**What’s In A Name?**

(Acts 9:36-43)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

Did you hear about the man who named his dog “Five Miles”? When someone asked him why, he said, “That way I can say I walk 5 miles every day!”

Then there was the band leader who named all three of his daughters “Anna.” When somebody asked how he could tell them apart, he replied, “I call them Anna one, Anna two, Anna three…”!

Finally there’s a man who says he buys all of his handguns from a man who calls himself “T-Rex” because…after all…he’s a small arms dealer!

If you’re wondering why I’m talking so much about names, it is because in the opening verse of our text we read about a lady with *two* names:

**“Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” (Acts 9:36).**

Now when it says that Tabitha’s name is by interpretation called Dorcas, I’m sure you’re familiar with what that’s all about. Names are pronounced differently in different languages. The name Paul in Spanish is pronounced *Pablo.* The name *Dan* in Dutch is pronounced *Dana,* which explains why comedian Dana Carvey has what sounds like a girl’s name to our Western ears. And the name “Tabitha” is a Hebrew name, the language of the Jews, while the Greek Gentile version of her name was *Dorcas.*

And as you may know, all names have meanings. We have a lady named Tracey in the church that I pastor, and her name means “fighter” or “war-like.” At 5 foot 2, she’s vertically challenged, so it’s hard to picture her living up to the meaning of her name, but you might believe it if you’ve ever seen her go after her kids when they misbehave. She goes on the warpath!

In our text, the name Tabitha means *Beauty,* and the name Dorcas means *gazelle.* So both names kind of mean the same thing, for gazelles are beautiful creatures. And the meaning of names *in the Bible* often have spiritual significance. The woman here, for instance, is a symbol of the nation Israel.

You see, when the people of Israel obeyed God and did the good works He wanted them to do, He made sure they were *beautiful* in the eyes of the other nations. Look what men said about Israel when they obeyed God back in the days of Solomon:

**“…Jerusalem…is…the city that men call *The perfection of beauty”* (Lamentations 2:15).**

When the people of Israel did good works and avoided bad works, God allowed Solomon to make Jerusalem *so beautiful* they were the envy of the world. But look what men said when they did bad works instead, and God let the Babylonians *destroy* Jerusalem and take Israel captive:

**“…Zion…*thy breach is great like the sea*…Thy prophets…have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity…All that pass by…wag their head…saying, Is this the city that men call *The perfection of beauty,* The joy of the whole earth?” (Lamentations 2:13-15).**

The Jews were *beautiful* as long as they did the good works God told them to do—as we see pictured here with Dorcas, who is said to have been “full” of good works (Acts 9:36)—and whose name *means* “Beauty”!

And here’s something else: Dorcas lived in the city of Joppa, *another* name that means “Beauty.” That makes Joppa a symbol of Jerusalem, the city known as the *perfection* of beauty.

But the beauty of Israel *died* when they got so sinful God allowed the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem back in the Old Testament. And over in the New Testament their beauty died when they did something as ugly as crucifying their messiah, and stoning His prophet in Acts 7—something we see symbolized here in Acts 9 when Dorcas dies:

**“And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber” (Acts 9:37).**

When this woman whose name means “Beauty” *died,* that was a type of how the beauty of Israel died when they stoned Stephen. You see, God wanted to give them a beautiful kingdom—like they had under King Solomon! That’s why the twelve apostles asked the Lord,

**“…Lord, wilt thou at this time *restore again* the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6)?**

God wanted to beautify Israel *again* in the eyes of the Gentile nations by restoring the kingdom they knew under Solomon. But all hopes of that died when they stoned Stephen—as we see depicted when Dorcas died.

And when it says they laid her in “an upper chamber,” that’s a picture of heaven. That’s where all Israel’s hopes and dreams of a beautiful kingdom went after they rejected their kingdom. And that’s where they are to this day, as Peter expressed when he wrote,

**“Blessed be…God…which…hath begotten us again unto a lively hope…to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, *reserved in heaven for you”* (I Peter 1:3,4).**

The hope of Israel’s kingdom is currently reserved for them in the “upper chamber” of heaven—as we see portrayed when they laid Dorcas in an upper chamber.

Grace believers often ask me about Peter’s words there, for they know that the hope of the Jews is not to go to heaven when they die, as is our hope, but for God to bring heaven down here to the earth for them. And someday He will! But in the meantime, Israel’s kingdom is in heaven, “vested” in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That word *vested* is defined by an online dictionary as: “secured in the possession of or assigned to a person.” We might say that the power of the executive branch of our government in the United States is vested in the president. If you’re still not sure what I mean when I say that Israel’s kingdom is vested in the Lord, consider what men cried when He rode into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday:

**“Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Luke 19:38).**

But compare that to what Mark says he heard others cry that day:

**“Blessed be *the kingdom…*that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Mark 11:10).**

As you can see, they understood that when *their king* came riding into town, *their kingdom came riding in with Him.*

We see this again when some unsaved Pharisees asked the Lord a question:

**“When He was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, He answered…*the kingdom of God is within you”* (Luke 17:20,21).**

That’s the verse that makes some Christians think that the Lord never meant to establish a literal kingdom here on earth. They feel His words there indicate that He meant only to establish a kingdom within men, i.e., in their hearts. But there’s no way the Lord would have told a bunch of unsaved Pharisees that the kingdom was in *their* hearts! He was telling them what I’ve been saying, that their kingdom was vested in Him and *He* was within them. He was right there in the midst of them, right there among them.

Look how the Bible uses that phrase *within you* when God warned the Jews of what would happen if they persisted in disobeying Him:

**“The stranger *that is within thee* shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail” (Deuteronomy 28:43,44).**

The “stranger” there is a reference to the Gentiles, and it wasn’t talking about little Gentiles living in the hearts of the Jews! It was talking about Gentiles that lived among them in their midst. And *the Lord* was talking about the kingdom that was in the midst of those unsaved Pharisees, in the person of their king. They had asked when the kingdom would come, and He replied by saying that their kingdom was right there in their midst, theirs for the taking. They could have had their kingdom if they had just accepted their king.

So when they laid Dorcas in an upper chamber, that was symbolic of how any hope Israel had of the beautiful kingdom God wanted to give them was now vested in the Lord, who was now in the upper chamber of heaven.

But when Dorcas died, her loved ones didn’t do what you do when you lose someone. You have a funeral and bury the loved one you lost. But that is *not* what her family did, as we see as we read on:

**“And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.**

**“Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.**

**“But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up” (Acts 9:38-40).**

Instead of *burying* Dorcas, her loved ones went to get Peter *to raise her from the dead.* That’s a picture of how Israel’s hopes of a kingdom may have died in Acts 7 when they stoned God’s prophet, but they weren’t “dead and buried”! All the nation needs is *a resurrection—*one we see depicted with the resurrection of Dorcas.

When it says that they brought Peter into the upper room where she lay, that’s a picture of something the Lord talked about in a parable when He said,

**“A certain nobleman went into a far country *to receive for himself a kingdom,* and to return…And it came to pass, that when he was returned, *having received the kingdom…”* (Luke 19:12-15).**

The nobleman here is the Lord Himself, and the far country is heaven. That’s where the Lord went after He died and rose from the dead. But someday He is going to return *with the kingdom* and raise saved Jews from the dead to enter it. That city “Lydda,” where they sent men to bring Peter to Joppa, is the Greek form of the Hebrew name “Lod,” a name that means *nativity* or *generation.* That’s a type of the new birth of the nation Israel that will take place before the kingdom begins. Speaking of that new birth, the Lord told the twelve apostles,

**“…ye which have followed Me, *in the regeneration* when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28).**

That word “regeneration” is a reference to the new birth of *resurrection* that will take place before the Lord establishes Israel’s kingdom, a rebirth we see depicted in the meaning of the name *Lod.*

But when that happens, the Lord won’t raise *all* the Jews from the dead—only the ones who did good works!—as we see symbolized here with Dorcas, who was *full* of good works!

Don’t forget, we’re saved by faith *without* works (Eph. 2:8,9). We’re saved, as Paul put it,

**“*Not by works of righteousness which we have done,* but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost…” (Titus 3:5).**

But the Jews under the law were saved by faith *plus* works of righteousness. They were saved by *working righteousness,* as we see when the psalmist prayed,

**“Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, *and worketh righteousness…”* (Psalm 15:1,2).**

And one of the ways they worked righteousness was by doing what God told them to do in Deuteronomy 33:19:

**“…offer *sacrifices of righteousness.”***

That was something He told them to do often (cf. Psalm 4:5; 51:19), but it wasn’t the only way He told them to work righteousness. They also worked it by obeying the law of Moses, like the parents of John the Baptist did. We read of them,

**“…they were both righteous before God, *walking in all the command-ments and ordinances of the Lord blameless”* (Luke 1:6).**

There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding about how the Jews were saved under the law. ut as you can see from those verses, when they offered the sacrifices the law said to offer, and kept the sabbath and the seven feasts, and did all the rest of the things that the law said to do to work righteousness, they were saved and counted righteous, no matter how many of the ten commandments they broke. Just ask David, who was guilty of adultery and murder!

But as we come to the New Testament, we see the Lord add *another* work to what they had to do to be saved when

**“…a certain ruler asked Him, saying, Good Master, *what shall I do to inherit eternal life?* And Jesus said unto him…*sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor”* (Luke 18:18-22).**

And do you know what the Bible *calls* giving to the poor? Earlier the Lord said,

**“Sell that ye have, *and give alms…”* (Luke 12:33).**

We see this definition of “alms” again in Acts 3:2,3:

**“A certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple *asked an alms”* (Acts 3:2,3).**

It’s obvious that this man was such an invalid he couldn’t work, so he sat outside the temple begging for help—for an alms. And people who helped him by giving him money were doing the newest good work the Lord said they had to do to be saved and have any hope of rising from the dead to enter the kingdom of heaven on earth.

And those “almsdeeds” kind of good works are the kind Dorcas is said to have done in Acts 9:36. That means when Verse 39 says she made coats and garments, these were not things she made *for herself,* to keep her warm at Bears/Packers games. And they weren’t things she made to sell to others to keep them warm either! She made them for almsdeeds, to give to the poor.

Helping the poor with things like clothing and food is something that God always wanted the Jews to do, as we see when God told them,

**“Is not this the fast that I have chosen…to deal thy bread to the hungry, *and*…*when thou seest the naked…cover him…*Then…the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward” (Isaiah 58:6-8).**

In Isaiah’s day, the people of Israel were fasting just to make a religious show of themselves! God responded by explaining that the kind of fasting that He was looking for was the kind where they would fast so they would have food to deal to the hungry!

But in the New Testament, God expected them to do more than just *fast* to feed the poor. He expected them to sell all they had to do it—that is, if they wanted to be saved! James wrote,

**“…though a man say he hath faith, and have not works…can faith save him? *If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food*…And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, *be ye warmed and filled*… notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; *what doth it profit?”* (James 2:14-17).**

Dorcas wasn’t one of the ones there who said to the poor, “O you poor, hungry, naked thing you! Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but didn’t give them any food to fill them, nor any clothing to warm them! That makes her a type of Jews who will be saved into the kingdom when the Lord returns to establish it. They’ll be saved by good works—the *specific* good works of feeding and clothing God’s people.

Job was a type of this, as we see when he wrote:

**“*If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering…*if he were not *warmed* with the fleece of my sheep; *Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade,* and mine arm be broken from the bone” (Job 31:19-22).**

Job’s friends were insisting that he must have been disobedient to God to have warranted such severe treatment at His almighty hands. But he insisted that he had always done the kind of works that God expected him to do, including the righteous work of clothing the poor.

Job had to go through a lot of tribulation in his life, but God rewarded him in the end because he had clothed the poor. That’s a picture of how the Jews who believe on the Lord after the Rapture will have to go through the Tribulation, but will also be rewarded in the end if they follow the sterling example set by Dorcas and clothe the needy.

But here we have a dispensational difference. Today, in the dispensation of grace, we don’t have to clothe the poor to be saved. We’re saved by grace through faith *without* having to work righteousness like that. But the apostle of grace says that we *should* do good works like that because we *are* saved (Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-8), as we see when Paul wrote:

**“As we have therefore opportunity, *let us do good unto all men,* especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).**

Okay, let’s see what happens next in our text:

**“And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive” (Acts 9:41).**

Here we’re seeing something that Jude talked about:

**“…*of some have compassion, making a difference...*Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, *and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy…”* (Jude 1:22-24).**

After faithful Jews rise from the dead, they’ll be presented to the Lord and His host in the kingdom *because they had compassion on the saints.* One of the ways they’ll make a difference in the lives of others in that day will be by feeding and clothing them after the beast renders it impossible for them to buy food or clothing without his mark (Rev. 13:17). You know. Compassion like we see pictured with Dorcas.

Now this resurrection made front page news in Joppa, as we see in the last two verses of our text:

**“And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.**

**“And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner” (Acts 9:42,43).**

In our next lesson, we’ll see that God didn’t just use Peter to illustrate the close of the old dispensation of the kingdom for the Jews. He also used him to illustrate the beginning of the new dispensation that God was now giving the Gentiles through Paul. In Acts 10, the Lord will send Peter to minister to a Gentile to introduce Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles.

But having said all this, you might remember that in our last lesson I taught that when Peter healed a paralyzed Jew named Aeneas in Acts 9:32-35 that this was a type of how Israel was spiritually *paralyzed* and needed the spiritual healing they’ll get in the kingdom. But *now* I’m saying that Peter’s resurrection of Dorcas was a type of how Israel was spiritually *dead* and needed the resurrection they’ll get in the kingdom. If you’re thinking, “How could Aeneas and Dorcas *both* be types of Israel in the future if one of them was dead and the other only sick?” compare what wll happen when it comes time for Israel to enter the kingdom of heaven on earth to what will happen when it comes time for us to enter *our* kingdom in heaven. At the Rapture, many members of the Body of Christ will have died and need to be raised from the dead, but some will be alive and just need healing. And many Jews like the twelve apostles and the Old Testament saints will be dead and need resurrection when the Lord comes to give Israel her kingdom, as we see symbolized here with Dorcas, but many will live to see the Lord come and just need healing, like Aeneas. You’re seeing both of these groups illustrated with these two miracles in Acts 9 that took place close on the heels of Israel’s rejection of her kingdom in Acts 7.

But in closing, *isn’t that an amazing Book you’re holding?* Only Almighty God Himself could have written a book that works out types like that! Do you think maybe you can trust what it says to guide you in every detail of your life? Like when it says that when someone wrongs you, you should be as gracious to them as God is to you when you wrong Him? Do you know how *beautiful* that is in the eyes of the world?

When bad stuff happens to you, don’t go stomping around like the proverbial bull in a china shop. That’s not acting like God acts when bad stuff happens to Him. God reacts *gracefully* no matter what unsaved men do to Him. That’s part of what makes Him so beautiful in *our* eyes, for He is also gracious to us when *we* do bad things to Him. And when you manage to pull that off and be gracious to those who wrong you in your life, that’s a beautiful thing.

Back in 2006 there was a shooting at an Amish school in Pennsylvania. Ten Amish schoolgirls were gunned down, and five of them died. The gunman then killed himself, so the Amish community couldn’t forgive him. *But they forgave his parents.* They went out of their way to locate the shooter’s parents to visit and comfort them.

And when that happened, *the entire world* took notice. It was all over the news. A book was written about that event, possibly more than one book, and a movie reenactment was made of that tragic day and the godly example the Amish displayed in the wake of that unthinkable tragedy, because the world thought it was such a beautiful thing.

Imagine if *all* God’s people lived that way. Do you think that might go a long way toward healing the hatred and animosity we’re seeing in our land in 2020? Lamentations 2:15 said that when the people of Israel obeyed God, they weren’t just beautiful, they were “the joy of the whole earth.” You can help bring joy to your part of the earth if you’ll just learn to reflect God’s grace in your life.

You can’t expect *unbelievers* to act like that. They’re always going to protest when they’re treated unjustly, or when others are treated unjustly. But if you’ll act like God acts instead, you can brighten your corner of the world in ways far too wonderful to imagine.

If you’re not saved, though, as amazing as all that is (how God could work out all those types), the most amazing thing He ever worked out is when He figured out how to pay for your sins by having His Son die on the cross to pay for them. If you had a million years to think about it you could never have worked out a plan like that. And even if you did, you’d never send your son to die to pay for it.

But God did. And if you’ll just *believe* that He did it, He’ll save you from your sins and call you someday to live with Him in heaven.