

I have had the occasion to think about death and dying since I have been preaching here. I first came in late September and we had a member that was terminally ill who died by the end of the year. What did we say about him? We had one of the former pastors of Community Christian Church die, and what did we say about him? We have had friends, neighbors, acquaintances die, and what did we say about them? We have had mothers, mother-in-laws, aunts and cousins die. What did we say about them? We had a dear one of this congregation die just recently? What did we say about him? When it comes time for people to speak of us, what will they say about our contribution to our families, our church, our community, and our world? What will they say?

Chapter 8 and the first part of chapter 9 of Acts, that we did not read, were about the early church going through a time of persecution at the hands of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. They had willingly commissioned a young man named Saul to go to the synagogues (meeting houses) of Damascus and bring back any man or woman who was of the Way (that's what they called people who followed Jesus' teachings), arrest them, and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial and imprisonment. After the resurrection of Jesus the Christians had just been an annoyance to the Jew. Now the Jewish leaders were out to destroy the Christians. So this was a time of persecution. After Stephen was killed by stoning for preaching the Gospel of Jesus many of the Christians had left Jerusalem and some were living in Damascus. Saul was determined to stop them in their tracks.

But as God would have it, the more the Christians were persecuted, the more they scattered, and the more they scattered the more they shared the Gospel with others? However, on his way to Damascus Saul had an encounter with the risen Lord Jesus and his world was turned up-side down. Rather than trying to stop the Christians, Saul joined them and preached to others to do the same. So after the persecution stopped there was a time of peace for the church and the Holy Spirit

increased their numbers. It seems during this time of peace the Disciple Peter was free to go to all the cities and towns in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria to visit the believers and encourage them. If there was any false teaching he would correct them; if they had not received the Holy Spirit Peter or other disciples would pray that God would give them the Holy Spirit and would lay hands on them.

On one trip while Peter was out visiting the churches he came to Lydda and healed a man that had been sick for eight (8) years. This man's healing caused the people in his town and near-by towns to accept Jesus as their savior. This was important because Lydda was known for the Jewish scholars who lived there and they heard the Good News about Jesus. Many of them became Christians and shared the good news with others.

While Peter was at Lydda, a well-loved Christian woman (a disciple) in Joppa by the name of Dorcas . . . died. Her name means "gazelle" in Greek as does its counterpart Tabitha in Aramaic. She was a disciple, one that had faith in Christ and was baptized. She showed her faith by her good works. She was known for her help to the poor. We don't know if Dorcas was wealthy but we do know that she used her resources to help the people that were poor that she met. This was her ministry. She was not just concerned about living a spirit filled life, but she showed her faith by her good works. It does not say that these poor were of the church or not, but she helped those that were in need. One scholar said she was commended not for the alms (money) which she gave, but for the almsdeeds (good works) which she did.

We know that she was sick and she died. Due to the hot climate of Palestine, dead bodies decayed rapidly, so burial usually took place within a few hours after death. If someone died late in the day, burial took place the next day, but always within twenty-four (24) hours after death.

Her friends and those with her did not bury her right away. Rather they washed her. According to custom they washed her in warm water, which, if there were any life remaining in the body, would revive it. So according to Acts, she was truly dead. Then they sent two men the 12 miles from the city of Lydda and Joppa to bring Peter the 12 miles back. Joppa, the city where Dorcas lived, was a Mediterranean seaport, one of the only natural harbors in Israel. Joppa means beautiful and was named that because of the way the sunlight reflects off its buildings and city walls.

Dorcas was died and they sent for Paul. The men had to walk 12 miles to get him and 12 miles to bring him back. Why? No one had been raised from the dead in the early church so far as the records of Acts report. But they sent for Peter. The believers had such great faith that they expected the Lord to use Peter to resurrect Dorcas.

When Peter arrived, he sent the weeping widows and other believers out of the upstairs . . . room, prayed on his knees for Dorcas, and commanded her to arise. I'm not sure that it was the faith of Peter, but the faith of the church of Joppa that God heard! You see, to avoid ceremonial defilement, Peter did not touch her until after God restored her to life.

This miracle, like previous ones, led many to believe in the Lord. After this miracle Peter remained in Joppa for some time (lit., "sufficient days") with a tanner named Simon. His house was "by the sea."<sup>1</sup>

So back to my question, what will they say? Dorcas made an enormous impact on her community by her good works and charitable deeds, "such as making tunics and other garments for the poor." When she died, the room was filled with

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lit. literal, literally

<sup>1</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:379

mourners, very likely many of the people she had helped. When she was brought back to life, the news raced through town. Her life was a testimony of her faith! Her deeds were a testimony of her faith! Her resurrection was a testimony of the power of God! We don't know anything about the time when she died and was buried, but we know that her resurrection caused a revival in her community! She was never the same! The church of Joppa was never the same! Word would have spread by every passenger and sailor on every ship about the miracle of her resurrection. Can you imagine what they said about this woman of faith and how her life promoted the good news about Jesus? God uses great preacher like Peter and Paul, but God also uses those who have gifts of kindness like Dorcas. Rather than wishing you had other gifts, make good use of the gifts God has given you.

Don't worry about what they will say about you. Spend your time using your gifts to help others to the glory of God! Ask: What special gifts do I have? How will I use those gifts to the glory of God?

Do your neighbors, coworkers and friends know that you are a Christian? What will they say about you?