



“A Lovely Gazelle Leaps Again”

Acts 9:36-43

May 8, 2022

Now as we open the Bible this morning on Mother’s Day, it is my great pleasure to take you to a delightful, costal town called Joppa. Today the city is called Jaffa. In biblical times, it was called Joppa. Today it is Jaffa, and is in the region of Tel Aviv Israel, thirty-five miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Here is a depiction of what it may have looked like in biblical times (pastor shows overhead). Here is another photograph of what it looks like today. You can see why it was named Joppa, which is actually a Hebrew word meaning *beautiful*.

There on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea the waters are blue and the sun shines. The sand is warm and yet the sea breeze is cool. I think that this looks like a pretty good place to spend some time. Doesn’t that look nice? Joppa, a place called beautiful.

Yet I wonder how many of you know that even in idyllic costal settings, pain and suffering still invades lives. I wonder how many of you know that even in places that seem like paradise, sorrows like sea billows still roll. Even in the lives of the loveliest women, sickness still spreads and life is still very, very fragile.

I wonder if anyone else is aware of these things. But further, I wonder how many of you know that even in the midst of such affliction, there is living hope. I wonder if you know that even in the midst of the tearful times that we experience, the Kingdom of God is in fact advancing on the earth and there is everlasting life to be found in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Because Jesus raises the dead, we have a living hope in Christ that is even stronger than death.

All of these realities come together in the portion of God’s Word that I want to share with you this morning from the book of Acts. Will you turn your attention there with me? Acts Chapter 9, starting in Verse 36:

³⁶Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. ³⁷In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. ³⁸Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, “Please come to us without delay.” ³⁹So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. ⁴⁰But 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. ⁴¹And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴²And it became known

throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner.

Amen, may the Lord bless the reading of His Word!

If you take another look at this photograph of modern day Joppa, you might notice a tower that rises up and is prominent among the buildings that we also see here. That tower is a part of St. Peter's Church that was built in Joppa in the 1600s to memorialize the events that we just read about here in the pages of Scripture.

Here we have the record of a mighty miracle and it comes to us as we follow the Holy Spirit's ministry through a familiar disciple, Simon Peter. After some time in Jerusalem ministering there after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, God sent Peter throughout all of Judea. He was given something of an itinerant ministry of preaching and also power to do miracles. Those miracles were given to certify the message that he proclaimed.

All of this was done as we read in Verse 42, that many would believe in the name of the Lord; that many would trust in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. That is the purpose that the book of Acts was written for—that many would believe in the Lord and that is the purpose for this writing as it extends into the modern day to another coastal region called Southern California, even a city called Bellflower.

The Lord wants to speak into our lives. If there is anybody that does not trust in Jesus, He uses His Word to create faith. We are praying that faith would rise up in hearts newly. For those of us who do know Jesus, this is given to strengthen and to fortify our faith, as the Holy Spirit conveys the reality of these things to our hearts.

This morning I want for us to take a good look at this amazing story that is given to us as an account of something that happened in history quite literally. I want for us to see the amazing things that unfold as they come to us in four parts to create and/or to strengthen faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. So first,

To create and strengthen trust in Christ, we see here a portrait of:

1. The Devotion of Discipleship (9:36)

We see this in the life of this woman that we have read about in Verse 36:

³⁶Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity.

Here in Verse 36, we have our introduction to a precious sister in Christ. She was a Hebrew and had the Hebrew name Tabitha. Luke is the Greek author of this text and he was writing to a predominately Greek reading and speaking audience, so he helped them out, saying, "This woman's name was Tabitha and translated that means Dorcas."

That's good information, but how does that help us out? I'm proud of you because I don't see any snickering going on out there, because through the years as I have read the name Dorcas, the inner third grader comes out in me saying, "Haha, DORK-as!" However, we should get past all of that because you are more mature than I am.

The Hebrew word Tabitha means Gazelle. The Greek word Dorcas means Gazelle. That is the meaning of her name. She was named with a term of endearment after the graceful antelope that resembles a deer; an animal that exemplifies elegance.

However, as beautiful as that name is, it is the beauty of her life that rises up off the page; for in our sister Tabitha, we have a portrait of mature Christianity. We see a picture of a woman who has been born again and who is following in the ways of Jesus Christ. It is a beautiful picture that we see.

Here we see a woman who was living out the vision that is given to us in the book of James, Chapter 2 and Verse 22, where the church is called to be doers of the Word. That verse says:

²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

The vision of that passage and the vision of the Christian life is that we are to be hearers and doers. We are to be both. We see a vision of this in Tabitha's life lived out.

We see that she was a careful hearer of the Word because she is called a disciple. Interestingly Verse 36 is the only time in the New Testament that the feminine form of the word *disciple* is used. It typically comes to us as *mathete*. Here it is *mathetria*. Either way, the word disciple means "learner."

Tabitha was a pupil of the teachings of the Messiah. She was a student of the doctrines of the church that were being given through the Old Testament into the New and then through the apostles of Jesus Christ. Here we have a woman who was being transformed by the renewing of her mind in the Scriptures—in the Word of God. Tabitha was a disciple. She was a learner. She was a student of the Messiah.

In this text we also see that it is clearly evident that Tabitha was a doer of the Word, because this text says that she was filled with good works and acts of charity. This language of charity is used throughout the pages of Scripture in the imagery of giving alms or giving for the benefit of the poor. All throughout Scripture, it is used in association with the fatherless, with the widow, with the orphan who were the most vulnerable people of ancient times.

We see later on in this account that Tabitha had a ministry of good deeds and of acts of charity. It was given with a special heart for the widows of the community of Joppa. She had a heart for them and she created garments for them. She also created tunics for them, which were the soft garments worn closest to the skin.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee in his way of teaching things, he stated that Tabitha was given the spiritual gift of sewing. She was called to the office of seamstress for the precious women of Joppa. It

was a calling that the Lord put on her life. Good deeds of the Kingdom were manifested in her life in this way.

It is just a beautiful thing, because even as we see her clothing widows with soft garments, she is clothing herself with the good deeds of the Kingdom as she is being clothed with power from the Holy Spirit to serve the Kingdom in this way.

In this woman whose example is given to us, we see the real deal. We see a genuine woman of God. She loved doctrine and she loved people. This is the work of the Holy Spirit within her. As she was adorning people, the Holy Spirit was adorning the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tabitha is for us an example of what God can do and wants to do and will do through His people; through those walking with Christ as they are filled with the Spirit of the Living God. That does not mean you are going to be called to the office of seamstress. You may be called to another spiritual gift. Chances are you are! There is a whole array of spiritual gifts that are given. But let us ask God to fill our hearts with the desire to be hearers and to be doers.

Here we see this woman with Mary and Martha merged into one, and that was God's power at work in a wonderful lady's life.

We have seen the devotion of discipleship and understand that this was God's work upon her, and we must lift our hands to the Lord, saying, "You must do this through me. Please transform my mind and life that I may be an example like Tabitha was."

We continue in this story and we see how the story does in fact take a tragic turn. Second, we see:

2. The Intrusion of Death (9:37-38)

Let me say that even this is given to strengthen our trust in Christ. But it was a tragedy, and it was a heartbreak. We read what is here in Verses 37 and 38:

³⁷In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. ³⁸Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay."

We don't know exactly what happened with Tabitha's body. Perhaps it was a form of respiratory disease and her lungs became heavy and she was laboring to take in oxygen until the point came when her lungs failed.

Perhaps it was heart failure and her heart lacked the strength to pump blood through the body until the time came where the flow of blood stopped. But the lungs stopped breathing and the heart stopped pumping, and this precious sister in the Lord, she became ill and she died. Whatever it was, it seemed to come upon her rapidly. It was during a period when Simon Peter

“just so happened to be there in the region.” But we see here that there was the sense of urgency in the church’s response to her death.

They dispatched two men from the church immediately to take the eleven mile journey east to the city of Lydda to find Simon Peter. They found two of their fastest young men to go get Peter. Off they went and they urged Peter to come because they viewed that as an urgent matter.

They heard what was happening through Peter—the healings that were taking place and they sought in this an opportunity to have Tabitha’s life restored, even though her lungs stopped taking in oxygen and her heart had stopped beating.

As we see the way they responded in this text, we see that even Christians, they have the instinct to hold on to the people they love in the face of death. Even as people who believe in Heaven and believe in eternal life, even those who have heard the words of Jesus that there is a paradise to come, if we can keep our loved ones close, we want to do that, don’t we? This is here laid out for us in the text.

Sometimes you hear people talk about death as a natural part of the circle of life. Some will even speak of the ebb and the flow, the coming and the going, as kind of having a certain beauty to it. To that, I say, “Malarky!” No, death does not have beauty to it. Death is not a part of the world that God created initially.

Death is judgment upon sin. Death has been introduced as a part of the curse, because human beings have rebelled against God. The wages of sin is death and even believers must pass through physical death. It happens every day and, yes, death is painful and it hurts. Even as we are passing through it, we have the tendency to want to hold on to life.

Brothers and sisters, I know, I know that for followers of Jesus physical death is only physical death. I know that physical death is the gateway into the paradise of God for the one in Christ. I know that we do not grieve like the rest of men who have no hope. I know, but I also know that in I Corinthians Chapter 15 and Verse 26, death is declared to be an enemy.

Death inflicts pain and the separation is hard. So maybe the empty space that some of us feel on Mother’s Day with mothers who have passed on, it hurts. So there is that too! So we see in this text the reality of the rawness of the difficulty that death brings even for those who have living hope inside of them. Even in hearts that do believe, the pain is hard.

Those men wanted to do something about that, so they went searching and running after Simon Peter. Quick! Get there before he leaves, because there was power at work in that man. So we continue. To create and strengthen faith in Christ, now we see the third part of this story unfolding before us. We see:

3. The Display of Divine Power (9:39-41)

The two men came urging Peter, saying, “Please, whatever you are doing, please drop it and come with us now.” Verse 39:

³⁹So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them

In the next part of the story there is a scene of sorrow that Peter entered into. Widows gathered, telling stories about the woman that was so dear to them. I can just imagine them saying, “Just a week ago, she was here with us, and it seems unbelievable that she is not with us now.”

It was surreal to them. Those of you who have gone through the passing of a loved one know that it can be mind-blowing. This is what those women were experiencing as they were showing the very garments that they were wearing. They were showing her designs, her eye for detail, her touch to add a little bit of style, maybe some embroidery, because there were parts of the garments they wanted Peter to see.

As so often happens at the memorial or funeral of a loved one, stories about the person’s life are being released. But in the end, Peter knew why he was there. Peter knew why they came to get him. Peter knew what they wanted him to do.

There is an interesting detail in Verse 37 that many Bible commentators have latched on to. In that verse it says that when she passed, they washed her. However, it does not say that they went on to anoint her. There were two very clear parts of the Jewish post mortem process. First, they would wash a body. Then they would anoint it, leading to the wrapping for the bodies burial.

Verse 37 says that they washed her, but it does not say that they anointed her. So, some suggest that they prepared her for the public visitation, but they did not prepare her for burial. This may be seen as a gesture of faith. They were hoping that this woman was going to have her physical life restored to her.

That is why they called for Peter ,and Peter came back knowing full well that this was not humanly possible. This was not something that Peter had any ability to do in himself. As Peter traveled with those two men for several hours at least, I wonder at what point his thinking was drawn back to an occasion of his time walking with Jesus to a moment he would never forget in his life.

It was a time when Peter was with Jesus. James and John were also called into the home of Jairus. Jairus was a ruler of one of the Galilean synagogues. The twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus tragically died. This man’s heart was broken. People came after Jesus to come and to heal her; to raise her up.

On that occasion, Jesus allowed Peter and James and John to remain with Him as He cleared the room of everyone else who were mourning and crying with sorrow. Then Jesus told all of them that she was not dead, but sleeping. They laughed at Him. They knew she was dead. Jesus was just using this way of speaking of physical death for the believer.

Jesus intended to do something very powerful, and He did so. Do you remember the words that He used when He raised that little girl up? He looked upon her and tenderly He said, “Talitha cumi,” which means, “little girl, arise.” And the little girl’s heart started beating again and her lungs started drawing breath again, and the little girl was lifted up with restored life to the great joy of all that were gathered on that occasion.

Now here came Simon Peter to a similar scene, and he knew that he had no power to do anything about it on his own. He knew full well that this would require the unusual working of the Almighty Lord of all, if anything was to be about the situation.

So now Peter was on the scene and as we see what happened next in Verse 40. Jesus cleared the room and what did Peter do?

⁴⁰But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed;

We can have an entire sermon on the humility of Simon Peter in this account. This is one of the beautiful expression of humility. Here was a man on his knees praying to God on this occasion, calling upon the name of the Lord, Simon Peter knew well that he was not the one who is the Lord of Life.

Simon Peter knew full well that he was not the Creator and the Sustainer and the Restorer of life, but knowing the One who is, he got down on his knees beside this woman’s bed, praying, “Jesus, do you see their sorrow. I know You do, just like you saw the sorrow in the house Jairus; just like You saw the sorrow and even participated in it at the graveside of Lazarus; just like You saw the sorrow that was in the heart of the widow of Nain. Is it Your will to bring Tabitha back in the midst of the sorrow that is being experienced here? Only Your power can do it.”

This is me just trying to think what Peter might have been praying, but he called upon the name of the Lord and he was filled with faith and what are the words that Peter spoke next? There was a movement of the Spirit upon him. This text does not even say that he stood up. There he was still on his knees, and turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.”

Jesus said, “Talitha cumi, little girl, arise.” Just one letter different. Peter said, “Tabitha, arise. Little gazelle, jump. Get back up. Arise!

⁴⁰...And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. ⁴¹And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

Understand that just like in our day, people did not get raised from the dead. Back in that day it wasn’t something that happened apart from a very unusual breakthrough called a miracle. You can imagine how that room exploded with joy as the lovely gazelle leaped again, and there she was alive in their presence.

There were lots of tears when she was dead. I would imagine there were just as many tears when she was alive again, just the nature of the tears being transformed in the midst of the time that passed.

Now we have this report, this account. Reading the preface of Acts Part One which is the Gospel of Luke, understand that the author of this text investigated these matters and he intended to pass on to us historical accounts of unreal power that invaded this world surrounding the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

This is intended for us to believe as fact. It is real. It is not myth. It is not fake. It is not phony. It is no some children's story. This is the power of God visiting this earth, doing something awesome. That's what this intends to be. Doctor Luke was a physician of the First Century world. He was a historian who wanted to pass on to us the truth about Jesus.

And here we see the power of God manifested, showing that Jesus Christ is not the only one who will be risen from the grave. Those who trust in Him will be raised up. This is an emblem of that fact. I say that is awesome, not as a surfer but as a pastor. Awesome!

So how does this apply to us? That was Joppa. This is Southern California. I don't know about you, but I have never seen a person raised back from death. We got to deal with that too, don't we? There are stories told about near death experiences, but ten to twelve hours after death, after being a corpse, Tabitha was back. I have never seen that.

I have seen people miraculously healed, but not every loved one that we pray for has their physical health restored, do they? For many, eventually for all, the sickness takes its course and they die, often despite our prayers. Is that not true? That is true.

It's Mother's Day, isn't it? I was thinking this week how we are at a stage in the life of Bethel Grace where there are perhaps now more of you who never knew my mom, than those of you who had the pleasure of knowing her.

Let me introduce you to Maureen Linda Saltzmann (shows overhead). That's how I remember her. That's her about twenty-years ago, when she was in the midst of some healthy years. A lovely, lovely woman of God. Do you see how she is in that picture? That's how she was.

Here she is with her first grandson. Again, this is when she was healthy. And here she is about three or four months before she went to be with the Lord Jesus Christ, as a condition called COPD started to invade her lungs.

Let me tell you that this woman, she was a vivacious, silly, joyful, fun-loving, mature godly, Spirit-filled follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, understand this, she struggled with sin and she had her flaws just like us, but she was full of good works; a sincere follower of Christ; following hard after the Messiah; pointing people to Jesus. Evangelism came so easy to her.

She would bake chocolate chip cookies and let the smell go through the neighborhood. Kids would come and the Bible would be opened. The kids got cookies and they got the stories about Jesus. She was active in the church. Active in so many ways.

She had physical weaknesses. Lung disease was advancing and we were praying to God for her healing, and committing her to the wisdom and the will of the Lord, but praying for her improvement before she died in my opinion way too young at the age of sixty-two. So this is the reality that we deal with, isn't it?

Reading through this text about Tabitha and Dorcas and how she like to sew garments and how she had the ministry of seamstress, how could I not think about the wonderful Women's Missionary Fellowship and a dear and precious sister in Christ who was a key leader in that ministry, Linda Van Raden! Covid-19 set in and how many of us were praying that she would get out of that hospital bed? Moving back earlier in the year, how about our sister, Glenda. How about moving back about a year ago with Myrna. We were praying for their healings.

So what do we make of all of this? We have all these stories in the Bible, which I prefer to call historical accounts that are real. Then we have the experience of praying for loved ones and often seeing those loved ones go home to be with the Lord.

To bring all of this together, we have to be very real and very aware and be very honest about the fact that even as we take in these accounts of the miraculous in the pages of Scripture, we acknowledge that not all of the sickness of the saints get healed. YET!

Not all of the infirmities that strike the bodies of the people of the Christ lead to miracles of physical restoration. YET! Not all cancers and heart disease cases get fixed. YET! Some do, most don't. YET!

Manifestations of the power of God in Scripture are given to show us what God can do and what He will do. First, the raising of Tabitha was a miracle. Second, it was a sign. A miracle is a rare, infrequent breakthrough of the power of God interrupting the usual course of affairs. A cluster of them happened around the coming of the Messiah into the world. We have the account of them to show us what He can and will do.

It is a miracle and it is a sign. They happen to point us to the great resurrection that is to come. They point us to the fact that Jesus is the Lord of life. They point us to the fact that He has resurrection power. Not only did God, working through Peter, raise Tabitha from death, but moreover, He raised His Son from the grave .

The account of this comes into our lives to declare unto us that the resurrection is coming. Jesus made a promise and He has power to fulfil the promise He made. Jesus said in John Chapter 5 and Verse 25:

²⁴Truly, truly, I say to you

He is talking to the person sitting in your seat right now. This is the voice of the Messiah echoing forth through the ages to you.

²⁴Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Jesus was talking about spiritual death to spiritual life. Separated from God because of sin, but cleansed of sin and now rejoined to the life of God, which is everlasting . *Whoever believes in Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

Once again, Jesus hear His words

²⁵Truly, truly, I say to you, and hour is coming, and now is here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

With sin washed away we are brought into the embrace of the Almighty, joined to the life of God. In Christ we live, and there is a day that is coming. Jesus said:

²⁸Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

The *good* in this text meaning repentance and faith. Trusting in Jesus. Hearing the good news that sinners can be made clean in the sight of the holiness of Almighty God. They will be raised up to everlasting life. Tangible life. Resurrection life. Physical life in the age to come that is permanent and everlasting.

There will also be a resurrection unto judgment and death. This is warning us of the very hell itself, which will be a place of unrighteousness and judgment. Heaven being the place of righteousness and mercy and cleansing and everlasting life.

Jesus calls us. Now we have to consider the response, the fourth and final part of this.

To create and strengthen trust in Christ, we:

4. The Response of Faith (9:42)

Verse 42:

⁴²And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

This is what the book of Acts is all about—the Word of the Lord spreading, spreading, spreading, spreading with the message of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ being proclaimed and the Word of God entering into hearts previously hardened with sin.

It is the Word spreading, spreading, spreading, spreading to the ends to the earth. It is the mercy of God spreading all the way to Southern California. It is the knowledge of the Messiah spreading, spreading even into this place called Bethel Grace right here and right now. He is moving and He at work, touching and fortifying hearts. This book of Acts was given as a historical account of the coming of Christ and the anointing of His apostles that we may believe and have life in His Name.

So as we conclude, I want to let you know that the history of Joppa is filled with a number of reminders of the mercy of the Lord. Joppa has a rich biblical history, this place called beautiful. When the prophet Jonah departed on his ill-fated voyage to anywhere but Nineveh, as far in the other direction as he could go, he departed from the port of Joppa. And God brought Jonah back. God forgave his wayward prophet, and He sent him with the message of repentance even to the great nation of Assyria and its capital, Nineveh.

I wonder if there is anybody here this morning like Jonah? God is telling you to go one way but you are going the other way. I wonder if it is time for you to stop stiffening your neck against the will of the Lord, and come back into the joy of walking in obedience with the Lord our God. If you are here and you know that you have been resisting and you would like prayer, there is a prayer room that is available to you after the service

I have to tell you a couple more parts of this rich history of the mercy of Joppa. When the cedars to construct Solomon's temple came to Jerusalem, they came through the port of Joppa. Those wooden beams that built the framework of God's dwelling place on the earth for Israel, they take us to the wooden beams that constructed the cross on which Jesus died; the One whose very body was itself the temple of the Living God.

It was on a wooden cross that the blood of Jesus was shed and where the judgment of God was released, so that the righteousness of God could be vindicated as God went on His merciful work of redemption, saving sinners, bringing them to new life and contrition and new joy and life in Jesus.

If you here this morning and know you need to come into this saving relationship with God through faith in Christ for perhaps the first time, praise the Lord, the Holy Spirit is making this known to you. As I stated earlier, there is a prayer room where we would like to talk with you about this.

The lovely gazelle who was caused to leap again, she had a history. Just like we have our struggles with temptations and sin, she was a woman cut from the same fabric as the rest of us, and she was a woman saved and born again by the power of the Living God.

You can trace back her history being saved most likely to the last verse of Acts Chapter 8, where we read about how God was finished with Philip as far as the encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch; how God sent Philip to the vicinity of Caesarea. And on his way to Caesarea, he preached at every city on the way. That is most likely when Tabitha heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and her heart believed and she was born again.

Not only did Tabitha leap to new life in Christ then, and not only did she leap to new life when she was restored, she is leaping with life in the Kingdom of God right now. Some day we will have the pleasure of meeting her.

And I close with this. He is risen! Let's pray.