Acts 9:23-43 (NIV) 23 After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. 24 But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall. 25 When 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. 26 But 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. 27 He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. 28 When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

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.”

peace, edification, evangelism, fear of the Lord
Acts 9:31
God arranges times of peace so we can be free to grow and serve.

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.
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.41. Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and began to pray. 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 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.