

June 13, 2021 by Steve Brandon



The Raising of Tabitha

Acts 9:36-43

1. Tabitha (verse 36)
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For those of you who paid attention to the weekly church-wide email that I sent out this week, you may be familiar with pictures, of what Hanna was learning this week. She has been working on her one-footer moves at WestRock Wake Park. Well, not all has been going according to plan.

Last night, as I was preparing my message for this morning, we received a call from Hanna's friend, Katie. she told us that Hanna was at the wake park and had a serious wipe-out. she hit her head, and now, has a big headache. On top of that, she doesn't remember her accident, and keeps asking about what happened. So, Katie drove her home as we tried to figure out what to do.

We looked on the internet for signs and symptoms of a concussion. Sure enough, the symptoms matched. She stopped by home, enough for us to see what was going on firsthand. Hanna was in the passenger seat of Katie's car, slouched over, covering her eyes. complaining of a headache. and asking repeatedly what happened. We called Brian, who used to work in an Emergency Room. He told us that she really needs to have a CT scan to make sure that she doesn't have any internal bleeding in her head.

I called around to a few emergency rooms to try to gauge if she would have any large wait times at any of the facilities. Eventually, we determined that it would be best to take her to the emergency department at the Javon Bea hospital. We also determined that Katie and Yvonne would take her.

But before they went. I placed my hand on Hanna's shoulders and prayed to God. I prayed in light of our text this morning, that God, who can raise the dead, can certainly heal our daughter. I prayed for his mercy toward Hanna, trusting that God would be gracious to her and to us. I prayed in full acknowledgement that Hanna's health is totally out of our hands. and so, we gave her to God, trusting in the power of God through prayer.

Yvonne and Katie went to Javon Bea Emergency Department to have her checked out. She got in quickly and had a CT scan. There was no bleeding in her head, so that's good. But she was extremely loopy last in the Emergency Room. She isn't here this morning. We left her at home with our other Children. She slept last night. But Stephanie, who slept with her said that she woke up a few times, asking about what happened.

So, we are praying for her. We would ask you to pray for her recovery.

I tell you that story because of our complete dependence upon the Lord for Hanna's health. We can simply pray and trust in the Lord. The power of prayer is but one application of our text this morning, which is Acts, chapter 9 and verses 36-43. The title of my message this morning is, "The Raising of Tabitha." It's one of two miracles at the end of chapter 9.

Last week, we looked at "The healing of Aeneas." the paralytic, who was "bedridden for eight years" (Acts 9:33). When Peter said to him, Acts 9:34 "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." To which Aeneas responded. "Immediately he rose" (Acts 9:34). Such a miracle stirred a revival in Lydda and Sharon, where Peter performed this miracle. And many "turned to the Lord" (Acts 9:35).

What we will see this morning is something similar. We will see Peter performing a miracle, which stirred a revival in Joppa, where Peter performed this miracle. And "many believed in the Lord" (Acts 9:42). So, let's read about this miracle.

Acts 9:36-43

Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. 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. 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. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and

widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

We have eight verses to look at this morning. I have eight points, one for each verse. Each point is simply a single word, upon which I hang my thoughts. My first point is this:

1. Tabitha (verse 36)

Tabitha is the woman around which this entire section of Scripture is based. She is introduced for us in verse 36,

Acts 9:36

Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas.

We find out here that Tabitha had two names. She was also called, "Dorcas." That's her Greek name. But her Hebrew name is Tabitha. Just like the apostle Paul. His Greek name is "Paul." But his Hebrew name is "Saul."

And so, throughout this sermon, I had a decision about what to call her. I could call her "Dorcas." Or, I could call her "Tabitha." I think that "Tabitha" wins out. It's a little bit better than "Dorcas." (She will thank me in eternity).

Anyway, like Aeneas from last week, all we know about this woman is right here in this passage. Tabitha is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible. So, what we know about Tabitha is not much, But it's enough to get a good picture of her. And she was quite a woman.

First of all, she lived in Joppa. "Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha" (Acts 9:36). Joppa is along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It's a familiar place in Biblical history. It's where Jonah fled, when running from the Lord. It's a familiar place in modern history. It's the place where Tel Aviv is today, the city through which all major travel in Israel today, in and out of Ben Gurion airport.

Second, we find from verse 36 that Tabitha is identified as a "disciple." A "disciple" is a "learner." It's the name that the book of Acts uses most to describe a follower of Jesus. Sometimes (5X), Acts describes followers of Christ as "believers," that is, those who "believed" in the Lord. But most often (26X), Acts describes followers of Christ as "disciples," that is, those who follow in the ways of their master, in this case, Jesus.

In the case of Tabitha, she was clearly a disciple of Jesus. Look at the end of verse 36, ...

Acts 9:36

She was full of good works and acts of charity.

This is the sign of a genuine follower of Jesus. Do you remember Ephesians 2:8-9? "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." This is how we are saved from our sins. We are saved by God's grace, as he shows himself to us. We are saved through faith, as we trust the work of Jesus on the cross. This is all God's work, that we might not boast. But God doesn't simply save us to bring us to heaven. He saves us to shine forth the light of Jesus. He changes us, so that we bear fruit for him. I have heard it said this way, "We are saved by faith alone, but that faith is never alone."

Indeed, that's what Ephesians 2:10 says, Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. That's exactly what Tabitha was doing. She was walking in the good works that God had prepared for her to do.

"She was full of good works and acts of charity" (Acts 9:36). That is, she was doing good, particularly, here with the poor. She had a heart for the poor, giving to them, and helping them. reflective of God's heart in her. "For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land'" (Deuteronomy 15:11).

This is a challenge to all of us as well. Do we reflect the heart of God in our actions? Do we reflect God's heart, not merely in being kind to one another here at church, but regarding the poor?

That's Tabitha. She was quite a woman. In verse 37, we find that she died. That's my second point.

2. Death (verse 37)

Acts 9:37

In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.

Now, we don't know exactly how old Tabitha was. In verse 39, she is identified as a "widow," so most assume that she was an older woman, which I have no reason to doubt. As the practice in Bible times was for widows to marry again, if they were young (1 Tim. 5:9), as it was much more difficult for a single woman to survive in those days than in ours.

At any rate, "she became ill and died." The common practice of the day was to bury those who had died quickly. usually within a day of their death, as decay of the body sets in. But what we see here in verse 37 is not out of the ordinary. "They had washed her, they laid her in an upper room." In those days, they didn't have funeral homes, and so, they would often place the bodies in their guest rooms. as they prepared them for burial.

One thing that is lacking here, is that they simply washed the body. they didn't yet begin the process of smothering the body with perfume. Instead, they sent for Peter. We see this in verse 38, ...

Acts 9:38

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."

I'm simply calling this point, ...

3. Asking (verse 38)

That's what these disciples did with Peter. They asked him to come. They asked him to come quickly. Now, if you remember from last week, Peter was in Lydda, having healed Aeneas, the paralytic. No doubt, those in Joppa had heard of the miracle. And their asking Peter to come was, in effect, asking for another miracle to take place.

They weren't asking Peter to come to perform the funeral services. From time to time, I receive calls from people, looking for me to do this very thing. In fact just this week, I received a call from a gentleman, asking me to perform a funeral service, asking me how much I would charge for such a service. It's not my regular practice to do so, as I have enough to do without performing a funeral service for strangers. I don't need a side gig of doing funeral services. I don't think that's what these men were asking Peter to do. They were asking Peter for a miracle.

Peter was more than willing to come. He was more than willing to travel the three hour walk between the villages.

Acts 9:39

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.

I'm calling this point, ...

4. Mourning (verse 39)

This is not morning as in 10am. but mourning as in weeping for the dead. Because, that's what Peter encountered. He encountered a crowd of other widows, who were mourning the death of their dear friend, Tabitha.

They were talking with Peter about Tabitha, as people do during a funeral. They were showing Peter all of the garments that Tabitha had made during her life. This would have been totally natural, and her upper room was probably filled with the garments that she had made.

I can't help, but to think that Peter had a sense of déjà vu at the moment. He had encountered this before. Do you remember the story? It's told in Mark 5. Jesus was ministering in Galilee,

Mark 5:22-24

Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet and implored him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live." And [Jesus] went with him.

Now along the way, Jesus encountered a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. She touched the fringe of his garment, reasoning, "If I touch even his garments, I will be made well" (Mark 5:28). She did and she was. She touched the garment of Jesus was healed on the spot. And as Jesus was speaking with her, a servant came from the house of Jairus to inform him that his daughter had died. He then gave his recommendation, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?" (Mark 5:35). But Jesus insisted that they should continue on to the home of Jairus. Jesus said, "Do not fear, only believe" (Mark 5:36). Now, consider the Biblical text:

Mark 5:37-42

And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement.

I'm sure that this scene was in the mind of Peter. as he is in this room, with a corpse before him, surrounded by women weeping all around him. And though the corpse before him was older than a 12 year-old girl, he did exactly what Jesus did.

Acts 9:40

Peter put them all outside,

Then, Peter does what Jesus didn't do.

Acts 9:40

[He] knelt down and prayed;

See, Jesus didn't have to pray. He could simply command the girl to rise from the dead. and she rose. But Peter, being a mere mortal, was in a different situation. He needed the power of Jesus to raise Tabitha from the dead. And so, he prayed. This is what I'm calling this verse.

5. Praying (verse 40)

This is the heart of our passage. It's the heart of application. It's prayer. We cannot accomplish the work of God without prayer. Oh, we can do many things without prayer. We organize events. We can gather people. We can speak and teach till we are blue in the face. And we may have results. More people may come. More activity may surround the church. But the work of God will only be done through prayer.

Someone has well said, "You can do more than pray, after you have prayed but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." Peter knew this. He knew that the only thing he could do at the moment was pray. He knew that he had no power in and of himself to raise this widow from the dead. He knew that the power to do this would come from Jesus, alone.

We saw this last week in the healing of Aeneas. Do you remember what Peter said to him? "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you" (Acts 9:34). Do you remember when Jesus healed the lame beggar at the Beautiful Gate? Acts 3:6 "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" But since Tabitha was dead at this moment, he couldn't command her to rise and walk. She was dead. That's why Peter prayed to the Lord. He prayed to the one who could hear his prayer.

If you have been working to memorize the Fighter Verses^[1] that we have set before you as a congregation, you would know what Peter knew. He knew the steadfast love of the Lord. He knew that God listens to our pleas for grace. He knew that God answers prayer.

Psalm 86:5-7

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.
Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
listen to my plea for grace.
In the day of my trouble I call upon you,
for you answer me.

And so, Peter prayed to the Lord. Now, I have been thinking this week of Peter's situation. I picture him, alone in this upper room. kneeling at the bed of this precious saint, Tabitha. She wasn't talking. She wasn't moving. she wasn't breathing. I picture him in total desperation. totally alone. Him and the Lord. And Peter prayed.

We don't know what he prayed. We don't know how long he prayed. it couldn't have been long, as everyone was waiting just outside the door. In fact, it's not long prayers that the Lord delights to hear. Rather, it's the "the effective prayer of a righteous person that has great power" (James 5:16). The power of the prayer of Peter was powerful enough to raise Tabitha from the dead.

Acts 9:40

turning to the body [Peter] said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.

It's so interesting that these words are the same words that Jesus said, except for one letter. Jesus said to the little, 12 year-old girl, "Talitha cumi," [which is Aramaic for] , "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And Peter says, "Tabitha cumi," which means "Tabitha, arise!" And she did.

Acts 9:40

And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.

Can you imagine the thrill of Peter? This isn't the sort of thing that happened every day. In fact, this is the only time in the ministry of Peter that he ever prayed for someone to rise from the dead, and witness it take place before his eyes!

I would bet that Peter was more thrilled to see Tabitha rise from the dead, than she was to see him. Can you imagine her experience? She was in the presence of Jesus, looking at his face in glory. She had run the race and finished the course and was enjoying her reward. Then, she was called back to look at the face of Peter. If anything, I think that she was disappointed. Not that Peter was an ugly man. But Peter pales in comparison with seeing the glorified Jesus!

If anyone could have written one of those "I went to heaven and came back" books, it was her. But she didn't. In fact, we read of no words even coming from her mouth.

She simply "opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up." Then we read, ...

Acts 9:41

And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

This is my sixth point.

6. Rising (verse 41)

Tabitha rose from the dead. Embrace the wonder of this text! A woman who was dead came to life! This isn't the sort of thing that you see every day! Nor is it the sort of the thing that you read about much in the Bible.

Throughout the entire Bible, there are only a handful of examples of this. Elijah and Elisha performed similar miracles (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:32-37). Jesus raised three people from the dead: The little girl, a little boy, and Lazarus. Paul raised Eutychus after he fell out of the window.

But beyond that, there are no other examples in the entire Bible of people praying to the Lord to raise someone from the dead. Of course, Jesus rose from the dead, but that wasn't as a consequence of the ministry of people seeking a resurrection from the dead. Further, at the death of Jesus, many were raised from their tombs (Matthew 27:53). Also, when a dead man's corpse touched Elisha's bones, he came to life. But neither of these were sought with prayer.

Now, I think that you misapply this text if you think that we should pray for people to rise from the dead. But I know that this happens. I know one story personally of a family that I knew. Their young daughter passed away from cancer. And this family was desperate, and had charismatic tendencies, and called in some preacher from across the country to perform the funeral service for their daughter. Our family would have gone to the service, but we were out of town on that occasion. But I was told that during the funeral service, this preacher turned to the corpse and commanded the little girl to rise from the dead. over and over he commanded her to rise. But, of course, she didn't. And so, the family left in sorrow, hoping that their daughter would rise from the dead! I fear that this is a common practice in some circles. It leads people astray, to be disappointed by their wrong expectations. This is a faulty application of the text. We ought not to read this and think that this is our task, as believers in Jesus, too go about raising people from the dead. Especially with so few Biblical examples of this. Further, the Bible nowhere records when people tried to do this and failing.

So, we aren't to read this account of Tabitha rising from the dead as an example for us to follow. Rather, we are to read it in its context. The story comes in the midst of the expansion of the church. This new faith that was beginning to spread throughout the Roman empire. Beginning in Jerusalem, and expanding to Judea and Samaria. And now, we see it expanding to the coast of the sea in the west. And these miracles were authenticating signs to confirm the truth of their message. Hebrews 2:3-4 says it well.

Hebrews 2:3-4

[This salvation] was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

In other words, the great miracles that the apostles did, and raising Tabitha from the dead, was God bearing witness to the truthfulness of his apostles. In this case Peter. This miracle was to bring authentication for the message that Peter preached. And indeed, it worked in Joppa so long ago.

Acts 9:42

And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

My point from this verse is this:

7. Believing (verse 42)

When this miracle became known, many people believed in the Lord. I have made know this miracle today. Do you believe in the Lord? This is the great application of this text for us this morning. It's a call to faith. It's a call to believe in Jesus. It's a call to believe in the gospel.

Do you believe? Do you trust in Jesus Christ, raised from the dead?

Let's look briefly at our last point:

8. Staying (verse 43)

Acts 9:43

And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

This verse essentially sets up chapter 10, where we see the Lord teaching Peter about his prejudice toward the Gentiles. Peter is staying with Simon, a tanner. A tanner deals with pelt and furs, which means dealing with dead animals, which were unclean for Jewish people.

But God was teaching Peter about what is clean and what is unclean, which we will look at next week.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 13, 2021 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] See <https://fighterverses.com>.