

Text: Acts 9:32-43

Title: “Unstoppable ... All Things Possible”

Open your Bibles this morning to Acts 9. As you're turning I want to let you know that two weeks from today, September 13, we will have our next unified service in the Sanctuary. This will be a special Sunday as I look forward to sharing some exciting developments as we think about refocusing the vision of our church. So please make every effort to be here that Sunday.

ILLUSTRATION – The movie “Soul Surfer” is the true story of teenage surfer Bethany Hamilton who experienced a great tragedy when she lost her left arm in a vicious shark attack while she was surfing. The movie tells the story of how Bethany's faith enabled her to face her fears and overcome incredible odds to emerge from the tragedy giving glory to God. Bethany Hamilton today is a powerful witness for Jesus Christ ... all because God worked a miracle to save her life. This scene shows how her faith, and her family's faith, in the darkest hour paved the way for God to do something amazing. Watch this:

“I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.” My desire today is to open up the Scriptures in a way that your faith in God will be increased ... that you will see that all things are possible with God. I want you to see that there is hope for your broken marriage ... hope for your bleak financial situation ... hope in the face of a devastating illness ... hope that with God all things are possible.

In our study of Acts we're seeing the awesome power of God on display. Acts is not just about what God did or used to do. It is what God will continue to do through us in the irrepressible power of the Holy Spirit.

Remember that back in Acts 8 there is this widespread persecution of the church. Things are really bad. The treatment of believers was so severe that most believers had to leave Jerusalem and move to other places. At the middle of this great wave of persecution is a man named Saul. The first part of Acts 9 shows Saul breathing out murderous threats against believers. Then suddenly and dramatically Jesus confronts Saul and he is gloriously saved. So this great persecutor of the church is so transformed that he becomes one of the great preachers of the church. And as a result...

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.

What an incredible turn of events! The greatest enemy of the church has now become the greatest friend of the church. And as a result the church can breathe a sigh of relief. They can now move about freely which causes the church to be strengthened, encouraged and to grow. Who would have ever dreamed that things could change like that? That's how dramatically and quickly things can happen when the sovereign God of the Bible decides to act. With Him all things are possible. And as believers we should live with that kind of wild expectancy. God, in

His unstoppable power is turning things around all the time ... from the most insignificant detail of our lives to the matters that involve entire nations.

ILLUSTRATION – Someone has described it this way. The world we live in is not a *machine*, where God is locked into some fixed pattern that can't be changed. The world where we live out our lives is a *stage where a drama is playing out*. And there is a living Author and Director, named Jesus. He is wonderfully creative and resourceful. Jesus will jump right on to the set anytime He wants to. We are actors in this drama. We think we know the script, but only Jesus determines how the drama of our lives and our world will play out. So be encouraged today, my friends. Jesus is alive and He can turn things around in ways and in times that we might never imagine.

Now in the last part of Acts 9 we have two stories about the ministry of Peter. Peter is the most important leader in the church in this part of Acts. He was Jesus' lead apostle, and now the main leader of the church. These two stories are not just about Peter. More importantly they show us how Jesus can break in to situations in ways that we least expect. **Read Acts 9:32-34.**

We must not miss the fact here that Luke wants us to see how the ministry of Jesus continues through the ministry of Peter and others in Acts. It's the same Jesus of the Gospels now working through His servant in Acts. For instance, in the Gospels we read about Jesus healing a paralyzed man at a pool called Bethesda. The man had been crippled for 38 years and Jesus spoke him:

John 5:8 - "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

And here in Acts 9 Peter encounters a man in a similar situation, crippled for eight years. And Peter just follows Jesus into this man's need. Peter said in v.34, "Jesus heals you. Get up and take care of your mat." And Aeneas got up ... for the first time in eight years! This is the powerful Jesus breaking into Aeneas' hopeless situation. And He's still breaking into our hopeless situations with power and hope. Back to Acts 9...

Acts 9:35 - All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

That's the first story. Here's the second. **Read Acts 9:36-39.**

This is Jesus continuing His ministry. Here again Peter is just following Jesus into this hopeless situation. Author and Director Jesus is once again jumping onto the stage, interrupting the drama and changing the whole script of a woman's life. And Peter is just one of the actors.

Remember in the Gospels (Mark 5) there was a man named Jairus whose little girl had died. Everything looked hopeless, but Jesus told the messengers, "Don't be afraid; just believe." When Jesus arrived at the home of Jairus a large crowd had gathered in the room where the girl's body was laid, and there was much crying and commotion. Jesus sent everyone out of the room except Peter, James and John. Mark 5:41 tells us ...

Mark 5:41 - He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha koum!” (which means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”).

The details are amazingly similar to this situation Peter is facing. Someone has died. The room is filled with grieving people. Peter sends everyone out of the room, gets down on his knees and prays. Now look what Peter does in Acts 9:40.

Acts 9:40 - 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.

Remember in Mark 5 Jesus told Jairus’ little girl, “Talitha koum” or “little girl get up.” Here Peter spoke to Tabitha in similar words, “Tabitha get up.” And Tabitha opened her eyes and stood up on her feet. Luke wants us to know that Jesus is continuing His ministry of bringing hope into impossible situations.

Note: Peter is an apostle and he has special abilities to perform miracles. We don’t necessarily have that kind of power, but Jesus hasn’t changed. He still changes lives. He still accomplishes the impossible, and He will work through us in doing so. It’s the same Jesus in the Gospels, in Acts and in your world today ... still doing the impossible.

Read Acts 9:41-42.

So here on the pages of Scripture we have the power of Jesus on display softening Saul’s hardened heart, healing Aenaes’ paralyzed legs and raising Tabitha from the dead. Now let me show you how encountering God in His Word like we have today can strengthen our faith in God with whom all things are possible:

1. FOCUS YOUR FAITH ON JESUS.

We shouldn’t look at these stories and think, “Wow, I wish I could do incredible things like Peter did.” No, we look at this and focus on the living Lord Jesus Christ. We focus on...

- **The deity of Jesus**

Acts 9:34a - Peter said to (Aenaes), “Jesus *Christ* heals you.”

Notice how Peter announces Jesus. He is Jesus *Christ*. Jesus is His *human* name; Christ is His *heaven* name. When we are anchored to Jesus we are anchored to God Himself. But we are also anchored to...

- **The power of Jesus**

Acts 9:34a - Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ *heals* you.”

Here is the raw power of Jesus to break into a situation that is impossible by any human calculation. Focus on the power of Jesus as the Son of God. But also focus on ...

- **The salvation of Jesus**

Now we might easily miss this if we aren't careful. In Acts 9:34 Peter said to Aeneas, “Get up and take care of your mat.” And he got up. And in v.40 Jesus said, “Tabitha, get up.” And she opened her eyes, and sat up. The word “get up” in both places is the same word that is used of God raising Jesus from the dead. It's the same word that is used to describe our resurrection in the last day, and the new resurrection life we have in Christ. The same Jesus who works miracles in the Bible is the Jesus who works the great miracle of saving souls. Focus on that, but also on...

- **The glory of Jesus**

Acts 9:35 says that when people saw Aeneas walking they “turned to the Lord. “ And in v.42 after Tabitha was raised it says that “many people believed in the Lord.” The results are the same in both miracles. Jesus turns things around so that people will turn to him! Today focus your faith on Jesus. But here's the next way our faith is strengthened:

2. FUEL YOUR FAITH WITH THE WORD OF GOD.

There's a reason God put this chapter in our Bibles. We learn of miracles in the Bible. When your faith grows weak, read the Bible. The faith that God can turn your life around, save your husband, heal your body or do anything else starts with the Word of God. Find a promise in God's Word that relates to your situation and cling to it. Here's the next way our faith is strengthened:

3. FEEL YOUR FAITH WITH HOPEFULNESS.

You can either feel your doubts with hopelessness or feel your faith with hopefulness. Listen, God is not just *able* to do the miraculous and the impossible ... He is *willing* to do that in your life and in your world. Jesus turns things around, and I want that realization to infect your view of your life, your family, our church and our world. When doubts prevail we feel hopeless. When faith prevails we feel hopeful. All the evidence we need is here on the pages of Scripture. God can turn bad situations into good situations ... and sometimes so unexpectedly.

Don't give in to the feeling that your life can never change, your child can never change, your career can never change, or your world can never change. Jesus Christ is not dead; He's alive. He speaks, He acts and He cares about the people and circumstances that are falling short of His will. Jesus is full of surprises. Feel your faith in hopefulness.

4. FLEX YOUR FAITH IN DIFFICULTIES.

Faith is our spiritual muscle, and the first muscle of faith we flex in our difficulties is prayer. That's what Peter did in Acts 9:40. He puts everyone outside and kneels to pray. Prayer shows our absolute confidence that Jesus is alive and can turn things around in this life. And with the answer to his prayer in his heart, Peter turns to that lifeless body and says, "Tabitha, rise." And Jesus steps onto the scene, turns death around, and Tabitha lives.

Do you notice that all of these miracles occurred in the face of difficulties. Saul is threatening believers. Aenaes hasn't walked in eight years. Tabitha is dead. Difficulties ... but when God wants to do something wonderful, He begins with a difficulty. When God wants to do something spectacular, He begins with an impossibility! Every miracle starts there.

What situation are you facing today where you need to start flexing your faith muscles? Start by writing it down on your note sheet. Then flex the muscle of your faith in prayer.