

## **YOUR DEEDS WILL SPEAK FOR YOU**

**Today's Text: Acts 9: 36- 43**

### **Extracts:**

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. *This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. ...And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they (implored) him not to delay in coming to them. ...When he had come ...all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. But Peter put them all out, 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 [Acts 9: 36-40]*

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*As far as Ibrahim was concerned, he was doing his duty. He cleaned the aircraft well and reported lost items he could find on board to his employers. What he did not reckon with was that his deeds were speaking for him in high places that he could not ordinarily access. For his honesty, he would now not only clean the inside of the aircraft; he would also fly in them- an unexpected reward for doing his work right. What if he had cheated by keeping those items to himself? Again, his deeds would have spoken for him but with a different outcome. So, what are your deeds saying about you? In this week's Bible story, a young disciple called Dorcas died and her colleagues sent for help for her because of her selfless service for them. There is a lesson there for us to learn as we struggle to live right in a wicked world. Read on.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story is based on the following sources: "NAHCO worker returns 25,000 pounds found inside aircraft," <http://www.theguardianmobile.com/readNewsItem1.php?nid=3892> , 23 Apr 2012; and "About NAHCO," <http://www.nahcoaviance.com/Default.aspx>

## 1. Background: Dorcas' deeds speak for her

According to the inaugural *Africa Fraud Barometer*, developed by Petrus Marais, KPMG Global Leader for Forensics, reported cases of fraud on the African continent increased by 46.4% from 355 cases in the first half of 2011 to 520 cases in the second half of the same year.<sup>2</sup> South Africa and Nigeria had the highest number of reported cases, presumably because they are also among the biggest economies and populations on the continent. The annual reports of Transparency International will also confirm that corruption is a widespread disease that has infected both advanced and developing economies. Therefore, to be a good believer is getting more challenging by the day.

The word of God enjoins us not to follow a crowd to do evil [Ex. 23:2]. At the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His listeners not to do their charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Instead, they should do so in secret, such that your left hand does not know what the right is doing, that “your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly” [Matt. 6: 1-4]. How can we do that in a situation where you are hardly alone at work, school or church? Even on the streets in many countries, there are surveillance cameras recording your movements. Reality television is making people crazy to be recognized for one bizarre thing or the other. So many people want to enter the *Guinness Book of World Records*. So, how can we separate the wheat from the chaff? ***How can we differentiate between hypocrisy and genuine deeds of charity? That is what this week's Bible story will help us to understand.***

Ordinarily, it is about a young disciple, Dorcas, who lived at Joppa, on the Mediterranean Sea coast, north-west of Jerusalem. Her remarkable story can be summarized as follows:

### *a) Dorcas' profile among believers in Joppa*

We are told, “At Joppa there was ***a certain disciple*** named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was ***full of good works and charitable deeds*** which she did” [Acts 9: 36]. She was introduced to us as a certain disciple, implying that she was an ordinary folk, not a prominent member of the congregation there. You could pass by without noticing her. They said that she was full of good works, suggesting that she was virtuous and showed good examples. Then, she did charitable deeds, implying that she rendered service to others free of charge.

We were not told how old she was but her charitable deeds were done among widows [v. 39], that is, women who had lost their husbands by death. Therefore, she could easily pass for the modern relief worker in war zones or earthquake/flood devastated lands. She could have been one

<sup>2</sup> “Africa Fraud Barometer rises,” <http://www.businesslive.co.za/world/2012/04/25/africa-fraud-barometer-rises> ; 25 April 2012

of Mother Teresa's nuns in the Missionary of Charity in Calcutta, India. She could have been the local assistant in the old people's home near you. Therefore, Dorcas is not far-fetched. She is somebody you know and you can do what she did that earned her a special mention in the Scriptures.

*b) Her deeds spoke for her*

Dorcas fell ill and died [v. 37]. I doubt if she was the first or only disciple to have died in Joppa. However, her death was special in that she left a void in the community. They washed her and laid her in an upper room, not in a grave. Those widows were not prepared to accept that Dorcas was dead, especially as Joppa was near Lydda and the disciples in Joppa had heard that Peter was there. They sent two of the disciples to him in Lydda and implored him to come to them. When Peter arrived, they took him to the upper room where Dorcas' body was lying. As the widows stood around Peter, weeping, they showed him "tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them" [vv. 38-39].

Dorcas did not carry out her charitable deeds to impress those widows but they were impressed. They did not tell Peter of her family connections or wealth (or the lack of it) or her beauty. ***They remembered her by her deeds and they were good ones.*** They were missing her and they showed it. They wanted her back and Peter saw it in their anxiety. Does anybody miss you (for good) when you are away on vacation or after retirement? Do they rejoice that the "wicked one" has gone? Do they experience "retrospective appreciation" when they begin to place a higher value on what you said or did while you were with them? Do you feel welcomed when you visit your old office or church?

*c) God restored her back to life!*

Peter needed some quiet and concentration! So, he sent all the weeping widows out. He knelt down and prayed. Then, turning to Dorcas' stiff body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." She opened her eyes and, on seeing Peter, she sat up! Peter took her hand, called the other disciples and handed her over to them [vv. 40-41]. You can imagine the joy of those widows. You can also imagine how Dorcas felt to know that the little she thought she had done could be so magnified in appreciation.

The word of God says, "He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given" [Prov. 19: 17]. We all are poor in one thing or the other. ***Dorcas was a true disciple of Jesus because she loved others as He had loved her [Jn 14: 12]. She gave others hope and the Lord repaid her with life. Her righteous deeds spoke for her when she could no longer speak for herself.*** That is the important lesson for us from the foregoing story.

## 2. What is driving your deeds?

According to an African proverb, when you see an old man running early in the morning, he is either pursuing something or something is pursuing him! In like manner, when you see people trying to do good, find out what is pursuing them or what they are pursuing. What is driving your deeds? It could be one or more of the following, among others:

### *a) It could be greed!*

Some people may be driven by greed more than anything else when they carry out good or charitable deeds. For example, the young man giving a ride in his car to a stranded girl may be doing so because he wants to sleep with her! He is driven by *lust*. The politician who has given scholarships to destitute children in her constituency may be investing for her re-election. She is an investor. The young pastor that goes out of his way to meet the spiritual needs of the affluent members of his congregation may be driven by the huge tithes that he hopes to get from them. He is a schemer. All those who love to give wide publicity to their charitable deeds may face the risk of being charged with acting out of prideful drive for human recognition.

A clear measure of this trait is what Jesus called *hypocrisy* that He often condemned in the Pharisees. Outwardly, they appeared righteous to men; but, inwardly, they were lawless [Matt. 23: 27-28]. Therefore, it is necessary to always assess the motive (s) for your deeds before you embark on them. For example, why do you want to work in a particular government agency (like the Customs and Immigration Services) but not in social welfare? Why is it that you only put money on the offering trays when your pastor calls for donations that are publicly announced? Why is it that you do not participate in group work where you do not have the limelight? *Why do you want to be a star but refuse to come out at night?* Think about that! When you keep taking and never giving, people will begin to notice that you are a selfish pig who ought to be thrown into a swamp. Your deeds will speak for you!

### *b) It could be pursuit of just reward!*

Many of us simply put in a good day's work for a good day's pay. If you want them to do overtime, you have to pay them for it. Therefore, for such people, there is nothing like a free lunch. *Charity is not free because somebody has to pay for it- through time, money or other resources.* Just reward, measured by equal pay for work of equal value, determines their attitude to good or charitable deeds.

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard [Matt. 20: 1-16] illustrates this situation quite well. A landowner hired labourers to work in his vineyard for different durations but all were to be paid at the rate of a denarius per day [a penny per day- NJV]. That is, irrespective of when they were hired, whether in the morning, afternoon or the last hour to closing time (the eleventh hour), each worker was to receive the same daily pay. Those recruited in the morning “supposed that they would receive more” but they were paid the same amount like everybody else. They complained, saying, “These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.” The landowner replied them, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?” [vv. 11-15]. ***Workers with such an attitude will never go the extra mile for other people. Their stinginess will speak volumes for them!***

Remember, however, that some things that you enjoy are free and you can never pay for them. The air you breathe is one such thing. The utility bills that you pay may be subsidized by the State with taxes paid by others. The food you eat is provided by the employed members of your family. So, what are you contributing to show appreciation or to lessen the load for others? Your deeds will speak for you!

c) *It could be the fear of God*

If you accept the premise that the whole duty of man on earth is to fear God and obey His commandments [Eccl. 12: 13], then you will see your short span of life as an opportunity to thank God for that privilege. You will see your existence on earth as a duty, a thankless one at that. ***You do what you do because it has to be done, not because somebody should commend you for it.*** After all, how many letters of commendation have you received from the tax authority in your country for paying all your due taxes as and when due? When have you ever received a pat in the back from the traffic control division for driving safely? In like manner, we should count ourselves lucky that God has chosen us to help Him to promote His kingdom principles here on earth. ***Your responsibility is to serve, not to count the cost. His responsibility is how to bless you for serving Him.***

For example, Jeremiah had been imprisoned in a dungeon for daring to truthfully speak the word of God that Jerusalem and all Judah would fall into the hands of the invading Babylonians. Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian eunuch in the service of King Zedekiah of Judah, feared that an innocent man could die needlessly. So, he went boldly to ask the king to allow him to bring the prophet out of that dangerous place because he had done nothing wrong. The king obliged him [Jer. 38: 1-13]. As the fall of

Jerusalem became imminent, God sent word through Jeremiah to the Ethiopian that he should fear not because he would not be delivered to the enemy, adding, “Your life shall be as a prize to you *because you have put your trust in Me*” [Jer. 39: 15-18]. He had saved Jeremiah because it was the right thing to do as a God-fearing man. His deed spoke for him before God when it mattered most!

*From the foregoing, we can define a good deed as anything that we do for others because it is the right thing to do, not because of any present or potential gain that we can get out of it. Therefore, it is a good measure of our faith in God, especially through faith in His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.*

### 3. Conclusion: Christ’s deeds are speaking for Him!

Summarizing the disciples’ experience, John the beloved apostle of Jesus wrote, “Truly, *Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book*; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” [Jn 20: 30-31]. In his testimony before the household of Cornelius, Peter added “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, *who went about doing good* and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him (and) *we are witnesses of all things which He did*” [Acts 10: 38-39]. *Today, history is dated before (BC) and since (AD) the coming of Jesus Christ to the world, the Man who did not write a single verse!* His deeds are speaking for Him.

Therefore, *let your deeds also speak for you. Do them because you love God and fear Him, not because they will lead you to heaven because Jesus has already done that for you.* Once you have that attitude, then you will *see good deeds as your duty. How God repays you is His prerogative.*

Let your good deeds speak for you.