

Sunday, September 28, 2025 | Martyrs

Week 7 | Acts 9:32-43 | "Dorcas"

READ: Acts 9:32-43 (ESV)

³² Now, as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. ³⁴ And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. ³⁵ And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

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. 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.

Today's passage is often overlooked. This is because the portion of Scripture preceding it is Saul's conversion, and the section that follows is the account of Peter's vision, where the Lord reveals how the gospel must be taken to the Gentiles. Those two unforgettable moments in church history understandably outshine the events that are sandwiched in between.

However, for careful students of the Bible, every passage contains some divine truths that we can glean. And while today's portion may not be the most spectacular, it nevertheless has much to teach us. Through the examples of Peter and Dorcas, we'll see how our faith ought to impact our lifestyle.

Vs. 32 – Luke shifts the focus of the narrative from Paul to "Peter," who was going "here and there among them all," likely a reference to "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria" (vs. 31). This man who was a simple fisherman is now an itinerate preacher, trying to fulfill the Great Commission. Professions of faith are great, and baptisms are even greater, but what's even better is that the church was hard at work discipling the new believers. It isn't

enough to join the church; the duty of Christians is now to grow in the knowledge of and devotion to the Lord. Peter traveled near and far to build up this now-expanding and fledgling church.

Eventually, Luke made his way “to the saints who lived at Lydda.” Lydda, also known as Lod, was a coastal town located on the plains of Palestine, approximately 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem and 10 miles south of Tel Aviv. According to the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, “It had a large market and was noted for the raising of cattle; textile, dyeing, and pottery industries flourished there; it was the seat of a sanhedrin, and famous talmudic scholars taught there.”¹

Vs. 33 – Though there was much to tell, Luke the Historian does not linger long in Lydda. The only thing he’s led by the Holy Spirit to record is of an event involving “a man named Aeneas.” Aeneas was “bedridden” because of some kind of paralysis. Unlike the lame man who had been healed outside the Temple gates (cf. Ac. 3:2), this man **hadn’t** been paralyzed his entire life but had suffered for “eight years.”

Vs. 34 – Luke doesn’t tell us how Peter “found” this man or why he picked him. All we’re told is that Peter addresses the man by name and says, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.” Notice that Peter does not heal the man in his own name, nor does he take credit for the healing. Instead, it is “Jesus Christ” who “heals.” Luke says, “Immediately he rose.”

Vs. 35 – Luke says, “And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw” Aeneas. Sharon is likely a reference to the Plain of Sharon, a region extending west from Lydda to Joppa on the Mediterranean Coast and north to Caesarea. This one healing had such an impact that the whole region “turned to the Lord.”

Vs. 36 – Luke moves now to the coastal city, “Joppa,” which was in the same region as Lydda and Sharon. In this town, there was a woman named “Tabitha.” This was an Aramaic name meaning “gazelle.” But considering Luke was writing to a Greek, he gives here the Greek name, ‘Dorcas,’ which, like its Aramaic counterpart, meant gazelle.²

But more important than knowing her name is knowing that she was “a disciple” of Jesus. And this was evident because, Luke says, she was “full [emphasis] of good works and acts of charity.” Here was a Christian woman who practiced what she preached. She wasn’t a Christ-follower in name only, but one whose life was filled with “good works” and “acts of charity.”

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Lod,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1345–1346.

² DBAG (2000), 258.

She was the kind of woman Paul referred to in **1 Tim. 2:9-10**, when he said, “Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.” While some women were distracted by their appearance and apparel, Tabitha was preoccupied with godliness and philanthropy.

Vs. 37-38 – Sadly, Tabitha “became ill and died.” A godly life does not mean a godly person will not become sick or die. Believers are not exempt from the ravages of this fallen world. Cancer bothers the Christian and non-Christian alike.

The other believers, after they “washed her,” did not immediately bury her, as was the custom at the time (cf. 5:6, 10), but put her “in an upper room.” This is not a proof text to support the practice of **sitting up with the dead**, wherein mourners would hold a vigil for the deceased. They did this because “Lydda was near Joppa.” And who was in Lydda? Peter. So the disciples in Joppa leave Tabitha unburied because they thought that Peter might be able to raise her from the dead. And so, these Joppa Christians “sent two men to him, urging him, ‘Please come to us without delay.’”

Vs. 39 – “So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room.” It appears that Tabitha/Dorcas was a seamstress who utilized her talents to benefit others. In fact, she had shown particular care for “the widows.” They showed Peter how their sister-in-Christ had made them “tunics and other garments.” Although Luke does not explicitly state that Tabitha/Dorcas gave the clothing, the fact that the widows had the clothing and that it was made “while she was with them” implies as much. In an age where clothing is easy to come by, the fact that these women were given articles of clothing by Tabitha/Dorcas might not seem very impressive, but nothing could be further from the truth.

At this time, clothing wasn’t made from artificial materials. It was made from everything from the poorest of materials—e.g., sackcloth and goat’s hair—to the most expensive of materials—e.g., wool, linen, and cotton.³ Additionally, clothing had to be handmade, a process that took considerable time to produce. Depending on the type of clothing, this process would add value to the piece of fabric. **To put it another way, even a basic set of clothing was expensive.**⁴ Scripture confirms as much. In Amos 2:6, a person is sold for a pair of sandals! And **in Lu. 22:36-38, Jesus tells the disciples to sell their cloaks and purchase a sword, implying that clothing was as expensive as weaponry.**

³ Gower (2005), 10.

⁴ Ibid., 16.

Admittedly, it is impossible to know exactly how much clothing cost during the first century. The best we can do is reference a third-century edict from Emperor Diocletian. According to archaeologist Alexandra Croom, during the third century,

“Mantles range from 7,500 *denarii* for first quality from Scythopolis through second quality, third quality, and three different levels of ‘inferior to third quality’ to ‘coarse linen for common people or slaves’, the cheapest of which cost only 500 *denarii*, one fifteenth of the price of the best.”⁵

If you’ll recall, a day’s work was equal to a one denarius (cf. Matt. 20:2). Thus, an average worker would have to save up **over a year’s wages just to purchase a *single* outfit**. When John the Baptist said, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none” (Lu. 3:11), he was quite literally advising people to give away a substantial investment.⁶ For Tabitha/Dorcas to handmake and then donate clothing to widows implies that her generosity outshone her wealth.

As it was in Acts 6, the care of widows retakes center stage. Including orphans, widows were some of the most vulnerable people groups in the first century. Tabitha/Dorcas embodied what a genuine religious person looked and acted like; **she clothed the widows.**

So, what’s the takeaway?

Religion works when it works for the **good of others** and the **glory of God.**

READ: Matthew 25:31-40 (ESV)

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or

⁵ Croom, Alexandra, *Roman Clothing and Fashion*, (Amberley Publishing, 2012), 34.

⁶ Gower (2005), 16.

in prison and visit you?’⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of **the least** of these my brothers, you did it to **me**.’

Love for the Lord and love for the helpless determine whether a church is promoting a healthy religion or is no better than a cult. James says, “**Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world**” (Ja. 1:27). How the church deals with and cares for the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized people is a litmus test for its spiritual health.

Vs. 40-41a – Wanting privacy, “**Peter put them all outside.**” Jesus did the same when he resurrected the daughter of Jairus (Matt. 9:25). We’re told that Peter “**knelt down and prayed.**” The apostle was entirely reliant upon the Lord. Peter turned “**to the body and he said, 'Tabitha, arise.'**” **And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up.**” As James 5:16 (CSB) says, “**The prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.**”

Vs. 41b – Peter “**presented [Tabitha/Dorcas] alive**” to all “**the saints,**” a reference to the Christians living in Joppa. Luke specifically mentions the “**widows**” as they would’ve been the most keen to see their friend alive and well again.

Vs. 42 – As was the case with the healing of Aeneas, word of Tabitha’s resurrection “**became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.**” Miracles invested the gospel message with credibility.

Vs. 43 – Peter “**stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.**” On the surface, this might seem like a throwaway detail, but there is more to it than meets the eye. Due to the smell that came from tanning and the fact that they handled dead animals, tanners weren’t regarded with respect. According to Kenner, “Throughout the Mediterranean world, tanners were among the despised trades...” alongside the likes of “**beggars, prostitutes, smiths, and butchers.**”⁷ This means that Peter had no problem socializing with the lowest class. Believers ought to have no issue with rubbing shoulders with anyone, no matter their trade or social status. As Peter himself will say after the Holy Spirit comes to the Gentiles, “**Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him**” (Ac. 10:34-35). **All are God's children, and if he does not play favorites, then neither should the believer.**

So, what’s the takeaway?

⁷ Kenner, Craig S., *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 1725.

The gospel can do great good for society's **insiders**, but it does the *most* good for society's **outsiders**.

READ: Luke 4:16-21(ESV)

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news **to the poor**. He has sent me to proclaim liberty **to the captives** and recovering of sight **to the blind**, to set at liberty **those who are oppressed**, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, "**Today** this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The gospel isn't really good news to those who've got a good life. Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:23-24). And while he will also say, "with God all things are possible," indicating that rich people can be saved (e.g., Joseph of Arimathea, Zacchaeus, Lydia, etc.), it is nevertheless true that rich people are more prone to trust in their wealth for security (cf. 1 Tim. 6:17). A healthy person doesn't feel they need a doctor, bBut sick people do (cf. Mar. 2:17).

Here's a great evangelism principle: **The gospel finds fertile ground in a needy heart** (e.g., being young and finding friends at church). **Find those whom society has shunned, and preach Christ.**

Video Description:

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Season 41 | 7