

## Our preparation for Service.

*"In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor."* Acts 9:36

**NUGGET** – In reading the whole account of Dorcas / Tabitha ([Acts 9:36-42](#)) we see an example of a life of Christian service. She is described in our verse today 3 ways. We are told that she was a person who did good. It doesn't say she was a good person, but that she did, that is she performed, good. It says she did good and helped the poor. She participated in the giving of aid to the poor.

But you might ask, what has this to do with preparation for Service? Well that comes from the third descriptor of her in our verse. It says that she was... a disciple. To understand Tabitha as one who did good and who aided the poor we must understand first that she is described as a disciple. She is one whose life has been prepared for Service by her being follower of Jesus Christ. The term 'disciple' is applied to those whose identity in life is defined by a relationship of repentance and love with Christ.

Her life was defined by her relationship with Christ not her relationship with a religion. Her relationship with **Jesus** is what prepared her for doing good and aiding the poor. The same is true of you. By your relationship with Jesus you are prepared to do good and aid the poor also. Now that doesn't mean that to be like Dorcas you too have to make "robes and other clothing".

- What are some ways that your relationship with Jesus enables you to express doing good?
- Why would you aid the poor as a result of your relationship with Jesus?

The thing with Dorcas is, that making robes and other clothing is what she was able to do so she did it. But that ability was not what had prepared her to "do good". God enables you uniquely with talents, gifts and abilities. But again those things alone, like Dorcas' ability to sew are not what prepare us for Service. To be prepared for Service like Tabitha is to be faithful and steadfast in our following of Christ.

Being a disciple is an intentional thing, it's not a matter of knowledge. A disciple seeks to practice what the Master teaches. To *know* what the Master teaches is not equivalent to *practicing* it. Oh sure we know that we will never reach perfection in our practice, but that is not what a disciple is called to do. It is not perfection that prepares us for Service, it is honest, faithful following.

**APPLICATION** – Consider these things.

1. You have been faithful today in learning more of Christ and you've been further prepared for Service. (That's cause for thanks to God!)
2. In your life Jesus has given you skills and talents, what good, in Jesus name, could you do (or prepare to do) in the next 24 hours?
3. If time and money were no object, what aid to the poor, in Jesus name, would you like to see done?

**PRAY** – Give thanks to God for His faithfulness to you and enabling you to faithfully spend time in His Word today. Ask His guidance for the preparation of Service.

## GOING DEEPER

This week's nugget out of [Acts 9:36-42](#) is set in the early days of the growth of the church. In fact this discussion of Dorcas / Tabitha follows on the heels of Saul's conversion and escape from Damascus. [Acts 9:1-31](#). Talk about a person being prepared for service! Saul was being prepared for later service by learning to be a faithful disciple right from the start.

When you read the account of Saul's conversion from being a persecutor of the church to being a disciple of Jesus many different things are reported; light from heaven, voices, a conversation, blindness, directions, help from others. This was a process that took place over days. But when the process was over Saul immediately began to preach Jesus Christ.

Jesus' conversion of Saul turned Saul into one who begins quickly to testify of the truth of Jesus Christ. But his testimony was not immediately received well by other followers of Christ. (What insight do we get from Ananias?) There needed to be a vetting process. This too was part of learning to be faithful in being a follower of Christ.

And for Saul, when he later became Paul, this process of being examined became a recurring theme, although later this came mostly from the Jews. See [Acts 13:1-14](#) [Acts 13:42-14:20](#). What benefits might come from such a process? Regarding Service, how might the process Saul / Paul went through bring about a willingness to serve others? Looking back on your life what parallels of the process do you identify with?

Moving on to another thought regarding preparation for Service, we talked of Dorcas doing good. Christian teaching tells us that doing good works can only be done by those who follow Christ. Consider the following regarding what it is that made Dorcas or you and I able to do good deeds.

"Good works must not only conform to the divine Law, but they must also flow from a willing spirit, that is, from the love of God. Whatever is not done from a willing spirit, from the love of God, for the purpose of serving Him, is a transgression of the divine Law, [Rom 13:8-10](#); [Matt. 22:37-40](#) ...Only those works are acceptable in the sight of God which are done willingly, from the love of God, [Ps. 110:3](#); [2 Cor. 8:3-4, 12](#).

To perform works of this nature is an art which only a Christian can accomplish. Non-Christians can do works which conform externally to God's Law, but the motives behind these works are at best only those that come naturally (the natural inclination to work, the natural love toward parents, wife, children, natural sympathy). The love of God and the desire to serve Him is found only in those who have come to faith in the Gospel by the operation of the Holy Ghost and as a result of this faith love Him who first loved them.

Good works, as Luther reminds us, "are done out of heaven", that is, are performed by those who through faith in Christ already possess heaven and accordingly bring the works which they do on earth to God as a thank-offering ([Rom. 12:1](#)). For this reason, catechisms and works on theology point out, in defining good works, that they can be performed only by believers."

Luther continually stresses the axiomatic truth: "The person must in all cases first be good and pious before he can do good works" and Luther tells us, too, how the person becomes good and pious. [How they are prepared! Like Dorcas was!] "Whoever believes in Christ, believes that He was born for us, died, was buried and raised again from the dead, he is born anew. He is a new man... If you continue in this faith, the Holy Ghost... strengthens and increases your faith, puts a new understanding into your heart, and awakens in you holy and new thoughts and affections, so that you begin to love God and refrain from all wicked actions, and do from your heart what God would have you do, and love your neighbor."<sup>1</sup> God's peace on being prepared for the doing of good deeds in His service this week, P.R.

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1. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, electronic ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1950, c1951, c1953).