

Bible Study 34 – Acts 9:36-43 – Tabitha Arise!

Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. 37 In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 38 Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, “Please come to us without delay.” 39 So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. 40 But Peter put them all outside, 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. 41 And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. 42 And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner (Acts 9:36-43).

1. Firstly, we read of a disciple in Joppa named Tabitha: Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity.

a) Tabitha was a Christian; a follower of Christ and a member of the church in Joppa... It is evident by the description and reaction of fellow Christians to her death that she was highly thought of

b) Tabitha’s name means Dorcas which translated into English means - gazelle... and maybe we are being taught that she was elegant in her spirit, gracious, generous, gentle...

c) Tabitha was a devoted and dutiful, a loyal and loving Christian... Faithful and a fine witness to the faith...

2. Tabitha had succumbed to illness and died: 37 In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.

a) ‘In those days’ implies that Tabitha had presently fallen ill and unexpectedly died... A reminder that we flourish like the flowers of the field and are just as fragile...

b) Tabitha has been lovingly prepared for burial... Even after death the Bible teaches us about the dignity of human body and hence there follows due care and ceremony...

c) Tabitha was presented for mourners – ‘laid in the upper room’ where family and friends could pay their last respects.... That was the norm in our own country until fairly recent times...

3. Tabitha’s fellow disciples summon Peter without delay who finds her prepared for final duties: Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, “Please come to us without delay.” So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.

a) Christians from Joppa immediately travel to nearby Lydda to plead with Peter to return with them in haste... Had these believers set out before Tabitha had died hoping that God would restore her to health through Peter’s intervention? Had Tabitha already died as is implied in the text and therefore were they hoping for a miracle? Or were they desirous to have the apostle come comfort the church and lead a funeral service as a fitting tribute to a woman that was so highly regarded in the church at Joppa?

b) Peter responds positively and is led to Tabitha’s remains. Peter consented and was taken immediately to Tabitha’s body...

c) Peter encounters mourners who present items of clothing that Tabitha had made... Such items were not shrouds but possibly aids for reflection in commemoration and celebration of a life well lived...

4. Tabitha is raised from death though the ministry of Peter: But Peter put them all outside, 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. 41 And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. So, as I said last time, Christ is continuing to work through his apostles to affirm and authenticate their authority and message...

a) Peter put the mourners outside. They would be superfluous in this instance. And possibly the weeping and wailing while natural and appropriate were a distraction to him...

b) Peter prayed. He turned to the Lord. He is powerless, but his God is all-powerful. Here we have an example of impotence crying out to Omnipotence that all the glory and gratitude should redound to the Lord.

c) Peter presents Tabitha alive. Just like the Lord Jesus had called forth and raised Jairus’ daughter, the widow’s son, and Lazarus, so he would raise Tabitha through the instrumentality of the Apostle Peter... So, Peter bid Tabitha arise. He gave her his hand and raised her up. And then presented her to the church. We can but

imagine their amazement and awe, gratitude, and gladness, and resulting praise and prayer...

5. Tabitha's recovery from death brings many to faith in Joppa: And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. 43 And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

a) Unsurprisingly, news of Peter's ministry and Tabitha's recovery spread quickly... God had supernaturally intervened...

b) Understandably, many believed on the Lord Jesus Christ as a result... For Peter took no credit himself but rightly pointed all to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, Healer and Helper...

c) Using the opportunity given, Peter stayed at the home of Simon, the tanner, some days, no doubt to teach the growing church in Joppa and to share the gospel with those who were yet strangers to grace....

Questions

1. In what ways is Tabitha a role model for Christians today?
2. What do those actions of Peter and Tabitha's fellow Christians teach us about our relationship to God and others?
3. How important is prayer in the Christian life and ministry?
4. Should we be ready to take advantage of opportunities and events to share the good news?
5. What place has hospitality in the Christian life and witness?