

A BROADER MINISTRY — IN JOPPA: CONQUERING DEATH ACTS 09:36–43

Introduction

Jesus Christ has the power to raise the dead. This is abundantly demonstrated in this marvellous event, an event that speaks loudly and clearly to the most desperate need of man — the need to conquer death.

- I. The place: a city where disciples and saints lived (v. 36).
- II. The need: a believer had tragically died (vv. 36-39).
- III. The source of power to raise the dead: Christ Jesus (vv. 40-41).
- IV. The results (vv. 42-43).

I. *Acts 09:36 Joppa, a City of Disciples and Saints*

The place where the power of Christ confronts death — a city where disciples and saints lived (see vv. 36, 41). Note two points.

1. The city of Joppa was an important commercial city (see *Joppa*, Acts 9:36).
2. The city had disciples or saints living within its borders (see Acts 9:32).

ACTS 09: 36 JOPPA

Joppa was a seaport town, bringing commercial goods from all over the ancient world. It was...

- the seaport for Jerusalem, the capital of Israel.
- the only seaport that could provide shelter between Egypt and Mt. Carmel.
- a busy, bustling seaport, populated with Jews as well as Gentile people from all over the world.
- an ancient seaport town, one of the very oldest in the Mid-East, dating back to the time of Jonah (Jonah 1:3).
- assigned to the tribe of Dan in the Old Testament (Josh. 19:46).
- the city where Peter raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36) and had the vision that led to the evangelizing of the Gentiles (See *Cornelius*, Acts 10:1f). □

II. *Acts 09:36–39 Ministering at Death*

The need was created by the tragic death of a believer. Note five points.

1. The believer was a faithful believer, a lady named Dorcas.
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a. Two names are given for her: “Tabitha,” which was her Jewish or Hebrew name, and Dorcas, which was her Greek name. Her name means gazelle (or doe or deer) which is a most beautiful creature. The gazelle is known for...

- its slender features
- its grace and loveliness
- its bright eyes and tender looks

The same traits were apparently characteristic of Dorcas. Note: Scripture does say the wife is to be as the loving hind and the pleasant roe to her husband (Prov. 5:19). She is to be as the beautiful creature: gracious and loving, bright eyed (joyful, excited, expectant) and tender.

b. She was deeply committed to Christ, a very faithful and devoted disciple, full of...

- *doing good* (agathon ergon): a general term meaning all kinds of good works, serving and doing all kinds of good to all who needed help.
- “helping the poor”: charitable gifts. She gave gifts to the needy.

c. Note the *poor she helped* (on epoie). The emphasis is that she gave things, gifts which she herself made (see v. 39). She must have been well off, perhaps wealthy; for she was buying material to make clothing, apparently for a large number of the needy. Note she was helping a large number of widows (v. 39). The widows without the financial support of their deceased husbands would be especially poor and needy.

Thought 1. Dorcas’ discipleship was not a false profession.

=> She did not promise something and then not follow through.

=> She did not begin and then slack off.

=> She did not say, “I will serve” and then ignore the need.

Mat 5:16 “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

2 Cor 8:11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.

2 Cor 9:7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

1 Tim 6:18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

Titus 2:7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.

Heb 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

2. Dorcas tragically died. The idea seems to be that she died right in the midst of her ministry when she was so needed. The believers were crushed. There was little hope that the ministry could go on as effectively as it had been.

=> There apparently were few, if any, as mature in the Lord as she. It appears as if they were newer believers, not having had sufficient time to grow and mature in Him.

=> There were so many *poor*. There apparently was no one else wealthy and gifted enough to meet their needs. The church desperately needed Dorcas.

3. A great hope and desperate appeal was stirred. The disciples at Joppa...

- had heard about Peter being close by in Lydda.
- had heard about the phenomenal healing of the paralytic.
- had heard (perhaps some had even witnessed) that Jesus had raised the dead.

Note three significant points about the believers.

- a. Great hope swelled up in their hearts. They did not rush to bury Dorcas as was the custom of Jews. But they washed her and laid her in an upper chamber.
- b. They sent two men to ask Peter to come and seek the Lord in behalf of Dorcas — for the sake of the church and its witness as well as for her sake.
- c. They demonstrated *great faith* in the possibility that the Lord could raise the dead and meet the cry of their hearts. They had enough faith.
 - not to bury her.
 - to go for Peter and ask him to come. This is important. They did not go to discuss the matter with him, but to ask him to come and to come quickly, without delay.

The words *come at once* (me okneseis) mean not to hesitate, not to be reluctant; but to act and act now, quickly, without questioning. The believers were in dead earnest, believing that the Lord could raise the dead if it was His will to do so. What an enormous faith in the Lord Jesus they demonstrated!

4. A sensitive, pastoral response was the result. Peter arose and went with the two men. He was the servant of the Lord, so he did love and care. He was deeply concerned and compassionate. He had been made aware of the need; the cry for help had reached his ears and he responded. (What a lesson for the leaders of the church!)
5. A deep sorrow was expressed for Dorcas, the dedicated believer. As soon as Peter arrived, they took him into the upper chamber. The widows whom she had helped so readily surrounded Peter, weeping from broken hearts. Note they began to show Peter the clothes Dorcas had made and given them. The word *showing* (epideiknumenai, middle voice) means they were pointing to the clothes. They were actually wearing the clothes she had made in her honour or because they had few or no other clothes decent enough to wear publicly.

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1 Tim 6:18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

Titus 2:7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness.

Heb 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

ACTS 09: 36 DORCAS

Think of the legacy left behind by this woman. Contrast the legacy of Euodias and Syntyche (see note, Ph. 4:2-3) □

III. Acts 09:40 Christ Jesus, the Source of Power

The source of power to raise the dead is Christ Jesus. Note three significant points.

1. The disciple got alone with the Lord. He excused everyone from the room. He had to get alone and seek the Lord. He had to concentrate and meditate; his thoughts had to be undisturbed before the Lord. There are at least three incidents in Scripture where the dead were raised in similar circumstances.
 - ⇒ Jesus and Jairus’ daughter (Mt. 5:40-42).
 - ⇒ Elijah and the widow’s son (1 Kng. 17:17-24).
 - ⇒ Elisha and the Shunammite’s son (2 Kng. 4:18-37, esp. 32-37).
2. Peter prayed to the living Lord. The Lord is living, and because He is alive Peter got alone with Him and asked at least two things:
 - a. He asked for the Lord’s will. Was it the Lord’s will or not His will to raise Dorcas? (See *Healing*, Acts 9:34.)
 - b. Once Peter knew that the Lord wanted Dorcas raised, he prayed both for the power to raise her and for God to use the miracle to make men believe (see v. 43).

Mat 6:6 “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Mark 6:46 After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

Luke 6:12 One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

1 John 5:14-15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us — whatever we ask — we know that we have what we asked of him.

3. Peter did exactly what Jesus instructed. He turned to the body and boldly demanded. “Tabitha, get up.”
 - a. Note the faith of Peter. It was the faith of the Lord Jesus Himself, the faith which Jesus had demonstrated in raising Jairus’ daughter (Mk. 5:41).
 - b. It was the Lord’s will for Dorcas to be raised from the dead. The Lord told Peter what His will was while Peter was praying. If Jesus had told Peter it was not His will, then Peter would not have commanded Dorcas to arise. Her resurrection was to serve a greater purpose than her remaining dead. (See *Healing*, Acts 9:34.)

John 7:17 “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

Acts 5:29 Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men!”

IV. Acts 09:41–43 The Results: Belief and Witnessing

The results of raising the dead were twofold.

1. Many believed.
2. A tremendous door was open for Peter to freely evangelize the area. It was here in Joppa that God was to give him the vision that led to the carrying of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1f).

Thought 1. Note this critical point. When God raises the dead, it is always to demonstrate the enormous power of God to save men through any and all trials, even from the greatest of enslavements — death. There is dramatic symbolism in this point for the conversion of a soul from death to life eternal.

The “many” who believed in Joppa illustrate the point. They believed because Dorcas was raised. Because she was raised, they turned to the Lord for salvation. They turned from spiritual death to spiritual life, from physical death to life eternal. They wanted life now and eternally, life abundant and life that lasted forever. They wanted to live with Christ in that glorious day of promise, the day of redemption.

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

Rom 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. ■