

Acts 9:36

“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor.”

In this short passage, we find profound theological truths hidden within a simple biography. Tabitha, or Dorcas, wasn't just a kind woman—she was a symbol of what the Church is called to be: active, generous, and spiritually alert.

1. The Significance of Names in Scripture

When the Bible gives the meaning of someone's name, it's intentional. In ancient Jewish culture, names carried deep spiritual symbolism. Just as God changed Abram's name to Abraham (Genesis 17:5), or Saul became Paul (Acts 13:9), names often reflected a person's divine calling or character.

John 1:42

“And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter).”

“Peter,” or “Petros” in Greek, means *rock*. Jesus uses this symbol to point toward the foundational revelation that Peter received about Him.

Matthew 16:18

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

This shows that name meanings can represent a person’s spiritual identity and destiny. Likewise, Tabitha is called “Dorcas,” meaning *gazelle*—a choice filled with spiritual meaning.

2. Why a Gazelle?

A gazelle is swift, agile, and graceful. In biblical symbolism,

animals like gazelles (or deer) often represent spiritual readiness, strength, and mobility in God's service.

2 Samuel 2:18

"Now Zeruiah's three sons were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle."

1 Chronicles 12:8

"Some Gadites defected to David at his stronghold in the wilderness. They were brave warriors, ready for battle and able to handle the shield and spear. Their faces were the faces of lions, and they were as swift as gazelles in the mountains."

Habakkuk 3:19

“The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.”

Dorcas is likened to a gazelle not because of physical beauty or speed alone, but to emphasize her spiritual agility—she was quick to act in kindness, fast to serve, and always ready to help others.

3. The Gospel in Action

Dorcas' lifestyle reflects the teachings of Jesus:

Matthew 5:16

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

She practiced James 1:27

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is

this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...”

Dorcas wasn't a preacher or apostle, yet her deeds carried the fragrance of the Gospel. She clothed the needy, cared for widows, and supported the Church—*acts of mercy that reflected the heart of Christ.*

4. Divine Response to Human Readiness

After she died, the community in Joppa did something remarkable—they sent for Peter. Other people may have died around the same time, but it was Dorcas they pleaded for. That shows her spiritual impact.

Acts 9:39-40

“Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed.

*Turning toward the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up.'
She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up."*

God honored her life by resurrecting her, showing how He values the faithfulness of His servants.

Reflection

Are we like Dorcas—swift to give, help, and serve?

Do we need to wait for reminders, or are we spiritually agile—ready to respond to the needs around us?

Let us not delay in doing good, so that when we are in need, God also will be swift to act.

Hebrews 6:10

"God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them."

Final Prayer

Lord, make our feet swift to obey, like the feet of Dorcas. May we reflect Your heart through our actions, and may Your Spirit make us ready and willing to do good at all times.

Shalom.

Let me know if you'd like this formatted as a sermon, devotional, or Bible study handout!

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