

Acts 9:36

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

Analysis

Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. Tabitha's introduction establishes her character through practical godliness, demonstrating that genuine faith produces tangible love for others.

Certain disciple indicates Tabitha's Christian identity. The dual naming (Aramaic Tabitha, Greek Dorcas, both meaning 'gazelle') suggests bilingual community and serves historical authentication. Full of good works describes character saturated with godly activity—not occasional charity but lifestyle of service.

Good works and almsdeeds specifies practical mercy ministry—caring for poor, widows, needy. Reformed theology distinguishes works as fruit demonstrating salvation from works as root producing salvation. Tabitha's deeds evidenced genuine faith; they didn't earn God's favor but flowed from it. James 2:17 principle applies: faith without works is dead.

The emphasis on which she did stresses personal involvement. Tabitha didn't merely fund charitable projects; she personally sewed garments and served needy. This hands-on compassion exemplifies Christian love—not abstract sentiment but concrete action meeting real needs.

Historical Context

Joppa (modern Jaffa/Tel Aviv-Yafo), Mediterranean port city, featured significant Jewish population with growing Christian community. Ancient culture highly valued charity, but Christian motivation differed—loving others because Christ first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Widows particularly vulnerable in ancient society lacked social safety net. Tabitha's ministry to them fulfilled biblical justice emphases (Isaiah 1:17, James 1:27). Her prominence in Joppa Christian community demonstrated women's vital role in early Christianity—not apostolic office but significant service ministry. The account dates to approximately 38-39 CE, shortly before Peter's Cornelius encounter which occurred in nearby Caesarea.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How do good works demonstrate genuine faith without being faith's foundation?
2. What characterizes Christian charity versus other forms of benevolence?
3. In what ways should practical mercy ministry occupy believers' time and resources?
4. How does Tabitha model women's vital role in church service and community impact?
5. What balance should exist between personal hands-on service and financial support of others' ministry?

Interlinear Text

Ἐν	Ἰόππῃ	δέ	τις	ἦν	μαθήτρια	ὀνόματι	Ταβιθά
at	Joppa	Now	a certain	there was	disciple	named	Tabitha
G1722	G2445	G1161	G5100	G2258	G3102	G3686	G5000
ὧν	διερμηνευομένη	λέγεται	Δορκάς·	αὕτη	ἦν		
which	by interpretation	is called	Dorcas	this woman	there was		
G3739	G1329	G3004	G1393	G3778	G2258		
πλήρης	ἀγαθῶν	ἔργων	καὶ	ἐλεημοσυνῶν	ὧν	ἐποίει	
full	of good	works	and	almsdeeds	which	she did	
G4134	G18	G2041	G2532	G1654	G3739	G4160	

Additional Cross-References

2 Chronicles 2:16 (Parallel theme): And we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as thou shalt need: and we will bring it to thee in flotes by sea to Joppa; and thou shalt carry it up to Jerusalem.

Titus 2:7 (Good): In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity,

Titus 3:8 (Good): This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

Hebrews 13:21 (Good): Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Acts 10:31 (Parallel theme): And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

James 1:27 (Parallel theme): Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Titus 2:14 (Good): Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Ezra 3:7 (Parallel theme): They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

Ephesians 2:10 (Good): For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

John 15:5 (Parallel theme): I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.