

A Woman Full Of Good Works.

Acts 9:36-42.

Sunday morning, May 2, 2010.

I. The larger picture.

Why are the accounts of Aeneas and Dorcas inserted in the narrative of Acts at this time?

- A. Vs. 31,32 tell us that following the intense persecution a time of tranquility followed, during which Peter traveled through all parts of the country edifying and establishing the newly founded churches.
- B. What we have in the accounts of Aeneas and Dorcas is two snapshots of the nature of this ministry which may be taken as representative of the whole of Peter's work at this time.
- C. Two things stand out:
 1. That the supernatural gifts of the Spirit (such as healing) were not as wide spread in the churches as is sometimes thought. Peter had to come before Aeneas could be healed, and the saints at Joppa could not prevent the death of Dorcas; without Peter they too were powerless.
 2. That the supernatural works wrought by the Holy Spirit's power in Peter underscored his apostolic authority. This apostolic authority needed to be plainly manifested before the churches in order for the churches to submit to him. Only in this way was Peter enabled to order and establish these newborn churches in the ways of the Lord.

II. A woman full of good works.

- A. This was a Jewish woman who's Aramaic name was Tabitha, which means Gazelle. Luke translates her name for his Greek speaking audience. Dorcas means Gazelle in Greek. It was a common name given to women. The Song of Solomon employs the imagery of the Gazelle frequently for both the Shulamite and her beloved, for the grace with which the Gazelle skips and leaps on the mountains.
- B. Dorcas is said to have been a woman "full of good works and charitable deeds." The words translated "full of..." mean literally "covered with..." Some people are full of good words, but not always accompanied by good works. Dorcas lived out of the gospel and her works testified to this truth.
- C. The course of nature after the fall has brought us into an estate where we see all things in relation to ourselves. Consciously or unconsciously we always ask ourselves the question "What's in it for me, or will I like it, or is this what I want?" We even approach the Lord and the gospel this way. We will be religious as long as we get what we want out of it, and if not we will abandon it or seek it elsewhere.
- D. Dorcas was of a different spirit as the Lord Jesus had been of a different Spirit. He, in His incarnation, willingly laid aside His personal power, privilege and prestige, and made Himself a humble servant to do us good in redeeming us. Dorcas did drink deeply from the well of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus " Phil.2:5, was an

abiding reality in Dorcas' life. Conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ was a reality, and it increasingly shaped her life.

Application:

Is this reality increasingly shaping your life? In what specific ways is life less about you now, and more about others? And if the Lord would bring you to the place where you lose yourself altogether, and life becomes all about others, are you good with that? Is that not the image of Christ to which we are predestined to be conformed? Do you pursue and pray for that? Henry Scougal, in his volume "The life of God in the soul of man," page 63, says: "*the worth and excellence of a soul (your soul) is measured by the (worth and excellence) of the object(s) of its love.*"

What are the objects or ideas to which you have given the love of your heart?

What is their worth and excellence before God and His kingdom and before eternity?

The cross of Christ shows us the way; here God, our Father, invested the life of His Son in the needy souls of fallen men and women.

Dorcas drank deeply of the Spirit of Christ in this regard. What about you?

In the work of conversion and sanctification the love of our hearts is transferred from ourselves to the Lord and His people. This is what the Lord asked the rich young ruler to do in Matthew 19:16-22. The Lord was seeking to effect a transfer of the love of this rich man's heart, away from his possessions, and to the Lord's and His people. The heart of this difficult passage is the love of the rich man's heart and what to do with it.

III. Hope for people like you and me.

As we saw last week in the healing of Aeneas, so here also we have a parable, an illustration, a comparison with the work of grace the Lord Jesus undertakes in our lifeless and loveless hearts. The work of grace always re-arranges and re-orders the love of our hearts according to the value system and priorities of His kingdom.

- A. In the person of Peter the Lord Jesus comes to visit the cold and lifeless heart of Dorcas. And so the Lord would visit your heart.
- B. United to Peter by the Holy Spirit and by prayer, the Lord Jesus speaks to Dorcas, using her Aramaic name the Lord says: "Tabitha, Arise!" Just as all creation always responds to the voice of the Creator, so Tabitha obeys and new life flows from her once cold and lifeless heart. So it will be with you.
- C. The first thing she does is open her eyes; the first thing someone does who has been touched by grace is see with new eyes; they have their understanding enlightened. The veil is taken of the heart; a new eternal reality has dawned.
- D. Next Peter stretches out his hand and raises her up. So the Lord with us; He imparts new life and new graces. The love for old things passes away and new loves spring up. Nothing has changed but everything is different.
- E. Finally the work of grace gives Dorcas back to the widows and orphans of the church in Joppe. And the Lord will give you, according to your gifts and graces, to the body of His people, that you may give yourself to them.

The question is: Is that what you would want the Lord to do with your life? Like the people of Gadara who asked the Lord to depart out of their coasts while mourning the loss of their swine, the Lord forces no man's hold; He will depart, and leave you with the treasures (such as they are) of your heart.