

Dorcas is Raised Up in Joppa

Text: Acts 9:36-43

Introduction:

Peter is traveling throughout Judea, preaching the Gospel, and he winds up at Lydda, amongst a group of disciples there. And while there, he comes upon a man, named, Aeneas, who was paralyzed and bed ridden for eight years. And in the Name and power of Jesus the Christ, Peter heals the man. And many more, throughout Lydda and all of Sharon, see the man, and turn to the Lord.

This morning, messengers from the coastal town of Joppa (about ten miles west of Lydda), will come to Peter with the sad and painful news, that a beloved disciple of the Lord, named, Tabitha, has died. And so, we will then travel with Peter to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, where the Lord, through Peter, will use Tabitha's death, as a means of glorifying Christ, unto the edification of the saints, and unto the salvation of many more precious souls.

I. Dorcas is Raised Up in Joppa

"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" (vs. 36).

And so, Luke would have us know a little something about this woman, Tabitha (in Aramaic, translated "Dorcas" in Greek), who will be the central focus, of that which happens in our text. Unlike Aeneas, who was just healed at Lydda, we are clearly told that Tabitha was a "disciple" of the Lord. And further more, the fruit of her Christian labors was well known to all. She was a woman, who was "full of good works and charitable deeds which she did." Tabitha's faith was powerfully confirmed by the sacrificial works, she had done in Jesus' Name. She was "*full* of good works and charitable deeds." She constantly offered herself unto the Lord's service, emulating well, the pattern we saw earlier in the Book of Acts, where many disciples had sold their land, and laid the proceeds at the Apostle's feet. And the fact that Tabitha was full of "charitable" deeds, indicates, that she had a peculiar heart for the poor, something very dear and

precious in the sight of God. Clearly, Tabitha had lost enough of her life, in Christ, so that she could continuously learn and meet the needs of the poor.

And so, brethren, see here again the significant fruit of "good works," in the life of the believer. While Tabitha trusted not in her good deeds, as a means of meriting any amount of favor with God, it was natural for her to do good works, in response to God's free grace, given her in Christ! She was able to show her faith by her works. And so, brethren, let us be reminded that while our good works never, ever merit God's favor, they are well pleasing in the sight of God (indeed, a "sweet smelling aroma"), when they are done, in Christ, and out of love, for Christ!

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

And so, this dear and beloved sister in Christ, who was full of benevolence and good works, became sick and died. We are not given any of the specifics of the illness, as the relevance here, is not on the nature of the illness, but on the fact that she died because of it. And in the immediate sense, we are reminded here, that the people of God; indeed, faithful and beloved saints, who are very active in serving the body, do suffer from illnesses, and that, even unto death. There is no sin, of which this illness was a direct consequence. Rather, it was simply the will of God that this beloved sister would suffer and die, at this time. And while, she will be healed for a time, the suffering was still real, and she will ultimately die in the future. Suffering and death are realities for all people, and it would do us best, if by the grace of God, we can glorify Christ in and by our sufferings and our death, brethren.

As was customary, Tabitha's corpse was washed, and prepped for burial. And they laid her in an upper room, perhaps to allow time for viewing (as we do), but also to grant Peter the opportunity to see her, should God be pleased to bring this beloved and most useful saint back, to serve Christ's church for additional time, as it seems that her life had been cut short. Needless to say, they believed that such a miracle could happen, which is why they sent for Peter. [Note again, at least, even a limitation on accessing such miraculous power...could nobody in Joppa heal Tabitha, when she was ill? Where are all the faith healers? Not one in Joppa???]

"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" (vs. 38).

Recognizing that Peter was in Lydda (about 10 miles away), they send for him, and urge him to come quickly to them. Clearly, they had hoped that Peter might be able to do something about the now deceased Tabitha. [Note, God's providence and perfect timing. All of this is ordained by God, for His glory. Tabitha dies, when Peter is not too far away. And God will bring his Apostle to Joppa, so as to manifest the glory of Christ, in the raising up of Tabitha]

"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" (vs. 39).

Peter goes with the messengers, and enters the upper room, where the body of Dorcas lay. And interestingly enough, a group of widows stood there with Peter, weeping. For, they who had benefitted so greatly from her charitable deeds, came to weep for her. And as they stood there, they reminisced about Dorcas's faithful labors, holding up various articles of clothing, which she had made for them. Indeed, the fruit of Dorcas's labor came forth! The evidence of her generous deeds of service unto the kingdom was present, all around. And now, those who had been so helped and blessed by her, wept, as they pondered her acts of kindness and compassion. For, those who had been so helped by her in life, could do nothing for Dorcas, at her death.

And brethren, consider this scene for a moment, and ask yourself this question, "Would there be any lowly widows or poor, at your funeral?" You see, the world prides itself in securing popularity and fame, so as to be worshiped at its death. They want to be remembered as that person of great talent or wealth or popularity or influence. But, who would wish to have a group of widows, weeping near their lifeless body? And yet, there is more true love set in the atmosphere of this lowly scene (indeed, angels are present!), than ever there was, in the large, richly decorated, luxurious burial parlors of the rich and famous. Let us covet a death like Dorcas, and be satisfied to have faithfully helped and served Christ's church, far over and above the deaths of those, whose successes are bound solely to this world. Let us be recognized at our deaths, for our giving acts, of faithfulness to Christ, and not by how much we gained and prospered in this world.

"But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed" (vs. 40a). Peter then puts everyone out of the room, not unlike he saw his Lord do, when He raised Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:40). Only, in Peter's case, there was a unique uncertainty as to his knowledge of the will

of God here. And so, he puts everyone out of the room, that he might seek the Lord, in fervent prayer. Peter kneels down and prays. And in this sense, he emulates Elijah, who raised the widows son (in 1 Kings 17:17-24), and Elisha, who raised the Shunammite's son (in 2 Kings 4:32-37). It is indeed, interesting to see the great humility expressed by each of these men, as they called upon God, to do what no man could ever do.

"And turning to the body he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up" (vs. 40b).

Indeed, the Lord heard Peter's prayer, and having the assurance of His will in the matter, Peter could call upon Tabitha to arise. And the Christ, who is the "resurrection and the life"; the very Author of life itself, restored her spirit within her, and she opened her eyes. And seeing Peter, she sat up. The widow of Elijah's day, was given her son back, and the widows of Dorcas's day, were given Dorcas back.

"Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up..." (like he saw his Lord do to his mother-in-law, in Mark 1:31). "...and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive" (vs. 41).

Much to the joy and edification of the church/saints, and to the great delight of the widows, Tabitha/Dorcas, was presented to them, alive! And what were their thoughts of the risen Christ, during those moments? Was it not the will of God, to uniquely present His glory to the people of Joppa, in this way? [Consider, when Lazarus was raised from the dead, by our Lord]

And brethren, what certainty does this give us, regarding the promised resurrection to come, to all of us, who have cast our lives and hope on Christ? From the world's standpoint, Tabitha had wasted much of her life, living for her God and for others. She had gifts. She could have perhaps made a better living for herself. But instead, she gave over her time, to serving widows. She gave up her life, didn't she...having invested in another? And the Lord Jesus promises that those who do so; that those who "lose this life," will find true, abundant life in Him. And here, we have a glorious picture of that promise being fulfilled. Dorcas's life was invested in the resurrection, unto the heavenly life in Christ. And here, the power of Christ to do as He promises, and the glorious foreshadowing of the reality itself, is pictured in Dorcas's being raised up! Indeed, taking up our crosses here, and following Christ to Golgotha, has its glorious end in glory, and in the resurrection of the saints! [Contrast with "building bigger barns"]

here...etc]. The message here, is clear, brethren. Let it sink in, and let it affect your course, for the few short days, we have left in this world!

"And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord" (vs. 42). Indeed, the sign had served its purpose for the saints, and for many unbelievers. For, the Word of God was authenticated by the sign, and once again, many came to believe on the Lord! And, all in all, Christ was building His church, and the gates of hell could not prevail against it!

"So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner" (vs. 43).

And from here, Peter will receive a vision, which will prepare him to travel north to Caesarea, where he will preach the Gospel to a gentile, named, "Cornelius."

Amen!!!