

Lesson Text

Acts 9:36-43 (NIV)

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda 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!”

³⁹ Peter 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.

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. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Today’s Lesson Aims

- **Learning Facts:** To know that nothing is impossible for God!
- **Biblical Principle:** To recognize that faith is the foundation of prayer.
- **Daily Application:** Live a life of faith by putting others first!

Introduction

Call the Expert

Many court cases rely on the testimony of expert witnesses. Because of their education, training, skill, and/or experience, these individuals provide specialized knowledge in a particular subject area. For example, a forensic psychologist may be called to discuss a murder suspect’s mental state, a handwriting expert may testify in a forgery case, or a medical expert may offer testimony in a malpractice case.

Such experts are sometimes referred to as “hired guns” or “go-to guys.” These monikers are descriptive of their roles: they are the people to whom one turns in times of legal trouble. Peter was a go-to guy of a different sort in the first-century church—an expert who could address an issue of life and death.

Power Hour
Lesson
Summary for
February 18,
2018

**“Faithful
Disciples”**

Lesson Text:
Acts 9:36-43

Background
Scripture: Acts
9:1-19, 36-43

Devotional
Reading:
1 Peter 1:3-9;
1 Peter 4:7-11

Lesson Background

Time: about A.D. 35

Place: Joppa

Today's lesson takes place in the first decade of the church, sometime in the A.D. 30s. The death of Stephen (Acts 7) caused a scattering of Jerusalem church members (8:1). One of them, Philip, traveled to Samaria where he had success in preaching the gospel (8:5-8, 12). The 12 apostles were still in Jerusalem, and of those Peter and John made the trip to Samaria to assist Philip and confirm his work (8:14). There Peter had a dramatic encounter with a sorcerer named Simon, a man who attempted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit (8:18, 19). After rebuking Simon, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching in villages along the way (8:25).

Sometime after this, Peter went to Lydda, a village about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem, to visit believers (Acts 9:32). There he healed a paralytic named Aeneas, causing many in the village and others nearby to turn to the Lord (9:33-35).

In today's lesson, Peter ended up in the seaside city of Joppa (modern Jaffa), 12 miles to the northwest of Lydda. Joppa was a walled seaport city built on a small ridge that jutted into the Mediterranean Sea. Its tiny harbor was the closest natural anchorage to Jerusalem, causing the city to become a bustling port by the time of Solomon (see 2 Chronicles 2:16). Allotted to the tribe of Dan (Joshua 19:40, 46), Joppa was the seaport to which Jonah fled to hire passage to a distant place in his attempt to escape God's call to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 1:3). Joppa was a Jewish city, and it had an established church of Christians of Jewish background. This thriving seaport is the setting for today's lesson.

Asking the Impossible: Acts 9:36-38

1. Who was Dorcas and what impact did she make on her community? (Acts: 9:36)

The term disciple is common in the New Testament as a designation for a follower of Jesus, occurring dozens of times (examples: Acts 9:10; 16:1; 21:16). The names by which this certain disciple is known are noted at the outset of the account. Tabitha is the Hebrew or Aramaic version of her name; in Greek it is Dorcas. Both refer to the small, graceful antelope known as the gazelle. The two names are used interchangeably in the account (see Acts 9:39, 40), indicating she is known to answer to both (this lesson will use the name Dorcas).

Dorcas has standing within the Joppa church because of her acts of compassion. Her reputation may even be established among unbelievers. She both does good deeds and provides relief for the poor in various ways.

Power Hour
Lesson
Summary for
February 18,
2018

"Faithful Disciples"

Lesson Text:
Acts 9:36-43

Background
Scripture: Acts
9:1-19, 36-43

Devotional
Reading:
1 Peter 1:3-9;
1 Peter 4:7-11

It seemed so tragic that a useful and beloved saint like Dorcas (Tabitha=gazelle) should die when she was so greatly needed by the church. This often happens in local churches and it is a hard blow to take.

What Do You Think?

- What one thing can you do this week to add to a godly reputation?

2. How did Dorcas' friends prepare for her burial? (Acts 9:37)

The tragic death of Dorcas begins with little detail or emotion. (The emotion comes later.) Her death from an illness seems to have been a quick process, not that of a lingering condition.

After Dorcas dies, her female friends do the normal things in preparation for burial. Probably still in her own home, her body is washed and laid out in an upstairs room. If this indicates a delay in burial, it may be because her sudden death has not allowed time to prepare a tomb. On the other hand, it may be that her friends hesitate to put the body in a grave if they anticipate she might live again. Do we see evidence of extremely bold faith?

3. How did the disciples respond when they learned of Peter's presence in Lydda? (Acts 9:38)

The news of Peter's presence in Lydda, 12 miles away, catches the attention of the congregation in Joppa (see the Lesson Background). With a 24-mile round trip ahead of them and time being of the essence, the congregation dispatched two men to Lydda asking Peter to come quickly.

But wait—why the hurry? Dorcas is already dead! Do the Christians in Joppa want Peter to come quickly to perform a resurrection before a certain amount of time passes? Do they want him to come quickly so he can console the grieving before a burial must take place? Neither is stated. The only thing that seems beyond doubt is that time is of the essence for whatever Peter is expected to do.

The believers in Joppa heard that Peter was in the area, and they sent for him immediately. There is no record in Acts that any of the Apostles had raised the dead, so their sending for Peter was an evidence of their faith in the power of the risen Christ. When our Lord ministered on earth, He raised the dead; so why would He not be able to raise the dead from His exalted throne in glory?

Witnessing the Incredible: Acts 9:39-43

4. How did Peter respond to the men from Joppa's request? (Acts 9:39a)

Upon hearing the news from the two men, Peter quickly removed himself from Lydda and arrived in Joppa with the two men.

Being approximately 12 miles away, speed is probably a walking rate of three miles per hour with rest stops minimized. That means that the two men traveled four hours to Lydda and four hours back to Joppa. Thus it is entirely possible that Peter is in the upper chamber within 8 hours of the death.

We usually think of the Apostles as leaders who told other people what to do, but often the people commanded them! (For Peter's "philosophy of ministry" read 1 Peter 5.) Peter was a leader who served the people and was ready to respond to their call. Peter had the power to heal, and he used the power to glorify God and help people, not to promote himself (Acts 9:32-35).

5. What did Peter find when he was taken upstairs to the room? (Acts 9:39b)

When Peter arrived in the upper room where Dorcas lay in state, he found a group of weeping widows who had been helped by her ministry. Keep in mind that there was no "government aid" in those days for either widows or orphans, and needy people had to depend on their "network" for assistance.

With no explanatory words recorded, the grief-stricken women show Peter the clothes made for them by Dorcas. The items of clothing are visual evidence of Dorcas' "doing good and helping the poor" (Acts 9:36b, above). Most widows of the time are in a precarious financial position as evidenced by their numerous mentions in the Bible in contexts of vulnerability and need (examples: Acts 6:1; James 1:27).

What Do You Think?

- In what ways can you help your church improve its grief support ministry?

6. What was Peter's immediate course of action upon arrival? (Acts 9:40a)

Peter seems to spend little if any time comforting the widows. Instead, he seems to use Jesus' procedure in the raising of Jairus's daughter in Mark 5:35-43 as something of a model. Jesus established an atmosphere of semi-privacy and relative quiet (5:37, 40); Peter establishes complete privacy ("sent them all out"), and the concurrent reduction in noise level will help him focus. He knows he must pray fervently with faith, for he has no personal power or healing skills that will help Dorcas (compare Acts 3:12).

After the room is cleared, Peter assumes a posture suitable for fervent prayer: on his knees.

What Do You Think?

- How do you navigate the tension between expecting God to intervene and realizing that He might not?

7. What command did Peter issue to Dorcas after his prayer? (Acts 9:40b, 40c, 41)

After praying to God, it is time to talk directly to Dorcas, also known as Tabitha (Acts 9:36, above). Peter, as he had seen his Master do before he raised Jairus' daughter from her deathbed; then uttered a short sentence differing only in one letter from the word of Jesus to Jairus' daughter. Whereas Jesus had said "Talitha cumi (arise)" (Mark 5:41), Peter now said "Tabitha, arise". The result of the mighty power of the Spirit of God in Peter was that Tabitha opened her eyes, and sat up.

The resurrections of Jairus's daughter and Dorcas both involve taking the person by the hand and immediate physical movement on the part of the resurrected (compare Mark 5:41, 42; Luke 8:54, 55). Peter assists Dorcas in standing up. For a moment, it is just the two of them in the room. We easily imagine them both excitedly speechless at what has just happened. Peter quickly presents her alive to those waiting outside. Dorcas lives! The tears of the widows probably continue, but now they are tears of joy.

The account of Peter's raising of Dorcas was emphatically the power of God, for the dead person certainly could not exercise faith.

8. How did Dorcas' rising from death affect the surrounding area of Joppa? (Acts 9:42, 43)

Due to this miracle, many throughout the region round about Joppa believed in the Lord! God uses signs and wonders in the book of Acts to bring people to faith—the faith that leads to eternal life (see Acts 2:43; 8:6; 14:3; 15:12). Without this intended result, there wouldn't be any lasting point in performing resurrections.

Peter had a fruitful ministry there, being accommodated by the hospitality of one Simon a tanner. It is significant that Peter stayed in the home of a tanner, because tanners (craftsmen who tans skins and hides) were considered "unclean" by the Jewish rabbis (see Lev. 11:35-40). God was moving Peter a step at a time from Jewish legalism into the freedom of His wonderful grace.

Throughout Peter's ministry, he claimed no honor for himself. He knew that he was Christ's servant, willing to go where he was called and giving all the glory to God. On an earlier occasion he specifically disavowed having healing power of his own (3:12-16); Paul and Barnabas will do likewise later (14:11-18). Bad things happen when people seek glory that is not theirs to have (12:21-23; 13:11).

As with the healing of Aeneas, the raising of Dorcas attracted great attention and resulted in many people trusting Jesus Christ. However, Peter took the opportunity to ground these new believers in the truth of the Word, for faith built on miracles alone is not substantial.

What Do You Think?

- What can your church do to capture the attention of the community for God's glory?

Points To Ponder

- Your good works do not go unnoticed. (Acts 9:36)
- God watches our faith in trying times! (vs. 37, 38)
- Always be ready to answer God's call. (v. 39)
- Always begin every task with prayer. (v. 40a)
- The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (vs. 40b-41; James 5:16)
- The humble works of a true disciple draws others to Christ. (Acts 9:42, 43)

Conclusion

Living Legacies

Here's a one-question test: What legacy of Dorcas remained after she died? If you answered "clothing she made for widows," we invite you to try again! Dorcas's legacy was more than clothing. When she died, her legacy was grateful people who had been objects of her kindness and for whom she had modeled the love of Christ.

Each widow was a living legacy. She had taught them by her life how to care for others less fortunate than themselves. She had given them an example to cherish. Peter brought Dorcas back from death, but eventually she died again. When that happened, her legacy was no doubt similar if not enhanced.

What sort of legacy will you leave? Perhaps you are thinking mainly in terms of money you have designated in your will for a Christian cause or organization. Before trying to build your entire legacy that way, consider two points: (1) that's not what Dorcas did, and (2) "The man who leaves money to charity in his will is only giving away what no longer belongs to him." The quote is from Voltaire; although he was certainly no friend of Christianity, there is some wisdom in his observation.

Our primary legacies will be the people we are influencing now for Christ, people who will remain to do the work of God's kingdom after we are dead and gone. How will people remember you? Are you a workaholic who never has time for others, or are you someone who can always be counted on to stop and help? Will your memory be of one who loved money the most or who loved people the most? Are you a self-giving parent, or do you model "me first" to your children? Most importantly, will you leave behind a legacy of faith?

Legacy of Evil

Domitian became Emperor of Rome in A.D. 81. His tendency was to grab more and more power for himself. His pretentious ways were seen clearly when he required visitors to his royal court to address him as “My Lord and God Domitian.” Eventually, the Roman Senate could stand no more, and Domitian was assassinated. In a remarkable move, the Senate then voted a damnatio memoriae (condemnation of memory) against Domitian. His legacy became that of a hated tyrant.

May we leave legacies like Dorcas rather than Domitian!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, forgive us for not attending to the work of Your kingdom as You desire. Remind us that the legacy we leave will be that of people we have served in the name of Christ. Indeed, it is in His name (Jesus) we pray and no other. Amen.

Thought To Remember

- Let us build our living legacies as we answer the calls of those in crisis.

Anticipating The Next Lesson: Next week’s lesson is **“The Good Fight of Faith”** where we learn that our faith should be centered around God. Study 1 Timothy 6:11-21.

Power Hour
Lesson
Summary for
February 18,
2018

**“Faithful
Disciples”**

Lesson Text:
Acts 9:36-43

Background
Scripture: Acts
9:1-19, 36-43

Devotional
Reading:
1 Peter 1:3-9;
1 Peter 4:7-11