

Acts 9:36-43

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Day 1

ACTS 9:36-39

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Throughout the story of Scripture, we see people called to witness for God. Here we see this two-fold. On the one hand, Dorcas lived a life full of witness to Him. She was known for the high-quality tunics and clothes she made. While the text doesn't specifically say this, people probably came back to Dorcas not only to buy clothing, but because of how she treated them. Her personality, character, and excellent craftsmanship were all a part of her witness for Christ.

What are some ordinary ways you can display Jesus to others? Does your manner of life lead people to see Christ's presence in you? In other words, does your speech about Jesus match your living for Jesus?

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” (Rom. 10:14-15)

The second witness is Peter, an apostle who is charged with the task of sharing the good news of Jesus with those who do not know him. That is what it means “to be Jesus' witnesses.” Peter's story includes both the messiness of denying the one he is proclaiming and the glory of God's testimony in his life. Peter is not a finished product, all shiny and spotless. No, Peter is human.

Do you feel the temptation to “have it all together” before you share about Jesus? Do you wonder how people could believe your words, the words of a sinner? Take comfort today that God has called you to be one of His disciples. There is grace and forgiveness through a life of repentance and trusting in Jesus. Reflect on your relationships. Who needs to hear this good news—that God saved a sinner like you and wants a relationship with those just like you? Receiving grace, trusting in Jesus, is the only qualification that is needed.

prayer

Lord, thank you for your love for me. Help me to see that your grace abounds and your invitation is to trust you with all things in my life. Lord, may the Holy Spirit be so active in my life that others notice. Give me the courage, strength, humility, and power to share about you. Today I pray for my neighbors, co-workers, family members, friends, and even strangers who do not know you. May my bold witness bring glory to you and life everlasting to those around me. I pray this in the power of Jesus' name. Amen.

Day 2

ACTS 9:36-39

³⁶ 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.

This captivating scene from Acts occurred approximately six years after Jesus's ascension and the Holy Spirit was given to the church. Recall that many Jews from the surrounding regions were gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Harvest at Pentecost. The crowd was "cut to the heart" (Acts 2:54) when they heard Peter preach the gospel. About three thousand people believed and joined the family of God that day!"

Fast forward six years. Peter has the opportunity to participate in this microcosm of God's family in Joppa. Enter Tabitha—a disciple full of good works and acts of charity. The greek word translated "disciple" is *mathetria*, which is related to the more common word for disciple, *mathetes*. *Mathetria*, meaning a (female) disciple, is found only here in the New Testament. This unique description of Tabitha highlights that she was no ordinary woman of service; she was a woman of God acting in loving devotion to Jesus. The gospel had so transformed her that when it came to tangible neighborly love, her life was full, saturated, and lacking nothing (9:36). So great was her impact that the grieving widows met Peter and clutched the clothes she had made them, remembering the warmth of Tabitha's embrace (verse 39).

Has someone impacted you deeply by their love? How has knowing them taught you more about the love of God?

Some of us read about Tabitha and may experience other emotions besides warm familiarity: sadness, longing, guilt, or even jealousy. Because you don't have a Tabitha in your life. Because you fail at being a Tabitha yourself. Because you are jealous of the attention and acceptance that the Tabithas receive. What do you take away from this story? Perhaps you respond by throwing yourself back into the hamster wheel of trying to earn and maintain your spot in God's family by doubling down on acts of service. Corrie ten Boom often spoke of various lessons that the Lord taught her about service in the Christian life. What is so striking about her story is not her triumph as a Holocaust survivor or her career as a renowned writer and speaker, but rather how the abundant grace of God met her time and time again in the midst of her lack. She put it this way: "Trying to do the Lord's work in your own strength is the most confusing, exhausting, and tedious of all work. But when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, then the ministry of Jesus just flows out of you."

How can you devote yourself to the Lord today in loving service? How is God leading you to depend on Him to do the very thing he is calling you to do?

Prayer

Father in heaven, thank you for Tabitha's beautiful example of a life transformed by the gospel of Jesus. Fill me with your Holy Spirit today, that I may be full of good works and acts of charity and share the aroma of Christ's love with my community. Use my meager life to bring glory to your name. Remind us that Tabitha's life is not a measuring stick by which to judge our own lives, but an encouragement to draw upon the same Spirit of Christ dwelling in our own hearts that animated her to sacrificial service. Thank you for the perfect righteousness of Christ that makes even all our inadequate "good works" a true delight to your eyes. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Day 3

ACTS 9:37-39

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.

It is interesting that Luke, the physician/author of Acts, gives us no details on what Tabitha’s illness was or why she died. One would think that some sort of detail would have been in order. Instead, he used just five words to describe what happened to her. Her resurrection makes those factors irrelevant as it does with John’s telling of Lazarus’s resurrection. We don’t know why Lazarus died either. Luke does include some details about Tabitha’s life. We learn she must have been an integral part of a group of widows. She was dearly loved, and the widows deeply grieved for her. Her ministry clearly impacted others and included making clothing for those in need. In other words, she was a fine, upstanding, and well-respected woman. Any church body would be grateful to have her in their membership.

So why did she die? In Lazarus’s case, John tells us that his death happened so God could be glorified (John 11:4). One could probably make the same case here in that the result of Tabitha’s resurrection was that the good news spread and “many believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:42). In the end, the New Testament writers don’t concern themselves all that much with the whys of living and dying. Implicit in their thinking is that God’s in charge and whatever happens is in his sovereign plan. They also knew that central in that sovereignty was his grace. Peter’s prayer for her was not a kind of wishful thinking. It reflected a deep understanding of what God, in his graciousness and mercy, could do. He believed what is stated so well in the Heidelberg Catechism: “I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Last week, my older brother and I visited our father’s grave. He would have been 100 years old on Memorial Day. It looks as if we both will live significantly longer than he did. He was not a particularly good father. But with all his inadequacies, we both knew that God’s grace had touched and changed his life and that fact helped to keep my sister and us in the faith. We aren’t going to get the detailed answers of why things are the way they are, why one lives or dies at specific times and on specific dates. But we do see that God is good and that he cares and acts in our lives. That is enough.

Prayer

Father, may we always see your grace and goodness. Help us to trust all the promises of Scripture that you have acted on behalf of our best interests. Help us not to get hung up on the details but to believe that your plan for us is the best. The big picture for us is shaped by your love. Help us not to ever forget that most important fact.

Day 4

ACTS 9:40-41

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.

Reading the story of Tabitha/Dorcas by itself can inspire us to be Jesus’s hands and feet in the place we live and to be amazed at the mighty works of God. Reading this story in the context of redemption history can bring a fuller understanding.

Where are we on God’s timeline? Luke is continuing the narrative he began in his careful gospel account of Jesus’s birth, life, death, and resurrection. He begins the book of Acts with Jesus instructing the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for “the promise of the Father.” This promise was that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Commonly called the Acts of the Apostles, this book could also be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. Only after Jesus was ascended and seated in authority above every other power could his life be distributed to all believers through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The disciples he trained for three years are now the apostles who will speak and act in his name through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God’s purpose is always that we have life, resurrection life, by believing in Jesus. Dorcas’s submissive life became the location where God could demonstrate the power and meaning of Jesus’s resurrection in a way that caused many to believe in him. And although a resurrection is supernatural, God used Peter in a natural way. He refused to be sensational by leaving on-lookers outside. Peter did not rely on himself, but knelt down and prayed, asking God to work. Then he spoke two simple words, “Tabitha, arise.” She heard and opened her eyes as naturally as we do waking up from sleep. Peter gently and respectfully took her hand and helped her stand before uniting her with her friends.

Resurrection life is a gift to be received. Can you imagine the joy and celebration in this little community in Joppa? We don’t know the rest of Tabitha’s story, but we know she eventually died and was buried. But one day she will hear Jesus call her name, and she will rise to be with him and all who have loved him . . . alive forever!

Prayer

Lord of life, we look forward to meeting your faithful disciple Tabitha some day. We bless you for giving us life through Jesus, and for using us in our ordinary places to be the location where you can speak and act. We see death and sorrow all around. Come, Lord Jesus!

Day 5

ACT :9:42-43

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.

In today's reading, we are shown that the good news is spreading. Many are coming to understand the gospel. The effects of it are rippling across their lives and communities.

It is significant that the person with whom Peter stayed in Joppa was a tanner--someone who worked with animal hides for a living. Typically, Jewish people avoided tanners because associating with them would have made them ritually unclean. Plus it was a messy job. These houses were often on the edge of town because no one wanted to be close to the smell of animal blood permeating the area. Peter was not out for personal gain or comfort in staying with Simon. But perhaps he had found a way to let Simon the tanner, despite his status, help spread the gospel.

And yet even as his stay with Simon may have been signaling that Gentiles were welcomed into the good news, Peter still had more surprises ahead in discovering just how life-changing that was going to be for everyone. In Acts 10, we see Peter is still staying with Simon. God will give Peter a vision and he will send an angel to a Roman centurion, all to further show that the gospel is meant for ALL. After all those events, Acts 10:34 says, "So Peter opened his mouth and said: 'Truly I understand that God shows no partiality.'"

It can be so fascinating to see how words in hymns get changed. It reveals so much theology. One hymn that comes to mind is "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood" by William Cowper. The second verse originally said: *The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day; and there **may I, though** vile as he, wash all my sins away.* Two parts got changed in the printing of our Trinity Hymnal. Here's how we sing it: *The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day; and there **have I, as** vile as he, washed all my sins away.*

Changing *may I . . . wash all my sins away* to *have I . . . washed all my sins away* reinforces that Christ has done the work. Our sins are not counted against us. If we are in Christ, we have not, do not, and will not pay for our sins. So we rejoice that our sins are washed away and in that posture ask for forgiveness and renewal. And that's the story of those in Christ around us as well. That leads us to the second lyric change. . .

The verse begins: *The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day . . .* then goes to either *I . . . though vile as he* or to our Trinity's version of *I . . . as vile as he*. So why the change? What's the difference? The word *though* is used to link two contrasting ideas

or used to show that one fact makes the other fact surprising. So saying *though vile as he* implies that it's surprising that we singers are as vile as a thief on a cross. Well, that's a problem. Sin is vile and it's all the same. And really, no one knows that better than we do ourselves. Which brings us back to the blood . . .

Simon the tanner lived covered in blood. What an amazing symbol of the life of Christ-followers! We, too, are covered in blood—the blood of Jesus that takes the messiness of our lives and somehow makes it clean. Yes, our sins do have consequences in our lives and do affect others. But we can plead the blood of Christ and ask to bear the fruit of his forgiveness that it might ripple out to those around us.

prayer

Dear Father, Peter knew the gospel was for all; he had been through Pentecost; he was staying with a tanner! But he had also been on the beach when Jesus asked him three times if he loved him. Peter knew the gospel was for him too. Yet you continued to reveal to him more and more deeply what that meant. Do the same for us, we pray. Show us how we are both as vile as and as forgiven as that thief on the cross with you. Thank you for including Simon the tanner in this amazing gospel account. Amen.

*Dear dying Lamb, your precious blood
shall never lose its pow'r,
till all the ransomed church of God
be saved, to sin no more:
be saved, to sin no more,
be saved, to sin no more;
till all the ransomed church of God
be saved to sin no more.*