

A Certain Disciple Named Tabitha

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[0 : 0 0] let's turn then to that chapter that we read acts chapter 9 and verse 36 i want us to take a look together at this passage the short passage between 36 and the end and this miracle that takes place i think it's probably true to say that you can't get a greater miracle than someone who was dead and is raised to life again of all the miracles in the scriptures they're all marvelous but there's something particularly marvelous about someone and we find it on several occasions particularly in the ministry of jesus you have jesus's daughter you have the son of the woman of name the widow of name and you also have lazarus now you also have that very strange passage of course also in matthew chapter 28 when all of those people who were in the tombs when jesus either died or rose again we're not quite sure what it was but they rose from the dead and they went into jerusalem that's another passage it's a more enigmatic a stranger passage but you can read it for yourself when jesus when jesus died with that again is an example of people who were dead and yet were raised physically and actually and historically to life again well here's one that takes place during the acts of the apostles in the book of the acts of the apostles which of course tells the story of how the first church in the new testament was formed just after shortly after jesus rose and he ascended to the father and he left his disciples of course in the world there was a day of pentecost and then they began to spread the gospel with this incredible power many many people on the day of pentecost they became christians they came to jesus and of course the gospel spread to all the known world at that time but as the gospel spread there were the most extraordinary things done and here's one of them and it takes place in joppa a disciple named tabitha which translated means dorcas this wasn't a man you don't have to be a man to be a disciple disciples are men and women and boys and girls 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 lida was near joppa the disciples hearing the people 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 and 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 then as we read towards the don't don't stop reading there and he gave her his hand and raised her up and then calling the saints and widows he presented her alive and it became known throughout all joppa and many believed in the lord this story does not end with the raising of tabitha or dorcas this story goes on to the spread of the gospel and to people hearing about tabitha or dorcas they came to faith in jesus that's the point that's the point of the story and that was the purpose and the objective of the miracle not simply to to uh comfort those who were sad at the death of of dorcas there were many people dying and many people were sad at their death this story is not about bringing comfort or joy to sadness this story is about jesus being made known in the whole region and many believing in the lord that's what the acts of the apostles is all about that's what the church is about that's what being a christian is

about that's what we are about this evening making jesus known now let's look first of all at at this woman we don't know how old she was but we have some very basic information about her we know her name her name is given to us in two languages one of them is in aramaic tabitha is aramaic and then dorcas it's translated dorcas the hebrew and the both of these names they mean two they mean exactly the same thing it means a gazelle a gazelle means absolutely nothing to us in this culture we don't tend to call people after animals and that's just a cultural thing we call some people are called after after flowers like rose for example because we happen to think that a rose of course quite rightly so is is an amazing flower so we kind of call our people out we call people after place names and we call people just after family names but sometimes in the bible they call people after animals particularly if that animal meant something to them and in the bible you actually find don't have time to look at it but you actually find that gazelle is something which which was which

was respected and recognized as something of great great charm and beauty find that in the book of the song of solomon you go back into the song of solomon and you'll discover that that so i don't know if her name reflected her character it usually did in the bible the name was reflective of the person's character so right away it's likely that this woman that this woman had a lovely character someone who and as you read through the story you discover that that's the truth this woman certainly did have a lovely character that was what her name is first of all the second thing we know about is where she lived down on the coastal town of joppa south town which is well known to us if you know that the story of jonah for example and is and and she was a in lidda was near joppa and lidda of course was the place where uh where peter was and he came and he was through him that she was raised uh too so we know her name and address but that bible is interested in something far more importantly far more important than our name and address and you find the most important thing about dorcas is in this word in verse 36 disciple a disciple because when it comes to our standing with god our name and our address they are all secondary importance what is of primary importance is are we right with god a disciple is someone who listens to someone else a disciple is someone who sits at the feet of a teacher that's that's actually what the word disciple means for example you had the rabbis in the bible and disciples i mean for example saul of tarsus was a was a disciple of gamaliel he means he used to he had his education from gamaliel and he would sit and listen to gamaliel's teaching but in this context in the context of the christian church as soon as that word disciple is used there is no question of what it means it means a person who had come to faith and come to trust in jesus christ as their savior that's what being a true disciple means every christian is a disciple we're very often accustomed to think only of the 12 disciples but in actual fact jesus had many more than 12 disciples he left many more people than the 12 who followed him and loved him and obeyed him and here as a result of the preaching of the gospel the spread of the gospel at that time many more men and women had become disciples there were thousands by the time we come to acts chapter 9 there were thousands of disciples each one of them having come to faith in jesus christ that's what a disciple is and that's what the gospel is all about and it's got men and there are men were men disciples women disciples young people children no one is too young this evening to be a disciple are you a disciple are you a disciple of jesus that's the most important question you can possibly ask yourself this evening are you a disciple and then the the fourth thing that we find out about this woman was that she was full of good works and acts of charity full of good works and acts of charity well that's as much as we know in the in the in the 36th verse but when she died later on in the passage we get to find out the kind of things that she was doing for many years i suppose in her life the widows as they stood beside her dead body weeping they showed the tunics garments jumpers blouses shirts and other garments that dorcas had made while she was with them and this this tells us not only that dorcas was a skilled person a person who was good at making clothes but it tells us also that dorcas filled it says that she was full of good works she wasn't some kind of she didn't do this as a hobby but this was what she was known for good works and making clothes and you put those two things together and you discover that it was for people who needed the clothes that she made the clothes it wasn't just as some kind of hobby some people make dresses and clothes as a hobby they buy the pattern from the shop some people make make wedding dresses and all kinds of things and it's fantastic how people can do that incredible how the gifts that some people have this is it's not that dorcas wasn't gifted but the point here is that dorcas loves to help others and to make clothes for people who need clothes because if you were poor in that in that part of the world at that time nobody was going to give you clothes and it meant that you were going to be cold and probably hungry unless somebody took the time and the effort to sit down and make you something and to give you it in order for you to get warm and for you in order for you to be clothed that's the kind of person that dorcas was full of acts of charity in other words that she was she was a person who was full of compassion and sorrow for those who needed things now very often we draw this conclusion ah she was a disciple because she worked hard for the good of others that's what made her a disciple wrong don't go down that road she was not a disciple because she made clothes for others it's the other way around she made clothes for others because she was a disciple and we've got to get that right because otherwise you go down the road of the social gospel of trying to earn your way into heaven by doing good things many as a person has spent their life believing that they can earn their way into god's favor by doing things for others and then they discover very often when it's too late that it's impossible you can't do it that's not what the bible is all

about the bible is not about getting into heaven by doing good things if that was possible as if that was possible it's not the reason it's not is because even the good things the bible says are like filthy rags in the sight of god even when we try because as soon as a person tries to do something good even if what they're doing good is good in the eyes of others god sees that our motives are sinful ones and we do it for ourselves and their sin mixed up in all of these motives what we need more than anything else is to be cleansed and to be washed from all the sin in our hearts and only god can do that now this is a woman first and foremost who was made right with god because she believed in jesus christ as her savior she was a disciple first and foremost then and only then a whole world opened up for her and to her so that she then began in other words what i'm saying is this the wrong way to look at the gospel is to say that we are saved by the life of jesus many many people they believe that it's the life of jesus that saves us they say this what about the teaching of jesus what about turn the other cheek go the extra mile feed the poor surely that's what saves us no it's not it's the death of jesus that saves us and we when we begin with the death of jesus and and come to calvary and to trust in his sacrificial death as the lamb of god that gave his life for our sins then we discover that god changes our whole perspective then and only then the life of jesus comes into play and we begin to copy jesus and we begin to listen to his teaching and we begin to put into practice his teaching and we begin to to do the things and obey the things that he says and here was a person who got the order right so i hope that you and i this evening have got that order right jesus first god first and then others next and ourselves last so she was full of good works and acts of of of charity and it strikes me that you know in many ways you know it's the more you go into this the more you discover of the kind of life that this woman must have lived it's quite fascinating isn't it how much you can discover even from a small passage like this for example the work that this woman did can't be described as very spectacular or very important work can it very often we think of but i i've heard young and i was like this myself when i was younger when i was a young christian you pray to the lord you say lord what is your plan for my life and you say i wish i knew what god's plan was for my life god's will for you know a lot of people are they're coming to a lot of young christians who are coming to the end of their school days and going into university or college going to do an apprenticeship or whatever or young christians in college or school they're just about to graduate and they're going into their first job and they're asking quite rightly how is god going to lead me what decisions am i going to make and very often very very often you get what they mean by that is something big when we talk about god's plan we automatically think of well god must have something really important for me to do what about sewing clothes spending your life sewing clothes for those who need it it's not very spectacular it's not very it's not very uh cool is it but that may be what god has for you are you just as willing to sew clothes for others as you are to do the big things in the christian life and very often it's when we show ourselves willing to do the wee things the little things the things that nobody notice notices and when we're willing to be a servant and a slave to others god works in that person and prepares that person for perhaps more visible things the things that are more visible but the fact is that for the most part most christians most people who follow jesus will never be remembered they'll never be known for for what they did and this woman would never have been known we would never know anything about this woman unless she had died it's quite strange isn't it this woman hadn't died when she died when she did and if the disciples hadn't come and if this miracle hadn't taken place this woman would have been forgotten about darkest nobody would have known her and yet she would have died and she would have gone to glory and the lord would have rewarded her for her for faith in jesus christ and what she had done for him the lord has promised that because that's what's important isn't it that god sees what we don't see it's not very big is it but maybe god is maybe god it's not very successful it's not what people today would call success is it we live in a world that's full obsessed with what we call success even to the point of coming into the into christian circles i recently subscribed to sky tv and that introduced me to the religious channels that there are i don't know if you ever watch the religious channels there's about 10 of them and it's a fascinating world of all kinds of different preaching styles and different types of worship and all of these things on the different channels most of them most of them are very very very very different and i'm not i'm not here to spend time criticizing these these channels sometimes you hear things that are absolutely brilliant and there's a tremendous tremendous opportunity isn't there imagine the opportunity that is to present the gospel all over the world tonight that's the first time in recent first time ever there's ever been that opportunity and yet it's also it's also a huge danger because if it's not the gospel then the opportunity is gone and people are going to be listening to all the wrong stuff and sadly that's what

some of it is and i'm thinking of the kind of person that you get i'm not going to name any names but who'll stand there and he'll twist to the bible and it so makes me so angry because when somebody changes the gospel then they destroy it it don't no longer is the gospel you know what they say they say you'll stand there and he says you know god wants you to be successful and god wants to pour out success and happiness on you and he's ready to do it now all you have to do is to try harder and to do the right things and god is there and and god is going to give you his own help and his own and his own leading and guiding he wants to open up a new world for you so that you will be happy and so that you will no longer be weak and unsuccessful no longer struggle and so that you will have all the good things in life that's rubbish that's and you know why i'm saying that because the bible is completely different look at what jesus says in matthew chapter 5 here's what god wants you to have blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth

[20 : 17] where's the success in that success is what god wants you to have of his own spirit not the way that the world looks at success and here's not a very successful person dorcas was she a person who spent her life sewing clothes for poor but you know that's what the lord wanted her to do and that may be what the lord wants you to do why because you're why is that so important because you're doing it for the lord you're putting god first and you're honoring him and serving him and you're recognizing at the same time because the person who recognizes and honors jesus will will at the same time recognize the needs of others you remember what jesus did when his disciples he took the basin in john chapter 13 and he went around and he washed he did the job the work that only the slave would do that's what god calls us to do and sometimes it involves hardship and frustration and it involves tedium and it involves not being recognized and not being very successful that's what god wants us to be and that's what god wants i thank god that there were people like dorcas here who were prepared for the sake of others and you know what makes this more marvelous than anything that there were poor souls in joppa at that time whose lives were changed because of a coat or a jumper or a jacket that they got from this woman and that transformed her she maybe saved their lives from dying of cold or dying of starvation or something else but there was there was one maybe she did maybe she felt that she couldn't she couldn't do enough because there were so many poor people at that time and maybe she felt frustrated every day and she wished there was more people to help her who knows but the fact is that there were some ones and the twos whose lives were helped and transformed by this woman who'd worked for jesus and they knew why she was doing what she was doing because she made it clear to them and they could see the love that she had for them reflecting the love that she had for jesus and every time they looked at her every time they received something from her they would see jesus and it was they knew it was because jesus was working in her and perhaps many of them that was for many of them that was a stepping stone to themselves becoming christians and them becoming disciples at the same time you know what you know what lies at the root of this it lies at the root of it that this woman that this woman did what very few people in the modern 21st century western world are prepared to do and that is to deny themselves you know what's obsessive in this world that utterly self-centered and christians are utterly self-centered and opportunities tonight are being lost to the gospel because we are choosing the easy life we're choosing to live the way we want it and we're choosing to just do what's easy and what's pleasing to ourselves instead of doing what god wants us to do and who knows who knows at the end of the day how we are going to be judged for the way in which we lived our lives i just put that challenge believe me i feel just as uncomfortable as you do i'm not pointing the finger at anyone i'm talking to myself as much as i'm talking to anyone but the gospel places a responsibility on each and every believer to see their responsibility towards other people with the love and the compassion of jesus christ

titus chapter 2 likewise show yourselves in all respect to be model of good works what is good works i i challenge you tonight look up the all look up all the places in the new testament where it talks about good works you know what good works are good works are the things you do for the help and for the benefit of other people you say well i i can't make clothes maybe making clothes is not appropriate are you telling me that you can't do a single thing for someone else who needs you are in some way this woman was gifted she obviously was interested in what she was doing she was able to with her hands god has given us gifts abilities and these abilities are to be used for the service of other people i'm asking you tonight what gifts do you have and are you prepared to use them for the for the service and for the sake and for the help of others as a means of witnessing to

the lord jesus of being christ's examples in this world that's what he wants us to be so whatever gifts it might not be might not be making anything i don't know it might be picking up a phone to someone who you know is lonely and you know you know who would welcome somebody just calling them to ask how you doing or going around to see someone who you know is housebound or someone who you know would love to have someone like yourself to come around even for 10 minutes 15 minutes for the most part it doesn't take much the problem is it doesn't happen no i shouldn't have said that i know it does happen i know that some of you are very very good at visiting and caring for the needs of others but there could be more there could be more and the lord is asking us and commanding us i believe through his word to take the basin and to go around and to be the servant and to minister to the needs of others in our own small way with the gifts that the lord has given to us you see the more you look into a passage like this the more it challenges us and it shows us the kind of life that we need to live if we're going to fulfill the lord's command in our lives now she died and as i said before it's interesting isn't it that that what we know of dorcas we only know because she died the first thing that we first thing that we notice is that that they heard her death caused shock waves all over the church at that time they were absolutely heartbroken at her death it's quite interesting isn't it that you might say well why is the church heartbroken at the death of a fellow believer surely they know surely they know that if this woman has been a believer in jesus then she's gone to a better place and surely they can rejoice at that now you may think that that's a very foolish thing to say but there are i've come across people who who try and reason that way surely we should be rejoicing and the fact is the bible tells us that when a believer dies we do not sorrow as those who have no hope nevertheless we do sorrow why do we sorrow because death is an intrusion and death brings a separation between families and friends and with the within the church and even if we know that a fellow believer has been taken away to be with the lord it still creates a huge sense of loss emotionally and in terms of the fellowship that that person brought in this world and so it's right to cry it's right to be sorry we cannot help but being sorry when someone and to show that sorrow when someone is taken away from us you have a great example of that in acts chapter 8 when when stephen was put to death and even knowing that during his process of execution he had seen heaven opened and christ waiting for him waiting to receive him you might think that the fellow disciples would be saying well how glorious is that that's absolutely wonderful no they didn't they made great lamentation for him godly men they said a inverted chapter devout men buried stephen and made great lamentation over him and that and that sorrow was caused by the by the the death of of lydia of dorcas at that time and peter was called as an apostle you'll notice that it was peter that came to through whom now this is very significant please listen to this and again i'm not very popular sometimes for saying this but the apostles were given a particular unique ministry of miracle and i'm not very i'm not everyone agrees with this it's particularly people who believe that miracles should be happening in this day and age i'm saying they don't i'm not saying they can't i'm not saying that god can't there's nothing that god can't do and from time to time on rare occasions strange things and special things and unusual things do happen i don't deny that for a moment what i deny emphatically is that today is the same day as when jesus lived in the world and when the and when the apostles lived in the world it simply isn't the facts speak for themselves and it's fruitless it's futile to try and imagine otherwise why don't we just accept what is and i want you to notice that it was peter that were called for now if miracles happened all the time at that time why call for peter because he was an apostle and apostles the apostles had been given that particular ministry of miracles apostle was someone who had seen the resurrection they had seen the ascended they had seen the risen christ and who jesus had sent into the world to be his apostles and it's as such that peter is called and peter the way in which he raises dorcas is also a very interesting thing first of all first of all it happened according to the example of christ you know there's something if you know your bible there's something very very similar about this story and the raising of jairus's daughter from the dead peter words peter used and i don't think i'm exaggerating i don't think that i'm sometimes sometimes you wonder whether you're you're you're reading too much into it but what peter said is tabitha cum tabitha cum tabitha he said arise when jesus raised jairus's daughter he said talitha cum and people would recognize that and they would recognize that it was after the pattern of jesus this was all centered on jesus don't make the mistake in thinking that miracles were centered on the person who was raised they aren't they're there to display the person of jesus as the son of god and it was after the pattern of jesus that peter raised this woman from the dead that's the first thing second thing it was by the power of jesus peter put them all outside knelt down and

prayed he said tabitha arise he didn't just say tabitha arise he prayed who did he pray to he prayed to the lord so that by his power peter didn't have the power within himself so that by the lord's power that he would that she would rise from the dead but i believe that in this chapter we have a picture of the gospel as well it's just the same as i believe that in every instance every case where someone who's dead is raised to life again god is showing us a picture of a person who is dead in trespasses and sins that's what the bible tells us a person who is unconverted is dead in trespasses and sins and as that person listens to the gospel and as god works in that person's life and in his heart that person comes to the end of their life and dies and as god continues to work in that person's life god works a miracle in which a new person arises that's why paul said if anyone is in christ he is a new creation that's god's work god's work is not just about change it's about rising from the dead that means that every person who trusts in jesus today is a new person risen from the dead are you an old person or are you a new person if you're an old person come to the end come to jesus turn away from everything that is wrong and sinful in your life and trust in jesus and ask him to raise you from the dead but fourthly this great miracle brought glory to jesus and that was the whole point of what happened here to bring confirmation to the ministry and to the reality and to the truth of who jesus was there were people who didn't see tabitha being raised from the dead they only heard about it but as they heard about it they knew that she had died others had witnessed her dying and then they heard that she had been raised literally to life once again that just didn't happen any more than it happens today or in any other generation the one great impossibility that there is is raising someone from the dead as many of us most of us know to our great sorrow and yet that's what happened here there can be no other power there is no other explanation god alone has the power of life and death and the authority over life and death that's why

I know tonight that jesus is the way and the truth and the life because he has that power that stares you in the face here was a woman who was dead they were just about to bury her she was raised to life again by the power of jesus and today two thousand years later when we're asking who is the truth the answer is clear jesus christ who has the power both the power over life and death and who says i am the resurrection and the life he who believes in me though he were dead yet shall he live jesus promise to us tonight is nothing greater than that life from the dead let's pray our father in heaven we ask now that we will bow in your presence and submit ourselves in faith to jesus we give thanks oh lord once again that we have read and looked over the word and we have tried to understand it we've tried to consider it together and we have once again discovered that this is the living word of god it challenges and warns us it instructs us it feeds us we ask lord tonight to be to be changed by your word we pray especially for those who need to follow jesus who need to begin to follow jesus we pray that you will take hold of them and open up their hearts for we ask in jesus name amen