 8:25 when he was returning to Jerusalem from Samaria with John. Peter was involved in an itinerant mission around Judea which brought him to Lydda. Lydda, mentioned only here in the New Testament, is today called Lod; Israel’s international airport is just north of the city. Peter later carried on an extensive traveling ministry, evident from 1 Corinthians 9:5. This is also implied from the addressees of his first epistle (1 Peter 1:1). Philip had preceded Peter to the area in and around Caesarea (Acts 8:40). The miraculous healing of Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years, was the occasion for many to come to faith in Christ. Three times in Acts, Luke used the words turned to the Lord to refer to salvation (9:35; 11:21; 15:19). The gospel was beginning to attract a wider audience, for many in this coastal region were Gentiles. Sharon is the fertile plain along the coast of Palestine, about 10 miles wide and 50 miles long. Lydda was on the southeastern edge of the plain. This miracle was Peter’s second healing of a cripple (cf. 3:1-10; also cf. 14:8-10).

9:36-38. While Peter was at Lydda, a well-beloved Christian woman (a disciple) in Joppa by the name of Dorcas... died. Her name means “gazelle” in Greek as does its counterpart Tabitha in Aramaic. She was known for her help to the poor. Because the cities of Lydda and Joppa are only about 12 miles apart two men were sent from Joppa to call Peter. (For a brief statement on Joppa’s history see Beers, The Victor Handbook of Bible Knowledge, p. 559.) No one had been raised from the dead in the early church so far as the records of Acts declare, but the faith of the believers was so great they expected the Lord to use Peter to resurrect Dorcas.

9:39-41. When Peter arrived, he sent the weeping widows and other believers out of the upstairs... room, prayed on his knees for Dorcas, and commanded her to arise (cf. Mark 5:41). To avoid ceremonial defilement (cf. Lev. 21:1; Num. 5:2; 9:6-10; 19:11), Peter did not touch her until after God restored her to life.

9:42-43. This miracle, like previous ones, led many to believe in the Lord (2:43; 4:4; 5:12, 14; 8:6; 9:33-35). After this miracle Peter remained in Joppa for some time (lit., “sufficient days”) with a tanner named Simon. His house was “by the sea” (10:6). This passage (9:32-43) shows the excellent preparation given Peter for his ensuing experience with Cornelius. (1) Two outstanding miracles confirmed his ministry; God was with him in a special way. (2) He was ministering in an area that was partially Gentile. (3) His living in the home of Simon the tanner was significant. Tanners were considered to be ceremonially unclean because they were constantly in contact with the skins of dead animals (Lev. 11:40).

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

When you think about humanitarians, what qualities come to mind? We usually think of those who are dedicated to a cause other than their own narrow self-interest. Humanitarians have devoted themselves to improving the lives of others. Their ideals shine through their devotion to the less fortunate. There were humanitarians in the early church. These were people whose faith was demonstrated by their actions. Their works were the outward sign of an overflowing faith. Dorcas was one such woman. Although we know little about her, we do know that she was respected. She was industrious. She made clothing, which she gave to people who were in need. She seems to have held some position in the community, and she had access to the resources she needed. Many people would be tempted to leave such work to someone else. It is easy to overlook suffering when it does not directly have to do with us. However, this woman did not do that. Her faith translated into a determination to serve those less fortunate. Because of this, numerous lives
were affected. That is why her death was such a blow to this community. This one woman had made a great impact on many, and she had several mourners. Standing near her lifeless body, they were stricken by the loss of this faithful disciple. This would be a tragic text if it had ended on that note, but it does not. The story is changed because of the actions of other faithful disciples. Instead of resigning themselves to her death, her fellow believers did not give up. They put out an immediate call for Peter. Do we know why they did this? Scripture does not explicitly tell us, but it does seem to support the idea that these believers sent for Peter in the hope that he would perform a miracle. Peter responded by coming. I can only imagine the breathless anticipation when he arrived. Everyone was wondering what would happen next. Here was this empowered apostle—one known for his miraculous works. When Peter walked in and prayed, he had to have absolute certainty that Christ’s power would flow through him. That conviction carried over into an amazing act of restoration, leaving a community rejoicing in amazement about this miracle. The faithful service of one woman had caused believers to call for an act of restoration, and it had occurred. The point I am making is that our faithful actions do make a difference. When we put faith behind what we do, we may, by God’s grace, achieve astounding results. We not only become faithful but also faith-filled and overflowing in His Spirit. Jesus said that His followers could move mountains with even the smallest faith (Matt. 17:20-21). Whatever we are called to do in our communities, we need to be purposeful about doing His work, trusting in Him to equip us for it. As we grow in faith, we will grow in confidence that God can do all things. We will rely on Christ for all results. When we act on that level of faith, we glorify Him. Are you trusting in the Lord today?

Lesson Introduction and Background
From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Today’s lesson takes place in the first decade of the church, sometime in the AD 30s. The death of Stephen (Acts 7) caused a scattering of Jerusalem church members (8:1). One of them, Philip, traveled to Samaria where he had success in preaching the gospel (8:5-8, 12). The 12 apostles were still in Jerusalem, and of those Peter and John made the trip to Samaria to assist Philip and confirm his work (8:14). There Peter had a dramatic encounter with a sorcerer named Simon, a man who attempted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit (8:18, 19). After rebuking Simon, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching in villages along the way (8:25). Sometime after this, Peter went to Lydda, a village about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem, to visit believers (Acts 9:32). There he healed a paralytic named Aeneas, causing many in the village and others nearby to turn to the Lord (9:33-35). In today’s lesson, Peter ended up in the seaside city of Joppa (modern Jaffa), 12 miles to the northwest of Lydda. Joppa was a walled seaport city built on a small ridge that jutted into the Mediterranean Sea. Its tiny harbor was the closest natural anchorage to Jerusalem, causing the city to become a bustling port by the time of Solomon (see 2 Chronicles 2:16). Allotted to the tribe of Dan (Joshua 19:40, 46), Joppa was the seaport to which Jonah fled to hire passage to a distant place in his attempt to escape God’s call to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 1:3). Joppa was a Jewish city, and it had an established church of Christians of Jewish background. This thriving seaport is the setting for today’s lesson.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)
NOTE: The major detail points and cross-references of this lesson came from a previous lesson dated 04/26/2009.

Faithful Dorcas (Acts 9:36-37)

36 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.
37 But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.

Faithful by living a Good life (36-37)

God created us to live a good life (Eph 2:10)
10 For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
A good life is obvious (1 Tim 5:25)
   25 In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden.

A good life includes being generous and willing to share (1 Tim 6:18)
   18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

We should encourage each other to live a good life (Heb 10:24)
   24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

A good life results in the glorification of God (1 Peter 2:12)
   12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

A good life so that others will praise God (Matt 5:16)
   16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

A good life so that we are a good example to others (Titus 2:7-8)
   7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

A good life is doing things done out of a pure and loving attitude and spirit (Luke 6:45)
   45 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

A good life begins by practicing and using the truth of God's word (John 3:21)
   21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

A good life is always helping others (Heb 6:10)
   10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

Faithful Friends (Acts 9:38-39)

38 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.
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.

Faithful in hope of the resurrection (38-39)

Hope of the resurrection because Jesus' resurrection was witnessed by many (Acts 2:32)
   32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Hope of the resurrection because through it saints will be united (Rom 6:5)
   5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

Hope of the resurrection because of the power of God (Acts 2:23-24)
   23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.
Hope of the resurrection because of the promise to the saints to meet Jesus in the air (1 Thess 4:17)
17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet
the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Hope of the resurrection because of the promise that it will result in change (1 Cor 15:52)
52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be
raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

Hope of the resurrection because it is based on Scripture (1 Cor 15:3-4)
3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the
Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Hope of the resurrection because of being united with Jesus (Rom 6:5)
5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his
resurrection.

Hope of the resurrection through preaching (1 Cor 15:12-14)
12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no
resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14
And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

Hope of the resurrection through a new birth and living hope (1 Peter 1:3-4)
3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth
into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can
never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you,

Hope of the resurrection through baptism (1 Peter 3:17-21)
17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 18 For Christ died for sins
once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but
made alive by the Spirit, 19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison 20 who
disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only
a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves
you also — not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves
you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

Faithful Peter (Acts 9:40-43)
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. 41 Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her
alive. 42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. 43 So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.

Faithful reality of the resurrection (40-43)

A reality because Jesus was the firstfruit of the resurrected (1 Cor 15:20-23)
20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For
since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam
all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he
comes, those who belong to him.

A reality because it is a goal (Phil 3:10-11)
10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings,
becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.
A reality because the resurrected body will be imperishable (1 Cor 15:42)

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;

A reality because it is an elementary doctrine (Heb 6:1-3)

6 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so.

A reality because it is a trustworthy truth (2 Tim 2:11)

11 Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him;

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Peter’s Progressive Change of Mind: Luke Sets the Scene (9:32-43)

In spite of Peter’s love for the Lord Jesus, his growth in the faith, and the power which God manifested in his life and ministry, he held the same views of his unbelieving Jewish brethren. And so did the rest of the apostles. God set out to change Peter’s thinking, in a way that was nearly as dramatic as the conversion of Saul, as described in the first part of chapter 9.

Peter’s change of mind was progressive, just as Paul’s conversion involved a process. Geographically, the progress is most evident. Peter started in Jerusalem, then went down to Samaria, and to some of the Samaritan towns (8:14, 25). Sometime later, Peter was found in Lydda (9:32) and then at Joppa (9:39, 43), and then at Caesarea (10:24). After this, he would return to Jerusalem (11:2).

I believe that these changes in Peter’s place of residence played a very crucial role in preparing him for the invitation to come to the house of Cornelius. I am inclined to doubt that Peter would have gone to Caesarea and to the house of Cornelius if he would have received the invitation to do so while he was staying in Jerusalem. It was here that his devoutly Jewish fellow-apostles and brethren lived. And it was precisely these folks who “called Peter on the carpet” for preaching the gospel in the home of this Gentile, Cornelius. But God took Peter and John to Samaria, where they welcomed many Samaritan saints into the faith and into the church. Then, at some point in time, God led Peter to Lydda, then to Joppa, and finally to Caesarea.

Peter’s arrival in Lydda was the occasion for his encounter with Aeneas, who was healed of his 8 year paralysis, in the name of Jesus Christ (9:32-34). This healing led to the conversion of many, and the broadcasting of Peter’s reputation and presence to the nearby town of Joppa (cf. 9:38). When Dorcas died, some of the disciples in Joppa sent for Peter. We are not told why they sent for him, or what they asked him to do. Was Dorcas still alive when they first sent for Peter? Had she died before these men were sent? Did they dare to think that God might raise her to life through Peter, a miracle such as Peter had not performed before (so far as the account tells us, at least)?

Peter’s method of dealing with this request was not that which we would expect from watching the television “healers.” Peter went to Joppa. There, he sent everyone from the room where the woman’s body was laid. Peter then prayed. We are not told for what he prayed. I know what I would have prayed: “Lord, what am I supposed to do?” Did Peter think of his own experience with the Lord, along with James and John, when He raised the daughter of Jairus (cf. Mark 5)? Somehow, Peter became convinced that he should pray that God would raise this woman from death. Only after she was alive did Peter call in the others, and present her to them, alive. This miracle of life was used of God to bring many to faith, and it also resulted in Peter’s change of location, from Lydda to Joppa, where Peter had an extended stay (9:43).

This sequence of events removed Peter from Jerusalem, and from the legalistic separatism of his Jewish brethren. It put him in contact, no doubt, with a larger number of Gentiles. It resulted in his contact with a woman who had died, as was thus not only ceremonially unclean, but also defiling to Peter. It also put Peter in constant daily contact with a tanner, a man who daily dealt with dead animals. It would seem that some of Peter’s scruples with “unclean” things would have had to have been set aside.
If the change of setting was preparatory in the life of Peter, making him more open to the invitation to go to the house of a Gentile, the miracles which Peter is reported to have performed (by divine enablement) are also significant. The miracle of the healing of the paralytic was not so spectacular, for similar healings had taken place by Peter’s hand previously (cf. Acts 3). But what was spectacular was the raising of a dead woman, something which is not said to have happened previously through Peter.

Would someone attempt to explain Peter’s actions (of going to the house of a Gentile, to preach the gospel to Gentiles) by insisting that he was “not himself,” that he had, perhaps, become carnal or was in a “backslidden state”'? The answer would have to be that this man, this “carnal man” had never before (or after) seen the hand of God work so mightily in his life and ministry.

The important changes which took place in Peter were those pertaining to his theology and understanding of the relationship between the “clean” and the “unclean” and the Jews and the Gentile. Notice, with me, the sequence of events which God brought about in Peter’s life, and the progressive realization on his part as to what all this meant.

(Adapted from URL: https://bible.org/seriespage/15-cleanliness-next-godliness-acts-932-1023)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Here’s a one-question test: What legacy of Dorcas remained after she died? If you answered “clothing she made for widows,” we invite you to try again! Dorcas’s legacy was more than clothing. When she died, her legacy was grateful people who had been objects of her kindness and for whom she had modeled the love of Christ. Each widow was a living legacy. She had taught them by her life how to care for others less fortunate than themselves. She had given them an example to cherish. Peter brought Dorcas back from death, but eventually she died again. When that happened, her legacy was no doubt similar if not enhanced. What sort of legacy will you leave? Perhaps you are thinking mainly in terms of money you have designated in your will for a Christian cause or organization. Before trying to build your entire legacy that way, consider two points: (1) that’s not what Dorcas did, and (2) “The man who leaves money to charity in his will is only giving away what no longer belongs to him.” The quote is from Voltaire; although he was certainly no friend of Christianity, there is some wisdom in his observation. Our primary legacies will be the people we are influencing now for Christ, people who will remain to do the work of God’s kingdom after we are dead and gone. How will people remember you? Are you a workaholic who never has time for others, or are you someone who can always be counted on to stop and help? Will your memory be of one who loved money the most or who loved people the most? Are you a self-giving parent, or do you model “me first” to your children? Most importantly, will you leave behind a legacy of faith? Domitian became Emperor of Rome in AD 81. His tendency was to grab more and more power for himself. His pretentious ways were seen clearly when he required visitors to his royal court to address him as “My Lord and God Domitian.” Eventually, the Roman Senate could stand no more, and Domitian was assassinated. In a remarkable move, the Senate then voted a damnatio memoriae (condemnation of memory) against Domitian. His legacy became that of a hated tyrant. May we leave legacies like Dorcas rather than Domitian!

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. Christians are great blessings for Christ as they serve lovingly in their communities (Acts 9:36)
2. Active faith leaves a lasting impression on those we encounter (vss. 37-38)
3. Active faith attracts those seeking peace and comfort in times of crisis (vs. 39)
4. God works through those who will submit to Him in faith and rely on His power (vs. 40)
5. God is still using those who believe He can bring life into the midst of death (vs. 41)
6. God’s people are called to make His truth known to all who will hear (vss. 42-43)