

Acts 9:32-10:8

Jesus' Witnesses to the Nations

Learning Objectives

- To recognize that the apostles' works of healing and caring for people led people to belief in Christ.
- To understand how the work of the apostles fits into the larger scheme of the Bible.
- To explore how our own ministry today should look like the apostles'.

What Is Witnessing?

Pray for your time together as a group.

Read Out Loud: Acts 9:32-43 (NIV)

³² As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴ "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

? What are some reasons you think the apostles performed these healings for people?

Possible Answers: They were told to by Jesus, they were imitating Jesus, they knew the healings would bring attention to the one behind the healings and His larger plan of salvation, they had compassion on the people and loved them, both wanting them to be healed and be able to be a part of Jesus' larger plan of salvation.

? We see in verses 35 & 42 that the healings Peter performed caused many to believe in Christ. Why do you think these types of healings persuaded so many to believe?

Possible Answers: Healings were very miraculous at the time, especially because medicine was not as advanced. Peter prays to God for the healings and does them in Jesus' name, so the people believed that God must be great to accomplish such things. They wanted to be a part of a faith in which God and the people who were a part of it cared deeply about people and wanted to do something about the evil in the world.

Read Out Loud: In the very beginning of our study in Acts, we talked about the importance of the unity of Luke and Acts. Drawing back on that discussion, we are going to spend a little time looking at the connection between Jesus' ministry and the apostles' ministries.

Read Out Loud: Luke 4:16-20 (NIV)

¹⁶ [Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

? In what ways did we see Jesus fulfill the scripture from Isaiah (vv. 18-19) in His life and ministry?

Possible Answers: Jesus healed many: people with leprosy (Luke 5:12-14), paralyzed people (5:17-26), people possessed by demons (4:31-36), and so many more. He came not for the healthy but for the sick, not for the righteous but the sinners (5:31). He interacted with people who were poor and looked down upon by society.

? What connections do you see between Jesus' ministry in the book of Luke and the apostles' ministry in the book of Acts?

Possible Answers: Jesus has compassion for people (Luke 7:13). In a way, Jesus is also a 'witness' of the kingdom, as well as the one who brings it to fruition. Jesus performs healings for many people just like

the apostles do and draws attention to the same things (Jesus and the gospel of the kingdom of God.). Both saw their work as a fulfillment of Scripture (Luke 24:25-27, 2:14-21).

Read Out Loud: Luke 24:46-48 (NIV)

⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,
⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

Read Out Loud: Acts 1:8 (NIV)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Leaders’ Note: We talked about what “witness” means in our study of Acts 1; however, if you think it would be beneficial, you can revisit the conversation here. It may be helpful to have people talk about how they (or today’s culture) would personally define what it means to be a “witness” before going into the following question:

? Optional: In the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts, Jesus tells the disciples that they are His witnesses. In these passages, how does Jesus describe what a witness does?

Possible Answers: See Luke 24 and Acts 1 if needed. Witnesses will preach the repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem and going to the ends of the earth. They will receive power from the Holy Spirit to do this.

? We see how the apostles act as witnesses in this passage of Acts through healings. We may not have the gift of miraculous healings, but how can we still be a witness to those who are sick and need care?

Possible Answers: We can minister to them by being present and visiting them, by praying with and for them, by bringing them food, etc.

? What are some of the things that hinder us from caring for people who are sick or need help?

Possible Answers: We might be selfish and not want to give up our time or money. We may feel ill-equipped or not know how to help. We might be afraid or feel like it’s not our place using reasons like I don’t know them well enough, I’m not family, they might not want my help, etc.

The **social gospel** is a type of ministry that puts the focus of Jesus’ work entirely on the reclamation of the world now, through various social movements. While it’s a wonderful thing to focus on the work Christ has for us on earth now (which is what we’re focusing on today!), we can’t forget that the work we do now is all in anticipation of the coming kingdom, where Jesus will complete the work Himself that He started.

? What should our motivation be behind these acts of service?

Possible Answer: We want to show them love and care because we were first loved and cared for by Christ, not for our own personal satisfaction or reputation.

Who Do We Witness To?

Read Out Loud: Acts 10:1-8 (NIV)

¹ At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment.

² He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³ One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

⁴ Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸ He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

? Up until this point in the passage, Peter has been healing primarily Jewish people. After his encounter with Cornelius (that we will discuss in the next study), he will extend his ministry to the Gentiles. Is there a specific group of people that you are more inclined to care for over another? Why?

Possible Answer: We all have biases that lead us to favor some groups more than others. Sometimes it's discomfort with a group of people we aren't familiar with, or the thought that one person or group would never respond to Jesus' love. But God is able to work in the life of anyone, and He loves all people.

? Go back and read Luke 24:46-48 and Acts 1:8 from earlier in the study. Who are we to witness to?

How can you take intentional steps to move toward the people you are less inclined to care for this week?

Possible Answer: All nations! Take time to ask questions, listen, and get to know this group of people. Pray for God to change your heart toward these people and give you opportunities to love them.

For Discussion And Accountability

? Who in your life is God calling you to witness to right now?

? How can your small group encourage you in your efforts to love this person?