

TABITHA

Acts 9:36-43

Some people seem to be just naturally good. My dear friend Tabitha was one such person. Always quick to help others. We'd been neighbours for many years, and I often helped with all the selfless charity work she did, - she naturally encouraged support and was a joy to be with. I still wear an oh so beautiful garment she made me. When she gave it to me I cried and we hugged, and I have felt part of her family ever since. She is a constant support and so much loved.

This year everything miraculously changed and moved forward! Events in Jerusalem concerning this man Jesus were on everyone's lips, - some from our village had been in Jerusalem for the Passover. My friend Thomas had seen him crucified, but later heard that Jesus had risen from the dead and been seen by many people. Thomas stayed on, and was in Jerusalem when the apostles, led by Peter, received the Holy Ghost and began to heal people. Two of the apostles came to Joppa, broadcasting the good news of the Gospel, that Jesus had risen from the dead, and had now ascended, at one with his Father, that the kingdom of heaven was indeed at hand! I was with Tabitha at the time, and we both became Christians along with many others. We now understood the source of the love we had always shared. Somehow Tabitha became even more productive, - there probably wasn't a street in Joppa where her love and handiwork were not known. As a light shining in the darkness, everyone recognised her, and we were blessed by all she did.

Then the impossible happened. One day fine and laughing with all of us as she shared her alms deeds with some of the poor, she was suddenly stricken with sickness, became confined to her bed, and most unwell. I stayed with her, nursed her, we prayed as best we could, but it was to no avail. My dear Tabitha breathed her last. No one could believe it. We looked at her lifeless body and wept with disbelief and anger and frustration.

With the agreement of her close friends, I washed her body and then we moved her up to the upper chamber of her house, laying her peacefully on the bed. I prayed to God for understanding, went through in my mind all the good things she had done, suddenly recognising they were immortal, could never be taken away, and despite the evidence before us, her goodness was also everlasting, but it didn't stop my tears.

Life went on, as it always did. Someone came from Lydda, full of news that Peter was there, - Thomas knew him, and was immediately interested wanting to see him again. Peter had just healed someone called Aeneas of his lameness. I dared to think. What could he do here? We needed his support, his Christly vision. I urged Thomas to take someone with him and ask Peter if he would urgently come here to Joppa, but not to say why. His thought would be open, and it would remain for Thomas and his friend to usher him into the upper chamber. There was such a gathering of us, - everyone had brought examples of what Tabitha had so lovingly made, sharing stories of what she so lovingly did. Our tears were a stream of grief and sadness. We would wait on what God would unfold and look forward to their return.

Three days passed by, but time seemed to stand still. So many people had come to give tribute to our dear friend, some gave back what she had given, saying to let others in greater need have what she had made.

News came that Peter was nearly here! I prayed to God that somehow he would give us comfort so that we could move on with our lives. He arrived! The outpouring of grief was immense, everyone anxious to show him what Tabitha had done. He stood, watching and listening, his compassion was evident, but there was a love that was shining from him that seemed to come from the Christ. We exchanged glances, and I felt that love. He quietly asked us all to leave so that he could be alone with Tabitha. I was the last to go and stood just outside the door. Was he just praying for inspiration? Giving his own personal thanks for a life well lived? - Perhaps he just wanted quiet time to pray with her and give her his blessing? I could feel an atmosphere of incredible love. What more could he do? We had left and became silent ourselves, waiting with an expectation of we knew not what but to see Peter again and hear what he would share with us.

I heard Peter speak "Tabitha, arise." My heart jumped! What! Did I really hear him speaking to a dead body and saying arise?! I suddenly thought of Aeneas, healed, I remembered Lazarus raised from the dead, Jesus himself arisen. Why had I been so blind? Peter had never asked to see the body, had never accepted she could ever be

separate from her life which is in God. He had simply said, "Take me to Tabitha". And now his command was with the authority of knowing the truth. He had dismissed our negativity and surrounded my friend with love and his sense of eternal life! "Tabitha, arise". I felt the power of his statement, and when he called out for us to go in, my heart was already rejoicing.

Tabitha stood, held warmly in Peter's arms, and she turned and looked at us with radiance, looked at me with such love in her eyes, - I felt tears welling: she ran from Peter straight to me, gave me such a hug, then stood back and holding my hands just squeezed them tight and shared with me that lovely moment of life illumined with the presence of the Christ. It was beautiful. Everyone was rejoicing, praising God.

I turned to Peter, humbly standing in the background, went to hold his hands, tears of joy and gratitude now nearly overwhelming me. We had seen what he had always known, that God is an ever-flowing fountain of life, and surely, we are its bubbling and ever-flowing stream!

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Tabitha got straight on, doing what she always did. News of the miracle was broadcast throughout Joppa oh so rapidly! Christianity had spread, and now here was such convincing proof. Tabitha was so well known! This demonstration of life couldn't be denied! Being a seaport, the news became really widespread, reaching across the Mediterranean! The apostles were doing the same as Jesus, healing, yes, even raising the dead!

Our dear Peter remained many days, - but he didn't stay with Tabitha, who could so easily have looked after him, - but in humility, not wanting to be thought in any way of taking advantage, lodged instead with one Simon a local tanner.

This was all such a blessing to so many people, - Christianity was now no longer just for the Jews, but it had become radiantly clear that the gospel was indeed for all peoples, and the love and good conduct of my dear Tabitha continue to just overflow in witness and selfless happiness.

We have seen the ever-flowing fountain of life, and our hearts are rejoicing in our Lord, in the faithfulness of His Love. What was dark is no more because the light of the Lord has shone.