

Disciples Like Dorcas

Franklin Church of Christ
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June 6, 2004
PM Worship

Introduction:

In **Acts 7:58**, Stephen, an evangelist and, I believe, a deacon in the Jerusalem church, was stoned. In **Acts 12:2**, James, an apostle, was executed. These great workers in the church died, and apart from grieving their loss and burying them, nothing was done about it. However, according to **Acts 9:36-41**, a woman in Joppa named Tabitha, also known as Dorcas, died. Her loss was so great to the church that Peter raised her from the dead. Clearly, Dorcas was a special disciple. In fact, every church needs disciples like Dorcas. Each of us needs to be a disciple like Dorcas. What set her apart?

Discussion:

- I. Dorcas was abounding in deeds of kindness and charity continually.
 - A. The term translated “abounding” has an interesting definition according to Strong’s Enhanced Lexicon. It means “Replete, or covered over.” Dorcas was covered over in serving others. Further, the text says she continually did these good deeds. Not only did Dorcas perform good works and serve others, she continually did so. Serving others was a habit for Dorcas.
 - B. We must be covered over in continually doing good works. Paul, in **Galatians 6:9-10**, said that we must never lose heart in doing good. Rather, we must take every opportunity we have to do good to all, especially our brethren. We need to be disciples like Dorcas.
- II. Dorcas sacrificed for others.
 - A. When those widows showed Peter the garments and tunics Dorcas made, who do you think had to pay for that material? If these were Dorcas’ good deeds, then it was her money. Who had to take the time to make those garments? Dorcas. That was sacrifice.
 - B. Too often we dream about how we would serve others if we had more time or more money. We might even picture times coming up in our lives when we will be better able to serve. When we get out of school and get on our own... After we are married or after our marriage settles in... Once our kids are out of the house or finished with college... When we retire... Then we will have more time and more money to serve others.
 - C. I do not know how much money Dorcas had. But I do know she did not spend her time thinking about what she would do if she had more. She figured out how to use the money she had to serve others. Someone once said, “It is not what you would do if a million were your lot, it is what you are doing with the dollar and quarter you’ve got.” Regarding time, were you aware that there were only 24 hours in a day during the Bible times, just like today? Dorcas had the same amount of time you and I have. But Dorcas made some choices about her time. She chose to use part of her time to serve others. We must make these choices as well.
 - D. This means sacrifice. Maybe you won’t get that widescreen television you wanted. Maybe you won’t let your kids play every sport in which they are interested. Maybe you won’t take all those vacations you had planned. Maybe you miss out on some things you would like to buy or do—but that is what sacrifice is all about. That is what Dorcas was all about and we need to be disciples like Dorcas.
- III. Dorcas did not do everything, but she did what she could.
 - A. The text highlights one activity for Dorcas. I am sure she did more, but she excelled in one area. She made clothes. Dorcas did not do everything, but she did what she could.
 - B. Too often we become overwhelmed with all the work that needs to be done. When we recognize that we cannot do it all, we do not do anything. At other times, we look at other Christians who can do things we cannot. Because we cannot do what they can, we decide what we can do must not be important and, again, we do nothing. These situations are similar to the one talent man in **Matthew 25:14-30**. He could not do much with his one talent. Therefore, in fear, he did nothing. But the master rebuked him, explaining that he should at least have done something. That is where we are. We certainly cannot do everything. We may not be able to do what others can do. But we can all do something. We must do that something.
 - C. What can you do? Can you cook? ... clean? ... fix clothes? ... cut grass? ... babysit? ... visit the sick? ... write cards of encouragement? ... make encouraging phone calls? ... teach Bible

classes? ... conduct home studies? ... have people into your home? ... fix cars? ... build things? ... do handyman repairs? ... pray with people? ... hold others accountable to God's word? ... help others grow spiritually? No matter how little or great you may think your abilities are, they were given to you to serve others (**I Peter 4:10**). We must be disciples like Dorcas.

- IV. Dorcas did not serve everyone, but she served those she could.
- A. When Peter arrived in Lydda and was brought to the room where Dorcas' body lay, he was not greeted by every disciple in the church. He was greeted by widows whom Dorcas had served. I am not saying Dorcas never did kind deeds for anyone else. But Dorcas evidently focused on a particular group—widows. Dorcas did not serve everyone, but she served those she could.
 - B. Too often we look around and see all the people that need to be helped and once again are paralyzed into inaction. We have all heard of the one commonly referred to as Mother Theresa. While I believe her theology was dead wrong, I believe her attitude toward service was dead on. She is reported to have said something along the lines of, "I cannot do everything, but I can do something. I cannot help everyone, but I can help someone." Who can you help?
 - C. We might ask, "How do I choose? I do not want to form a clique." I do not think Dorcas was a cliquish Christian, but she focused on one group—widows. Is there a group your gifts can particularly help? ... widows? ... elderly? ... young marrieds? ... young parents? ... plant workers? ... farmers? We do not know why Dorcas focused on the widows. Certainly their great need played a part. No husband is mentioned for Dorcas, perhaps she too was a widow and understood their needs. Maybe her mother was a widow and in taking care of her (cf. **I Timothy 5:16**) she learned of the great needs for all widows. Dorcas evidently had a desire to help the widows, she could help the widows and thus she did help the widows.
 - D. Further, as you consider who you are to love and serve, remember the parable of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:30-35**. The Samaritan did not help all people. But neither did he only help his closed circle of Samaritans. He helped the one with whom he came in contact. Who should you serve? Why not start tonight by giving some encouragement or praying with the person you are sitting next to this evening? Don't bypass them to get to your closer friends across the building. We must be disciples like Dorcas.
- V. Dorcas did not wait to be asked, but did what she could, when she could, for whom she could.
- A. This is the most important lesson in this text. Was Dorcas simply the tool of the Joppa Church of Christ's garment making ministry? No. The text says she was full of good works, not that she was part of a church organized ministry. This was her work. The headquarters was her home, not the church building. The oversight was her own, not the elders. While caring for Christian widows is a legitimate work for the church (**Acts 6:1-6**), Dorcas was working on her own.
 - B. Too often we Christians see things that need to be done and wonder when the elders are going to do something about it. After all, they are our leaders, shouldn't they head up some kind of church work to accomplish these things? We might even go to them and give them our great ideas. Most of the time, they will let us down and not do anything about it. Do you know why? Because like Dorcas, they cannot do everything either. Do you remember what happened in **Acts 6:1-6**? The brethren came to the apostles saying the Hellenistic widows were not being taken care of. What did the apostles say? "Our hands are already full with other work. Find other men in the congregation to take care of this." So what do we do next? If the elders won't take care of the work, we tell others and hope that someone will do something. Why not us? Why not you? Why not stop waiting for others and start being a disciple like Dorcas? You must serve, doing what you can, when you can, for whom you can. We must be disciples like Dorcas.

Conclusion:

What we learn from the New Testament and stories like Dorcas' is that the great amount of work done by the early church was not accomplished by the organized plan of local congregations. The greatest amount of the work was done by hard-working, devoted disciples who did not wait to be asked but simply looked for how they could use their abilities to serve others and serve God. The big question for you now is, "Are you a disciple like Dorcas?"