

Episode #1150 Acts 9 Part 6-The Resurrection of Tabitha

I. Acts is unique in the New Testament. Rather than the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, it focuses on what came after, when the Lord had ascended back into heaven. The Lord left His disciples with many commands to carry out, and Acts tells us how they did them.

II. We just studied Peter's miraculous healing of the palsied man Aeneas. Now, we learn of the death of a disciple at Joppa named Tabitha in Aramaic or Dorcas in Greek. She had been full of good works and charitable deeds. So the question arises: why did she die?

III. Peter Raises Tabitha from the Dead. Act 9:36-43.

A. Acts 9:37. Tabitha dies.

1. This portion is of very great importance, for it is far more than simply the record of the resurrection from the dead of Dorcas. This portion we have before us contains hidden truths which we need to discover and thus to add to our intelligence regarding Divine things. My interpretation of this portion will be quite strange, it will be different, and it is simply that of me and my ministry. If there should be any who do not agree with me, that is perfectly all right. If there are any who agree with me, that is perfectly all right. In my interpretation of this, I seek the approval of my Lord, and if any care to differ, they may do so.
2. The problem of Tabitha is that she is the only disciple, the only believer, in the Acts period who was sick and who died what we would call a natural death.
 - a. I know that Stephen had died just before this, but Stephen died at the hands of men. Stephen was a martyr, and men could be martyred in the Acts period. They had to live and believe in the expectation that this could take place.
 - b. We have also seen that Ananias and Sapphira died, but they died at the hands of the Lord because of their sin.
 - c. We also read in I Corinthians 11:30, which was written during the Acts period, that many in Corinth were sick and many were dead, but these died because of failure to conform to the Divine order.
3. Therefore, the sickness and the death of Tabitha imposes a real problem. This woman was a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Scripture declares.
4. She was full of good works. We know that, and if we take the Word of God to be inspired and all of its descriptions to be accurate, this filled her life. "Full" is the Greek *pleres*, and means filled up or thoroughly permeated with. She was full of good works.
5. Under the Divine condition that existed in the Acts period, she should not have been sick, and she should not have died. This woman's illness and her subsequent death cannot be explained by saying that these were just the outflow of Adam's sin, as in Adam all die, I Corinthians 15:22, and so on. The believers of the Acts period were cut off from Adam, and they were free from the results of sin so far as sickness and death were concerned. Romans 8:2, 8:11. These people at that time were free from the law of sin and death, and we are not.

6. I believe that when we make a careful examination of all the facts, they will show that this woman's illness and her death were the result of failing to conform to God's order. What was this order that she violated? In Matthew 4:4, the Lord had declared that under His government men could not live by bread alone. The only way that a man can live and conform to God's order when it is an established fact on the earth is by feeding on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Our Lord was not just rebuking Satan. Our Lord was declaring an established truth, and He was establishing this truth. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. If they do not, they will "starve to death" from lack of God-given "food"! Today, there are many people who live by bread alone. They do not need the Word of God. We live in a time when the Word of God can be completely and totally neglected in our lives, and yet nothing will happen to us as a result, for we are living in the dispensation of the grace of God. But that could not be in the Acts period.
7. Now the life of Dorcas was so full of good works and alms deeds that there was no place for the Word of God. You might say, how do you know that? Well, the Bible declares here that this woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. There is something in the Word that might illustrate this. In the Old Testament as well as in the New, we have the word *consecration*. The priests were consecrated to the Lord. That word consecration means, "to fill the hand." When anyone says, "my hands are full," he means he is consecrated to something. Oftentimes when people tell us "my hands are full," we wonder what their hands are filled with. Generally, it is the affairs of this life, the cares of this world, the family matters, the business matters, the financial matters. They must read a financial website but they say, "My hands are so full, I have no time for the Word of God." They can get away with this in the dispensation of the grace of God. A woman's life could be completely filled with her family, and that is not a bad thing. It might be full with the needs of her husband, and that would not be a bad thing. But when a life is full, even if it is filled with good things, to neglect the Word of God will bring difficulties when God's kingdom is in the earth.
8. Now Tabitha's time and strength were given to feeding and clothing others, and she had no time nor strength left to feed herself on the Word of God. If this woman's life was filled with good works, then that was the thing to which her life was consecrated, and that could not be according to the word of the Lord Jesus Christ. The importance of feeding on God's Word was emphasized by the Lord Jesus in His dealings with Mary and Martha. Luke 10:38-42. Martha chose to serve Him and was busy and troubled about many, many things, but Mary chose to sit at His feet and hear His word. Tabitha had chosen to emulate Martha, and she served these people, apparently by making garments to clothe them. She had chosen service to the neglect of the Word of God, and that choice could not be passed over lightly by the Lord. He did not say, "Well, she means well, so let's look over it."
9. We have already seen that the twelve apostles realized the truth of this, Acts 6:2. They declared that it doesn't make sense, it is an insane thing to do, that

we would leave the Word of God to serve tables. And therefore they refused to do it. Now in spite of all of this, Tabitha felt that her service to men would make up for her neglect of the Word of God. However, God would not alter His clearly established order to suit the program of any woman, no matter how good her works may be.

10. The outcome of this service in self-will was that she became ill and died. I believe that her sickness was not because she got a bacteria or virus. Both of these were from the hand of the Lord. This sickness was laid on her, and because there was no change, she probably tried to go on and make these garments in spite of it, death came upon her. I believe that these both were from the hand of the Lord.
 11. As already mentioned in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, it was a strict custom in Israel to bury a person as soon as possible after death. But there is something different here, for in the case of Tabitha her fellow disciples believed something was strange, and her body was kept until Peter arrived.
 12. It is evident her friends felt that something had gone wrong somewhere. Something had gone awry. Had not Jesus Christ said because I live you will live also in John 14:19? Yet in spite of these words of promise here was a woman who had died, and she had died in a time when these promises were in full force. What crime could this kind, generous woman possibly have committed, whose every effort was to do good works and charitable deeds? There is no doubt but that her fellow disciples were greatly puzzled. If they were not martyred, only some grievous fault against the laws of God's kingdom could ever bring death upon them. They do not understand how Tabitha could have done anything worthy of such harsh treatment. However, there was a man nine miles away who may have all the answers. So they place her body in an upper chamber and send for Peter.
- B. Verse 38. They can't understand what has happened to Tabitha, but they hear that Peter is nearby. They know God's apostle will be able to solve this.
- C. Verse 39. Widows with no adult male to care for them were in the worst possible state of anyone in Israel. Thus, much of Tabitha's labors had probably been bestowed upon widows. They cannot understand why she has died. We need God's perspective on this. At this point it will be good for us to get the whole picture of the situation as it existed the moment Peter stood in that upper chamber. Above all and over all was God in Christ, the King of the kingdom that was then on the earth. He was the highest of the heavens that were associated with Him in this rule that was being enacted on the earth. Under Him stood Peter, an apostle, an authorized and accredited representative of God's government who had full power to bind a matter on earth and have it bound in heaven or loose a matter on earth and have it loosed in heaven. Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18 apply here. Finally, there was Tabitha, a subject of the kingdom of the heavens who had cast her lot with it even before it spread out to encompass the earth. She was dead, and it is quite evident she was dead because of an imbalance in her life. She had the wrong diet: too much good works, and too little of the Bible. There had been too much of the work of God and too little of the Word of God in her life, and let me tell you, under heaven's government that condition cannot be tolerated. There is going to be, shall we say, a Divine diet when God governs this

- earth, and it cannot be all the Word and no work, and it cannot be all the work and no Word. That is the lesson we have to learn. However, Peter was a man under authority, but he could not act in this case apart from direction from his superiors. God had acted upon Tabitha, but if Peter wished to appeal that decision and to seek grace for Tabitha, he had every right to do so. Thank God, there is no red tape when you deal with heaven's government.
- D. Verse 40. Peter needed direction from his Superior. Tabitha clearly deserved mercy. God's government is fair one, but a righteous government will always show mercy where it is warranted. Thus, God gave him authority to raise her from the dead. Peter could pronounce people dead with a word, Acts 5:3-4 and 9, and can also reverse death with a word! As human beings, it is within our power to bring death, yet it is utterly beyond our power to bring life back to the dead again. Peter got such power from God. It is most evident that this woman was deserving of mercy, and under a just government mercy will always be shown when it is deserved. Mercy is a favor shown to those who have some claim on the Divine pity. Grace is a favor that is wholly undeserved. The resurrection of Tabitha is a clear act of mercy under God's government. While Peter has full power to raise the dead, he would not undo what God above him had done until he cleared it with the One above and over him. This is the reason for his prayer. He asked and sought the will of God. He prayed and made request of heaven what he should do. He received the answer, and then he turned to the boy and spoke the words that brought this woman back to life. Yes, he sought the will of God in regard to this dead woman. He may have felt he lacked wisdom in view of the fact that a judgment had come from heaven and this woman was dead as the result. Yet once this will was known, he restored her to life. You may remember in Acts 5 Peter spoke the words that sent two disciples into the state of death. Here, he speaks the word that brings one disciple out of the state of death. What clearer proof do we need that death is not a reward, but is a punishment? Peter did not send Ananias and Sapphira to a reward, and he did not take Tabitha away from her reward. No, he restored to her something lost, and he did it as a representative of heaven's government, destined to sit on one of twelve thrones governing the people of Israel.
- E. Verse 41. This must have brought them great joy, and a little awe. Yet they were part of God's government, and probably hoped this would happen when they called for Peter. They were more surprised by Tabitha's death, it seems, than by her resurrection.
- F. Verse 42. Whatever the believers thought, this was a powerful sign to those who had not yet believed. Thus the gospel continued to grow, and to dominate the scene as it spread. The inhabitants of these towns were all Israelites. The overwhelming majority of the Israelites continued to hear the word gladly, as they had heard Christ when He was on earth.
- G. Verse 43. The homes of tanners, those who tanned the hides of animals, were usually built away from the rest of the town, and downwind, as they stank. Most would not have wanted to stay there. When Peter accepted the hospitality of the man Simon the tanner, he was lodging with a man who was considered unclean from the Jewish standpoint. Now I do not say from the Scriptural standpoint, but from the Jewish standpoint anyone who dealt with the hides of animals was considered unclean. This tradition had very little basis in the Word of God, and thus it seems that Peter

completely ignored it. He well knew from the Lord that he was to follow God's clean and unclean laws, not those made up by the Jewish leaders. Here Peter broke with a Jewish scruple that had no real foundation in the word, and that was a step in the right direction. regarding truth, and God is going to lead Peter further down this road, as we will see in Acts chapter 10.

IV. Conclusion: Tabitha had died, not like we die because we are all dying in Adam, but because her life was out of order according to kingdom rules. She gave herself wholly to the work of God and had no time left for the Word of God. This will never be allowed under God's government. Yet a good government is always merciful, and God showed mercy to her. In this way, we learn once again that the Acts period was far different from what we experience today. It was part of God's government, and we live not under God's government, but under God's grace. This is the dispensation of the grace of God, and God does not act in government today. Someday He will again, and then we will see what an earth governed by God truly looks like. May God speed the day!