

**Acts 9: 36-43; “Tabitha’s Good Works Rewarded”, Sermon # 44 in the series –  
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on  
June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017, in the Morning Worship Service.**

The name Tabitha is a beautiful name. In the Chaldee, the Greek, and the Aramaic languages it signifies – “a gazelle”. The Preachers Homiletic Commentary says – “The gazelle, or antelope of Judah, is celebrated for its slender and agreeable form, its graceful motions, its fiery and beautiful eyes, and was not infrequently employed by Hebrews and other Orientals as a type of female loveliness.” (end of quote) Truly this Tabitha, who we are studying, was a beautiful person in the best sense of that word. This name of Tabitha, or Dorcas (the Greek word for a gazelle), was very appropriately given to her, for this Christian lady had a particularly beautiful Christian character. I want you to look with me this morning at the manifold glory of what it means to be a Christian disciple. It does not simply consist in being doctrinally discerning, or having all knowledge, although that is a highly important component in living your Christian life to the glory of God. But there is also a pure and holy beauty which is set forth in the Christian disciple engaging in good works. Such works, this dear Christian woman went about doing.

And so, we want to draw some very important truths from the life of this dear disciple of Christ; for dear she was to many, and dear she was to God. We want to learn from her life, in order that our lives might be changed to become more like hers; so that we will be engaging in good works, and so that God will be glorified in us, and so that many of the saints and other poor people will be helped. In fact, we want to see how it is that God Himself highly values and rewards the good works of His saints; both in this life, and in the next. 1<sup>st</sup> of all – I want you to see that a disciple of Jesus Christ is called to good works. (verses 36) 2<sup>nd</sup> – A disciple of Jesus Christ will be remembered for their good works by other saints and people that they have helped. (verses 37-39) And 3<sup>rd</sup> – A disciple of Jesus Christ will be remembered by God Himself, and they will be rewarded for all their good works. (verses 40-43)

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – A disciple of Jesus Christ is called to good works.**

“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.” Sometimes in the scriptures you will find a statement like which is found in Acts 11: 24, concerning Barnabas – “For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” His being full of the Holy Spirit and of faith helped him very much to be a man who could encourage and strengthen other brethren in their faith. But I want you to see that this woman Dorcas’ being full of good works showed forth the reality of her faith and love for all the brethren. She was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did because she knew that the Lord had given Himself for her in order that her heart might be purified, so that she could be profitable to the Lord, in service to him, and to other people around her. Turn with me over to Titus chapter 2, verse 11-14.

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” How do I know that I am a Christian? I know that I am a Christian when I have believed in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of my sins; when I realize that I have believed in Him and He has changed my sinful heart so that I deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. Do you deny ungodliness? Or do you affirm ungodliness by not paying much attention to the claims of God upon your life, your time, and the works that you do? Are you full of worldly lusts, passions to be great or rich or powerful or popular? Or, are you able to live soberly and righteously and godly in this present age? Are you

looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, or do you not think about that glorious appearing?

I fear that even many Christian people have misunderstood that phrase – “Looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing”, as though Christ might personally and visibly appear at any time and rapture them up to glory to be with Him. That would be their greatest happiness they think, to escape tribulation, trouble, and trial, and instantly be with their Lord. But this verse is not intending to tell us that Jesus could come at any time. It is not teaching the immanency of the Lord’s return (that the rapture is the next event on the prophetic calendar, and that is what we ought to be looking for at all times). It is stating that a Christian should be looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of Christ as the ultimate realization of what they are laboring for now, while they are still here upon the earth. Paul is trying to tell you, dear Christian, that this is the great object which you are living your life for now; that you are living soberly and righteously in your thoughts and behavior, and that you are living with this great object in view; of doing good works to the glory of God, today. You are looking continuously to see how you can serve Christ, because you want to be about your Father’s business. You are helping the brethren and other people around you now, because you know that when Christ does appear, that you will see the fruit of all of your labors then, and how God has been glorified through your service to Him.

The visible results will be evident on that day and so with it is with great hope and expectation that you look forward to that day. You look forward to day, even though you believe that you may in all likelihood die without ever seeing Christ come back during your lifetime. You labor on and do good works, as looking for Christ’s appearing, because you believe that no Christian will ever miss the rapture of the Church. At least this is what you should believe if you read 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4: 13-18. You will find there that no Christian is going to miss the rapture; the appearing of our great God and Savior. And if you will read Revelation 1: 7 you will find that when He comes, it will not be a secret snatching away of believers alone, but that “every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him.” And so, let us believe and understand that according to the Bible, all of the dead will be raised on that same great and last day. But in terms of our study at this hour, let us remember that our great God and Savior Jesus Christ gave Himself for us, so that He might redeem us from every lawless deed, and God’s great purpose was to purify for Himself His own special people who are zealous for good works. Indeed, it is what we are called to.

Turn with me over to Ephesians chapter 2, verses 4-10. “But God who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together with Christ, and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Now here we see that we are not at all saved from our sins by our own good works, and this includes our perseverance in our faith after we are saved. Salvation is entirely based upon God’s being rich in mercy and because of His great electing love for particular sinners, He saves them. He sets His love upon them, and He singles them out, even when they are dead in their trespasses. A sinner is continually trespassing, crossing the line of what is good and right and true in God’s sight; breaking His holy law, or not keeping it from right motives. A sinner is often trying to justify themselves before God, by putting forth their supposed good works, and trusting or hoping that God will approve of them, and that they would then find favor in God’s sight

through this means. But salvation is entirely of God's mercy (He being rich in mercy) that when that elect sinner was dead in their trespasses, that He came to their heart and made them alive, together with His Son. He raised us up together, spiritually speaking, and made us sit together in the heavenly places. In other words, Christ has you upon His heart continually dear believer. He considers you to be sitting right there with Him; enjoying His victory over sin and death, if you have trusted in Him. Your salvation is entirely of grace, it is not of yourself; it is the gift of God, lest you should boast and say – This is what I did to bring myself to Christ; this is what I did so that God would be pleased with me; this is what I am doing to keep myself in the faith and to be faithful to you God, so that I can be forgiven and go to heaven. No, No, No, none of that is true. Salvation is of grace through faith and it is most certainly not of yourself.

But look at what you are called to dear Christian in verse 10 – You were born again, you were created anew in your heart by the Holy Spirit's working; you were created in Christ Jesus for good works. And these good works are not those which have simply proceeded from your own thoughts and desires in the matter; they are works which God has prepared beforehand that you should walk in them. Oh, how holy and wise and wonderful a God we have, that He should tell us this truth. Any good work that you do for God after your conversion to Christ, God has prepared for you to do it. He has appointed these good works for you to do; and He gives you grace to be able to walk in these good works which He has prepared. Do you see, dear Christian, how God has taken your whole life into His consideration; that He knows all of your good works beforehand, and He will see to it that by His good grace, you will walk in them. He will be the One who by His good Spirit will lead you into whatever future usefulness to Himself that will take place. This is a matter for your prayers and not for your anxiety.

Ask yourself – What has the Lord gifted me with? What has He given me the ability to do for Him? How can I pursue doing these good works which He has prepared for me to do? I would suggest to you that this lady Dorcas is a good example for us. She knew where to start and how to expand her own personal ministry of good works. She was good at making tunics and garments and she had the love of Christ constraining her in her heart to help the poor. That is where she started, and she built off of all the grace and natural and spiritual ability and giftedness that the Lord had given to her. Perhaps, dear Christian you need to consider this. Am I building off of all of the grace and natural and spiritual ability that God has given to me? That is where all of your reward from Christ will be found. And this is what you are called to.

**But 2<sup>nd</sup> – A disciple of Jesus Christ will be remembered for their good works by other saints and people that they have helped.**

Verse 39 – “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.” As we read these words, we should understand that Dorcas truly had persevered in her good works, during her life's ministry, and many people had benefitted greatly by what she had done. All of these widows that she had helped clearly remembered what she had done, and they were all there that day; standing there with Peter and weeping as they showed him what she had done. Why were they so affected by Dorcas' death? Did they really believe that Peter could bring her back again? Well, they certainly did believe that with God all things were possible. And hadn't Peter's Master, the Lord Jesus, raised a number of people from the dead? Perhaps some of them thought that way. But I rather think that the reason that there was this great pouring out of emotion by these widows and others, was because they had seen, and had come to know, the love that Tabitha had for them, through the kindnesses that she had shown them.

They wept because she, the one who had done these good works, would no longer be able to do them. She was a valued laborer for Christ, and the gospel. And she had now left them for glory, and was no more to be with them again on this earth. And her loss, they believed, could

not be made up. They thought that they could not possibly make up for her loss, by simply trying to work harder at good works themselves. She had done so much good for all of them, they did not feel that they would be able to make up the difference themselves. There would be a tremendous hole in the women's ministry in that area. Let us understand that some Christian people are very hard to replace, once they have died and gone to heaven. And this is why you and I should value them highly for their work, while they live. This lady was one of those people who would be tremendously missed and very hard to replace.

Daniel Whedon, the commentator says concerning these widows who were weeping – “There were many widows, as if some war or desolation had slain many husbands”. “The Gazelle,” he says, referring to Tabitha, “seems to have been unmarried, for no husband weeps for her or is named; she seems to have been not poor, as she was not compelled to be industrious for her own sake.” “But if wealthy, she was neither too indolent to work, nor too proud to work for the poor.” “The coats and garments, may some of them, have been upon the persons showing these, others laid up for bestowal.” I think that we should take notice of the fact that this massive number of good works that she did was accomplished by her, as individual acts of faith. Turn with me over to the book of James, chapter 2, verses 14-18. “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” “Can that faith save him?” “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?’” “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead.” “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’” “Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” So this is where we need to begin, when we want to show forth the fact that we have faith in Christ, and have been saved. We start to do good works. This is what Tabitha did.

It was because she had faith that she said – I will hard work at making these garments that I can give to people in need. She did not say: I cannot do much, so I will not do anything. She said – I may only be able to make one garment at a time, but if I persevere in my work, the number of the garments made, and the good that I can do, will be multiplied. And she was right about that. One garment at a time, she was giving them away without charge. And no doubt she prayed as she labored, that making these garments would be a witness to her Lord and the truth of His word. Was it not the Lord, who had by His righteous work saved her? Was it not her Lord who had woven a garment of His own righteousness which He had spiritually clothed her with? She would do the same on a much smaller level for needy people, and contribute to His fame, and preach His gospel by her works.

That was the secret of her success. She was not working so much for herself, as she was for the Lord. She was laboring so that His cause and kingdom might go forward; one garment, and one act of kindness, at a time. And so, the good effects of her ministry were multiplied by God Himself. The same will happen for you, dear Christian, if you will learn to live by faith and labor by faith, for Him. If we say that we have faith and do not do good works, it shows that there really has not been a change in us; there has not really been this glorious work of regeneration done in our heart by the Holy Spirit. A good tree will bring forth good fruit, and part of that good fruit will be good works.

Look with me over at Matthew 5, verses 13-16 – “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned?” “It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” “You are the light of the world.” “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.” “Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.” “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Now I hope that you can understand here, what it, how it is that your works will be remembered by men. It is if your light is shining before them so that they will see your good works. Just mere good wishes and good intentions towards them

will not glorify God. Your light (your true understanding of His word, and the way of salvation) must really shine forth from you in this particular way, if Jesus is to be preached to them, and the truth of the gospel be understood. What kind of shining of the light is Jesus talking about? He is talking about letting your light shine in such a way that they see your good works, and then they will praise your Father in heaven, that you have truly understood the truth of what God has called you to; and that you have done these good deeds which confirm it to them.

The preaching of the gospel is not only done by speaking words of truth, it is also set forth very plainly in the good works which are done in Jesus name. Indeed they are meant to confirm the words of the gospel spoken to those who are being ministered to. These works come from a right understanding of the words that have first been spoken to you, by the Lord Jesus Himself in His word. You have correctly understood the truth of the gospel, and what Jesus has done for you. You were a sinner who needed a Savior, but you may not have known that you needed Him. But Jesus did something of infinite value for you; He lived in perfect obedience to God on your behalf; He suffered the punishment of the cross, on your behalf. And His actions were the fulfillment of God's word, and thus He sealed the truth of God's word with His blood, for you, the sinner. Therefore, if you will faithfully represent Him to others, you will also freely do good works, so that the people whom you do them for, can see your light, and turn to the Lord and seek His grace. I like what our 1689 Confession of Faith says in Chapter 16 – "Of Good Works". It says – "These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith; and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the Gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that having their fruit unto holiness they may have the end eternal life."

**3<sup>rd</sup> – A disciple of Jesus Christ will be remembered by God Himself, and they will be rewarded for all their good works.**

That is what happened here in this particular case. God, on the basis of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, remembered Tabitha, and He rewarded the good works of this dear lady, and as an act of His sheer mercy and His steadfast love to her, and to these particular people. He raised her from the dead. Peter, who was acting as the representative of Christ, was given the privilege of showing them, and us, that there will be a reward for the work of the righteous in the day when Christ returns, and raises all of the righteous dead. In this work of resurrection performed by Peter, in the power of Jesus' name, we see the joyful prelude of what will come to every faithful Christian on the day in which Jesus returns. It says in verse 39 – "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." "But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed." "And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." "And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up." "Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive." "And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord."

This miracle should remind us of one of the works of resurrection which was done by the Lord Jesus in the days of His earthly ministry. The raising of Jairus' daughter was a miracle performed in a very similar fashion. But in allowing Peter to perform this particular miracle, the Lord Jesus was fulfilling His word to Peter and the other apostles in John 14: 12 – "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father." This was one of those "greater works" because of the results which took place after Peter raised her. It says, "It became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord." When Jesus performed the miracle of raising Jairus' daughter, there was not a similar result; partially because he told the parents to

tell no one. But this particular miracle that we are studying today shows us in typical form that on the day of the resurrection, there will be a reward for the righteous. The Lord arranged all of the circumstances that would show everyone there that day, that He was rewarding her for her good works; He would raise her from the dead, through Peter's instrumentality, and He would present her alive to all of the people who did not think that they could accept her untimely death.

The fact that Peter was so close to Joppa when this lady died, the fact that the brethren beseeched him not to delay to come over to them, the fact that she was so greatly loved by those who knew her, and had been helped by her; all of this, should show us that God's providential care and kindness was already at work even before the miracle was performed. Our Lord Jesus preparing the way for this great work of raising her from the dead. Even so, our Lord has gone before us into heaven, and He is preparing a place for us. He is preparing for that time when He shall glorify us in our bodies. He is preparing all of the good things that He will do for all of His dear people on the Day when He raises them from the dead.

Are you looking forward to that day? Are you laboring in light of that coming day? The fact that Christ will reward all the righteous according to their works on the last Day is a part of His having completed the work of redemption for us. Since He has accomplished everything necessary for our salvation, He can also reward His people according to what they have done for Him; particularly their good works. Our Confession of Faith, Chapter 16, Paragraph 6 says – "Yet notwithstanding the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in Him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unreprouvable in God's sight, but that He, looking upon them in His Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections."

Therefore, beloved brethren, I want to exhort you to be looking forward to the Day when Christ will return. And one of the greatest reasons that you should be looking forward to it, is that His reward will be with Him. If anyone will build upon the foundation of Christ with the good materials of good doctrine and good works, their work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. The Day will come and Christ will raise us from the dead, and He will present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. We will shout aloud to God our Savior – We praise You because You alone are wise! To You alone belongs all glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever! Amen. Let us pray, having heard this message to be more like Tabitha, beautiful in character that we might be of help to many. Pray that you might be glorifying to God in the way that you live your life. Let it be full of good works and charitable deeds that you will do, for Christ.