

Acts 9:23-43 (NIV) ²³After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, ²⁴but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. ²⁵But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. ²⁶When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. ³⁰When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus. ³¹***Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.*** ³²As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. ³³There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴“Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. ³⁶In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸Lydda 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!” ³⁹Peter 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. ⁴⁰Peter 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. ⁴¹He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. ⁴²This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

44-09-02-The Prospects of Peace

peace, edification, evangelism, fear of the Lord

Acts 9:31

God arranges times of peace so we can be free to grow and serve.

INTRODUCTION: (Scripture Reading: Acts 9:23-43)

– There are several stories in the passage read from Acts 9, but I want to focus on one verse: **Acts 9:31**, *Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.*” Through the lens of this verse, I’ll try to show how these stories relate to the **sermon title**, “The Prospects of Peace,” *and* to the **sermon’s theme**: **HOM.idea**.

I. God Provides Special Seasons of Peace—“*Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.*”

- A. One way God brought “*a time of peace*” from persecution was **to go after and take out a major leader of the persecution by saving him.**
1. Remember, **Saul led those who stoned the 1st Christian martyr, Stephen, who died praying, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”**
 2. Jesus told us to do this in **Mat 5:44**, “But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” then He exemplified it from the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”)
 3. If we *suffer wrongly, we may feel like calling down God’s wrath on our persecutors, but God may be allowing it as a cross, from which we can pray the same powerfully strategic prayers.*
- B. When Stephen’s prayer for Saul was answered, **Satan’s use of him to destroy the church was totally reversed: Saul began to build up the church— v.28, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.**
1. Satan knew how **zealously devoted a spiritually blind Saul** could be. SO, now that Saul’s eyes were opened, **the devil threw all his energy into stopping him from using that same zeal for Christ.**
 2. Remember **what Jesus had prophesied to Ananias—the man sent to pray for Saul—Acts 9:16**, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” (The persecutor would become the persecuted.)
 3. This began **in Damascus— v.23**. After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, then **in Jerusalem, Saul (v.29-30)** “debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.”

TRANS: Satan’s plan backfired. Instead of getting rid of Saul, it put him where God wanted him. Saul became Paul, God’s tool to spread the Gospel all over the Mediterranean, and the devil had his hands full trying to stop him. But until Satan could refocus on Palestine, *“the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace.”*

II. Seasons of Peace Provide the Freedom to Focus on Ministry— *“It [the church] was strengthened;”*

- A. Conflict is a great place for the *testing of strength*, but not a good environment for the *building up of strength*. [**Imagine** walking into a classroom, and before hearing any lectures or studying any material, you’re given a final exam by the teacher.]
- B. Conflict may be a great place for *learning about your weaknesses*, but you need a time of rest from it, to focus on *strengthening those weak areas* for the next challenge of conflict you’ll face.
 1. After Pentecost, before persecution began, the infant flock had a beginning honeymoon period, when it *thrived under the ministry of the apostles*— Acts 2:47b. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. [**New Christians** often get special care from the Holy Spirit. They have a hedge of protection around them, until they *join the rest of us in facing daily trials of our faith*. Even Saul experienced this— v.23. *After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him.*]
 2. When conflicts do flare up, instead of *thriving*, we tend to focus on surviving. (Our conflicts may not be as harsh as those of the early church, but they’re usually enough to make us look forward each day to a quiet time and each week to a worship service at church, where for our faith can be renewed and strengthened.)

TRANS: This is a repeating cycle in the Christian life: *strengthening; conflict; strengthening; conflict*. Satan was after Paul all his life. He’ll stay after us all of ours. But **when God arranges times of peace, it frees us up for growth and service**. We can squander these times or use them to *focus on the ministry* God has given us to do.

III. A Focus on Ministry Produces Growth— *“and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it [the church] grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.”*

- A. People can know *about* Jesus without knowing Him or His power.
 1. The Holy Spirit applies His power to make Christ known, but we are often meant to be *the contact point* for that ministry.

2. Peter used this “time of peace” to visit believers in the area. (He may not have had an agenda, but God did—God used him as a contact point for the church to be *encouraged by the Holy Spirit*.)
- B. That *encouragement* came in the form of two miracles.
 1. The 1st was a healing— v.32-35, *As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. “Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up. All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. (Peter didn’t do this on his own. He ministered just as Jesus did, doing only what He saw His Father doing.)*
 - a. This encouraged the church! It meant *Jesus was still at work*. (Peter only said what he saw: “Aeneas, *Jesus Christ heals you.*”)
 - b. Don’t be afraid to say or do what God shows you. (Look at the result of this one man’s healing— v.35, *All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.— A city-wide revival!*)
 2. The 2nd miracle was even more *dramatic*: Tabitha, a disciple in a town nearby got sick and died. They washed her body for burial, laid it on the floor of an upper room, and had Peter come— v.40-41, 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. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. (Same story: by the Holy Spirit *Peter did only what he saw Jesus doing, bringing life to the dead.*)
 - a. *What an encouragement!* The Joppa church had lost a valuable believer (v.36b), “*who was always doing good and helping the poor.*” Now she stood before them *alive, ready to start serving again.*
 - b. (v.43) “*Peter stayed in Joppa for some time,*” probably busy teaching and baptizing, because (v.42) “*This [miracle] became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.*”

CONCLUSION:

—Miracles are’t the point. The point is **Jesus is not done yet**. He’s still getting paralyzed people moving, still reviving those prematurely dead in their service to God. When we sense **God giving us times of peace**, let’s use that **freedom for growth in faith** and for **obedience in service**, just as Peter did, saying and doing what Jesus shows us.