

Acts 9:36-43

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/acts/acts-9/acts-936-43/>

There is a believer in the coastal city of Joppa named Tabitha. She is well known to be charitable and kind. But she falls ill and dies. The disciples of Joppa send for Peter, who is not far in the town of Lydda. He comes to Joppa and prays for Tabitha. He tells her to arise, and she wakes up from death. Her resurrection becomes well known throughout the city, and many believe in Jesus because of it. Peter remains in Joppa for a time.

Peter is on his pastoral circuit, visiting communities of believers across Israel during a period of peace and growth for the church (verse 31). In Lydda, he healed a paralyzed man, Aeneas, leading all the men and women of Lydda and the plain of Sharon to faith in Jesus (v. 35).

Roughly ten miles west of Lydda was the port city of *Joppa* on the Mediterranean Sea. *Joppa* is perhaps best remembered as the city from which Jonah set sail for Tarshish, running in the opposite direction of the city of Ninevah where God had commanded him to go (Jonah 1:3). *Joppa* still exists to this day, as a part of Tel Aviv-Yafo (see map in Additional Resources).

Joppa already had a community of believers established there, whereas the towns of *Lydda* and *Sharon* do not appear to have had a community of believers prior to the healing of Aeneas. While Peter is in *Lydda*, something tragic occurs in *Joppa*. *Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. Tabitha had an honorable reputation among the believers in Joppa, a selfless woman who was abounding in deeds of giving and taking care of others' needs. She exemplified the fundamental social philosophy upon which Israel was founded, to love one's neighbor as oneself (Leviticus 19:18, Mark 12:30).*

Evidently her most helpful contribution was that she was some kind of weaver, and she clothed others out of *charity*, giving away *tunics and garments* to those in need, charging nothing. Jesus describes clothing the naked as a great deed that pleases Him, one that will be rewarded in His kingdom (Matthew 25:34-40). Simple acts of *kindness and charity* are highly prized by God, no matter how small they seem by the world's standard. The love of Christ was evident in *Tabitha*, and she was well loved in return by those who knew her.

Sadly, *it happened at that time that she fell sick and died. As was custom, her friends and family washed her body, then they laid it in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, the believers in Joppa, having heard that Peter was there (in Lydda), sent two men to him. Lydda was only ten or so miles from Joppa, very near, and the two men who were sent to Peter probably moved in haste, reaching Peter in a few hours at most. Finding him, they began imploring him, "Do not delay in coming to us."*

So Peter arose immediately and went with them. All of this could have happened in the same day. *Tabitha* may have died the night before, or even that morning. Either way, she had only lately died. It is not stated overtly why the *disciples* sent for Peter. It can be inferred that they hoped for a miraculous healing, though this account never states what they want from him, only that he *not delay in coming to the church in Joppa.*

When Peter arrived, they brought him into the upper room where Tabitha's body lay. There, all the widows stood beside Peter, weeping, mourning the loss of their generous friend, and showing all the tunics and garments that Tabitha/Dorcas used to make while she was with them. They were *showing* Peter the legacy of love *Tabitha/Dorcas* left behind, her impact on the community with all the gifts of clothing she *used to make* with her own hands for those in need.

But Peter sent them all out of the room, the widows and the men who brought him. Peter had watched Jesus do this when summoned to visit the dead daughter of Jairus. In that instance, Jesus sent all the mourners out of the room, save for Jairus and his wife, and Peter, John, and James (Mark 5:40).

Here, Peter *knelt down and prayed.* Every act of healing performed by the apostles was a result of answered prayers. The apostles did not wield powers of their own. They were authorized and commissioned by Jesus to perform miracles, yet they always did so by asking it of God, or speaking in Christ's name. So, after he *prayed* on behalf of *Tabitha*, Peter *turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, arise."*

This too is similar to what Jesus said to Jairus' daughter, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!" (Mark 5:41).

God grants *Tabitha* resurrection, seemingly for the sake of the community of disciples she impacted so profoundly through her *kindness and charity*, as well as to send waves through *Joppa* so that more would believe in Jesus. After Peter tells her to *arise*, *Tabitha opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.*

And Peter gave her his hand and raised her up. Then *calling the saints and widows* back into the room, *he presented her alive.* What were tears of grief only minutes before turned to sobs of joy to see that *Tabitha* lived.

Word spread throughout the city: *It became known all over Joppa*, the result of which was that *many believed in the Lord.* This was why Jesus performed miracles as well. The ultimate aim was always to direct the hearts of men and women to God. The acts of supernatural healing proved that Jesus was from God, and that anyone healing in His name was also from God. A man born blind, given his sight by Jesus, stated this truth succinctly, "If this man were not from God, He could do nothing" (John 9:33).

For those who had ears to hear, they would do well to listen to the messengers of God. Christ had the "words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Now the believers in *Joppa* increased due to this miracle of *Tabitha's* resurrection, believing in the name by which she was brought back, the name of Jesus, the Son of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

In recording this resurrection miracle performed through Peter, Luke sets the stage to compare this miracle to a similar miracle that will be performed through the agency of Paul. Paul will later embrace a young man who died from a fall from a window and he will come to life (Acts 20:9-10). This will also validate Paul's authority as a true apostle of Jesus, sent to the Gentiles.

Peter decides to remain in *Joppa* for a time. He *stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon*, doubtless one of the disciples. It will be at this house that Peter will receive a vision that will open the door for the gospel of Christ to be given to the Gentiles. The door will be opened by Peter, an apostle to the Jews, but the house will be built by Paul, Jesus's apostle to the Gentiles.

Biblical Text

³⁶ Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. ³⁷ And it happened at that time that she fell sick and died; and when they had washed her body, they laid it in an upper room. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, having heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him, imploring him, "Do not delay in coming to us." ³⁹ So Peter arose and went with them. When he arrived, they brought him into the upper room; and all the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing all the tunics and garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them. ⁴⁰ But Peter sent them all out 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. ⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴² It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³ And Peter stayed many days in Joppa with a tanner named Simon.