

# Faithfulness ... During Times of Tragedy

*“... Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (Psalms 30:5)*

**Wednesday, August 10, 2022 5:00 p.m.**

**Lesson:** Acts 9:36-43;

**Time of Action:** 35 A.D.;

**Place of Action:** Lydda; Joppa

**I. INTRODUCTION.** Lydda, was a small village about 25 miles from Jerusalem and about ten or eleven miles from Joppa. Peter was visiting there as he went from place to place preaching the gospel. While there, he was summoned to come to Joppa to help one of the believers. In this reading, we will examine the faith of a number of people. *Faith caused Dorcas to use her talents for the Lord. Faith caused her friends to believe a miracle could happen, and faith encouraged Peter to attempt the impossible.*

**II. BACKGROUND FOR THE LESSON.** After Saul (later called Paul) met the Saviour and was converted (see Acts 9:1-16), “the churches (had) rest throughout all Judaea, Galilee, and Samaria” (see Acts 9:31). God took Saul this proud persecutor of believers and by His grace redeemed him and made him His servant. With Saul’s conversion, persecution slowed down allowing the apostles to preach and teach openly within the cities that had little exposure to the gospel. Luke, the author of Acts, continued to follow Peter’s ministry to show how God was using the apostles in the spread of His Word. Peter was God’s chosen spokesperson at Pentecost (see Acts 2:14-41); later he was God’s spokesman at the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Samaria (see Acts 8:14-24), and then he was God’s chosen vessel to open the gospel to the Gentiles (see Acts chapter 10). As Peter traveled around the country, he came to Lydda where he healed a paralyzed man named Aeneas (see Acts 9:32-34). As a result of this miracle, many people in Saron (or Sharon) and Lydda turned to the Lord (see Acts 9:35).

### **III. A FAITHFUL FRIEND (Acts 9:36-38)**

**A. A good woman (Acts 9:36).** *“Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.”* Here Luke tells us that “there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas.” The city of “Joppa” was a very old coastal city along the Mediterranean Sea and was about eleven miles from Lydda. The name “Joppa” has been changed to Jaffa which is now part of Tel-Aviv. The prophet Jonah left from the port of Joppa on his ill-fated trip trying to run from the Lord (see Jonah 1:1-3). The phrase “Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas” means that the name “Tabitha” is Aramaic, the language that most Jews spoke after the Babylonian Captivity, and “Dorcas” is Greek, but they both mean “gazelle” and speak of grace, gentleness, and beauty. She is called a “certain disciple” probably because this is the only time in Scripture that the term “disciple” is used for a female. However, the Greek word for a female disciple is “mathetria,” pronounced “math-ay’-tree-ah.” It is only used here in Scripture to describe a female disciple. A “disciple” was a learner of God’s truth, but also one who became accustomed to habitually fulfilling the Great Teacher’s (Jesus Christ) will. Dorcas was doing what a disciple should do—

imitating her Lord. Jesus loved people and served their needs. Likewise, Dorcas loved people and served them. Luke said that “this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.” Dorcas put into practice Christ’s love. She spent her days doing “almsdeeds” or deeds of mercy for the needy. She did what James later wrote about: she showed her faith by her works (see James 2:14-18). It seems that both men and women were able to have a warm coat or an outer garment because of Dorcas’ work as a seamstress. Her life was characterized by kindness and generosity, and she lived up to the ideal established for godly women (see Proverbs 31:13, 20; I Timothy 2:10). The way Luke describes her and her work helps us understand why he wrote that she was “full of good works.”

**B. A grievous loss (Acts 9:37).** *“And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.”* During the days that Peter was in Lydda preaching, Dorcas became “sick, and died.” We are told that after she died “when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.” Washing the body was in keeping with the customs of both Jews and Greeks. For Jews, outside the city of Jerusalem, burial was not necessarily carried out on the same day, especially if the shroud or the coffin needed to be prepared. But inside the city it had to be buried the day the death occurred. Since Joppa was northwest of Jerusalem and therefore outside of the city, Dorcas’ friends laid her in an “upper chamber” or room. Upper rooms were frequently built on the flat roofs of homes and many homes in Palestine had one. It seems that the reason that Dorcas’ friends kept her in the “upper chamber” was because they wanted Peter to come and see her before they buried her.

**C. A hopeful request (Acts 9:38).** *“And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.”* The believers at Joppa had heard about Peter’s ministry and miracle at Lydda (see Acts 9:32-35).

The village of “Lydda was nigh” or close to “Joppa.” The “disciples” or the believers in Joppa “heard that Peter” was in “Lydda,” so they sent “two men” there to find “Peter desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.” In other words, they begged “Peter” to come with them without delay.

#### **IV. A FAITHFUL GOD (Acts 9:39-43)**

**A. Peter’s arrival in Joppa (Acts 9:39).** *“Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.”* Without any delay “Peter” did as the men asked, he “arose and went with them.” The text doesn’t tell us if the men told “Peter” why he was wanted in Joppa, but they probably did since the apostle didn’t hesitate to go with them.

When they returned to Joppa, “Peter” was taken into the “upper chamber” or room where Dorcas’ body was laid. Before “Peter” did or said anything “all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.” It appears that “all the widows” whom Dorcas had graciously made clothing for were gathered

around her body. Of course, they were weeping and wailing as was the custom, but they were also showing “Peter” the “coats and garments which Dorcas made” for them. This small band of believers was there out of love and devotion for “Dorcas” because of the mercy, love and helpful life she had demonstrated among them. Truly, her works followed her (see Revelation 14:13).

**B. Peter’s prayer (Acts 9:40).** *“But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.”* The language used here is strong. It literally means that “Peter” thrust or forced “them all” out of the room. It appears that Peter was following the pattern of Jesus in a similar situation (see Matthew 9:18-25; Mark 5:21-24, 35-42). No doubt the people were reluctant to leave, but they did as Peter commanded. Then he “kneeled down and prayed.” This certainly was one reason why “Peter” wanted the mourners out of the room. The Apostle needed to be alone with God in prayer. He needed to know what God’s will was for this dead disciple. It appears also that “Peter” didn’t want any praise to come to him. The friends of Dorcas or “Tabitha” were not to focus on “Peter” and what he would do. While in prayer, he must have determined the will of God concerning “Tabitha.” After prayer, “Peter” turned to the corpse and said “Tabitha, arise.” It is most significant to note that this word came only *after* “Peter” had “prayed.” Sure, “Peter” demonstrated faith, but it was God’s power that brought “Tabitha” back from the dead. The last part of this verse says that “she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.” Death couldn’t hold its victim. God’s power prevailed. “Tabitha” was instantaneously and completely restored when “Peter” spoke. Life and full energy was back in her body.

**C. Peter presents Dorcas alive to the saints (Acts 9:41).** *“And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.”* When Dorcas sat up, Peter “gave her his hand, and lifted her up.” Peter reached out “his hand” to Tabitha and took her hand and helped her to her feet. Again, it was God’s power working through Peter’s faith that accomplished this miracle. Dead people cannot demonstrate or exercise faith. Then Peter “called the saints and widows, presented her alive.” The Apostle then called everyone he had earlier put out of the room to come back in and he showed them that Tabitha was “alive.” What a shock it must have been for them to see Tabitha standing before their eyes alive and well.

**D. Peter’s prevailing message (Acts 9:42-43).**

1. (vs. 42). *“And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.”* The fact that Dorcas was alive was evidence of God’s power and the truthfulness of the gospel message preached by the apostles. The miracle of Dorcas being raised from the dead “was known throughout all Joppa.” This was something that couldn’t be kept secret. God didn’t intend for His works and Word to remain secret. As a result of this miracle, “many believed in the Lord” (see John 12:10-11). Without a doubt, the greatest reason to bring Dorcas back to life was to present other opportunities to share the gospel message of Jesus Christ. Neither should we hide the works that God is performing in our lives. What God does in our lives should provide opportunities to share the gospel with others.

2. (Acts 9:43). *“And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.”* The raising of Dorcas provided the incentive that led to a great spiritual harvest in Joppa. As a result, Peter “tarried many days in Joppa” so that the people might have every opportunity to learn about Christ. Peter stayed in the home of “one Simon a tanner.” This was a strange place for a devout Jew to stay because “tanners” made animal hides into leather. This involved contact with dead animals, and according to Jewish custom, one who handles dead animal skins, as Simon did, was ceremoniously unclean (see Leviticus 5:2). But we see that Peter was already beginning to break down his prejudice against people who were not of his kind, as well as customs that didn’t agree with Jewish religious traditions.

**V. Conclusion.** This lesson does not specifically state that Peter preached the gospel in Lydda and Joppa. However, from Peter’s past actions (see Acts 2:1-40; 3:1-26), it would certainly indicate that he used each miracle as an opportunity to preach salvation through Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. Apart from the gospel message, miracles provide no eternal value. They may excite people’s emotions and imaginations for a while, but without the gospel, no permanent or eternally lasting results are accomplished (see Romans 1:16). This lesson has also highlighted the faithfulness of true disciples of Jesus Christ. Dorcas faithfully served others; her fellow disciples believed God could raise her to life; and Peter acted in faith to do just that. Not only did the Lord return Dorcas to life, but also many people in the area were born again and given new life. Even today as we read about the miraculous raising of this seamstress, we should be encouraged, and our faith should be strengthened.

### **Questions:**

1. Why was Peter in Lydda?
2. Who was Dorcas?
3. What happened to Dorcas?
4. What happened after Peter performed a miracle on Tabitha?
5. When things seem impossible, why is it important to continue to trust in God?