

Acts Series #10 “God Of The Impossible”

Acts 9:36-42

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Requests For Burial*

1. People will often leave instructions for how they want to be buried
2. The Associated Press ran this interesting story of a British man who specified in his will that he wanted to be cremated and that at the memorial service the organist play Cole Porter's song "Every Time We Say Goodbye".
3. Well, we was cremated as he wished but the organist was in such a hurry to get to the funeral home that he made a mistake and grabbed the wrong sheet music.
4. He didn't realize his error until he was well into the song, which to everyone's surprise was another of Cole Porter's songs — "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes!"

B. *Today*

1. We're going to see an unusual memorial service in our study today
2. At the end of Ch. 9
3. Let's again set the scene
4. Persecution had scattered the disciples from Jerusalem into the surrounding regions, and everywhere they went they carried the gospel
5. New groups of disciples sprang up all over the place
6. Peter, having a true pastor's heart, wanted to make sure they were all doing well so he decided to take a tour of the villages and towns around the area and check in with the new churches
7. When he arrived in Lydda, which is a little over 20 miles NW of Jer., he found a man who had been paralyzed for 8 years
8. Peter healed him, and when the people of the area saw him made whole, there was a mass response of faith—virtually the entire city and region came to Christ
9. Then the scene shifts to the port city of Joppa, about 10 miles west of Lydda . . .

II.TEXT

A. *V. 36*

{36} At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.

1. A small community of disciples existed there in Joppa
2. Among them was a real saint of a woman
3. Her name in Hebrew was *Tabitha*, which means “gazelle”

- a. and what a fitting name for this lady
- b. for as we read on we find that she was indeed *graceful*
- 4. Luke tells us that the Greek version of her name - “gazelle” was *Dorcas*
 - a. now, I don’t know about you, but I prefer the name *Tabitha*
 - b. I certainly don’t mean to offend anyone here who might be named *Dorcas*
 - c. it’s just that the name *Tabitha* sounds so much more graceful than *Dorcas*
 - d. we could call her Dorrie, but not Tabby, because then she’d sound more like a cat than a gazelle
 - e. enough of this - we’ll call her Tabitha
- 5. Luke describes her as full of good works and charitable deeds
 - a. she was a person who well understood that while we are not saved by good works, we are saved *for* them
 - b. she understood God’s heart for the poor and needy and made it her aim to take care of them as best she could
 - c. her charity and love was well known in the area
 - d. and she was deeply loved by the church in Joppa

B. V. 37

{37} But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.

- 1. While Peter was in nearby Lydda, working with the church there, Tabitha became ill and died
- 2. It was a shock to the disciples and a cause of great mourning as they lost someone so dear to them all
- 3. They followed the burial custom of the day by washing her body
- 4. But they stopped short of anointing the body with the balms and perfumes that were applied just before placing it in the tomb
- 5. Someone remembered that Peter was not far away, so they sent word for him to come

C. V. 38

{38} And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them.

- 1. Because of conditions in the ancient world, the dead had to be buried quickly
- 2. Lydda was about 10 miles from Joppa and the round trip would take a full day
- 3. So it would be at least 2 days from Tabitha’s death till Peter could arrive, and it was probably more like 3
- 4. This was well past the time they would inter their dead

D. V. 39

{39} Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.

1. What a pathetic scene this is
 - a. I mean *pathetic* in its truest sense
 - b. there is real *pathos* here - real passion
 - c. the sorrow is so thick you could cut it
 2. Tabitha, though gracious as a gazelle, was the stalwart champion of the widows of Joppa
 - a. widows shared the very bottom of the social scale with slaves
 - b. and in some ways they were worse off -
 - c. because at least slaves had an owner who would house, cloth, and feed them
 - d. but widows had no one and would often roam the streets, living off scraps and the charity of strangers
 3. Tabitha was the Mother Teresa of Joppa
 - a. she took in the outcasts,
 - b. fed and clothed them
 4. When she died, their light went out
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5. Peter is taken to the room where her body is lain
 6. All around him is the sound of women weeping
 7. One by one the widows who have come to pay their respects walk up to Peter and show him their clothing - all hand sewn with tender care by their hero
 8. The room was a living mosaic and tribute to Tabitha's good works
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9. I wonder what crossed Peter's mind as he stood there
 10. I wonder what he was thinking;
 - a. what questions did he struggled with?
 - b. what prayer did he silently utter?

E. Vs. 40-41

{40} But Peter put 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} Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

1. Friends look closely at v. 40
 - a. do you see anything there -
 - b. does it jog your memory?
2. It should: Let me read you another passage . . . (Mark 5)

{21} Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea.

{22} And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet

{23} and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live."

{24} So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him.

{37} And He permitted no one to follow Him except Peter, James, and John the brother

of James.

{38} Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly.

{39} When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping."

{40} And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying.

{41} Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise."

{42} Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement.

3. Peter was one of 6 in the room when Jesus raised that little girl from the dead
4. He had seen Jesus send everyone else out and then pause over her bed, look down, reach out and take her cold, lifeless hand in His
5. Then He said, very simply, "Little girl, rise! = Talitha, cumi"
6. Now, as Peter stood in that upper room in Joppa, seeking God on what to do, the Holy Spirit recalled to his memory something Jesus had said
 - a. (John 14:12) "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father."
 - b. also, when Jesus had sent out the disciples, He told them a part of their mission was to *raise the dead* [1]
7. Up to this point, Peter had been faithfully following the Lord's leading
 - a. we've been following his story in Acts for the past several weeks
 - b. we saw Peter take his first step by obediently waiting in Jer. till the Holy Spirit came upon him
 - c. then we saw him take the next step by faithfully proclaiming the truth about Jesus to the crowds gathered at Pentecost
 - d. then we see him taking another step by healing the lame man at the gate to the temple
 - e. then we see him take another step by boldly preaching Christ to the Sanhedrin
 - f. then there are more steps of healing and moving in the realm of the miraculous
 - g. then he takes that monumental step of crossing the cultural boundary between Jews and Samaritans
8. Each one of these steps was a stretch for Peter
9. Each one of them was made by faith
 - a. no matter how clear the leading of the Spirit
 - b. each one of them required him to go past his own experience and put his trust in God
10. But in that upper room in Joppa, Peter faced his biggest challenge
 - a. it's one thing to preach to a hostile crowd
 - b. and it's a challenge to walk up to a lame man with the intent to heal

- c. but it is an altogether different thing to look on a lifeless corpse and bring it back to life
- 11. Peter knew that better than anyone
- 12. But he also knew that God had proven Himself utterly faithful in every step to this point
- 13. And he also knew that Jesus had told them they were to raise the dead in His name
- 14. He had seen Jesus do it—and as a follower, he believed Jesus had walked him to this woman’s side to bring her back
- 15. So he knelt and prayed; looking to God to do His work
- 16. Then he spoke almost exactly the same words Jesus had said to Jairus’ daughter, “Tabitha, cumi = Tabitha, rise”
- 17. Her eyes fluttered open and she turned to see Peter by her side
- 18. And as she sat up, Peter took her hand, just as Jesus had taken the little girl’s hand
- 19. Then he called Tabitha’s family and friends back into the room
- 20. You can imagine the joy that marked that reunion

F. V. 42

{42} And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

- 1. There are some miracles that cannot be easily explained away by the skeptics, and this was one of them
- 2. When word spread that Tabitha had been raised from the dead by the power of Jesus, many turned in faith to Him

III. CONCLUSION

A. What Can we Learn?

- 1. What can we learn from this story? Much
- 2. We tend to look at people in the bible like Peter and John as super saints; as people completely out of our league
- 3. When we see them leading hundreds of people to faith in Christ, healing the sick, and raising people from the dead, it’s easy to conclude that they are in a class all to themselves and common people like ourselves can never hope to follow in their example
- 4. But the whole point of the Bible’s story of these guys is to show that they ARE just like us
 - a. sure Peter was a mighty man of faith and power
 - b. but he’s also the guy Jesus rebuked as being the mouthpiece of the devil
 - c. the same guy who trusted God to raise Tabitha from the dead denied he knew Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest
- 5. Consider John, the disciple of love
 - a. he was the one who laid hands on the Samaritans and they received the Holy Spirit
 - b. but a year or so earlier he had asked permission from Jesus to call down fire from heaven to wipe them all out

6. You see, friends, the point is this -
7. While we see such mighty miracles in the book of Acts, they were all performed by normal, everyday people just like us
8. What allowed them to do such great deeds for the Kingdom of God was not something in themselves = it was their simple faith and confidence in God
9. Peter was just like you, and you are just like Peter
10. The only difference is that Peter had been brought, step by step to a place where it was time for him to take another step of faith and trust God to raise the dead
11. Every believe in this room is called to a walk of faith
12. And every Christian in this room is being led of the Lord to take some new step of faith
13. No matter how long you've known the Lord or how far you've gone with Him, He wants to lead you on to a deeper and more intimate walk with Him
14. And no matter how much you know or how much you've seen, every new step is a step of faith
 - a. it's a step of looking beyond ourselves to Him
 - b. it requires trust
 - c. it's a risk
15. What we can rejoice in, is knowing that whatever step of faith the Lord calls us to, He has faithfully and patiently brought us there, one step at a time
16. He does not call us to some step we are totally unprepared for
17. Look at Peter for example -
 - a. Peter wasn't called on to raise someone from the dead on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit first came on the disciples
 - b. no, Peter wasn't brought to this challenge until God had faithfully taught him to trust in smaller things first
 - 1) preaching
 - 2) healing a lame man
 - 3) facing the Sanhedrin
 - 4) and all the other unrecorded lessons he had learned before he arrived in Joppa and Tabitha's room
18. Christian, take comfort in that!
 - a. as you follow the Lord, He will never bring you to something he by His grace hasn't prepared you for
 - b. as we sing, "He will not let you fall."
 - c. no, He will walk with you and see you through
 - d. the steps of a righteous person are ordered by the Lord
 - e. your whole call is to trust Him, and take those steps as He lays them out

B. God Of The Impossible

1. Then, last, think of the incredible lesson Peter and the disciples at Joppa learned that day
2. They learned that with God, nothing is impossible!
3. To the world's way of thinking, death is the end

4. When a person dies, that's it - the story's over
5. To the world's mind, there is no rising for the dead, it is an utter impossibility
6. But the Christian has this hope and promise - with God, nothing is impossible
 - (Mat 19:26) Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."
 - (Mark 9:23) Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."
 - (Mark 14:36) Jesus said, "Father, all things are possible for You."
7. Peter had heard Jesus say these things
8. And that day in Joppa he once again saw them to be true
9. Friend, let this be your hope and confidence
10. What is impossible with man, is not with God
11. No matter how deep the hole, how dark the night
 - a. no matter how great the sorrow,
 - b. or complicated the problem
 - c. there is a solution with God

[1] Matthew 10:8