

Lessons From A Godly Seamstress

Her many friends gathered to mourn their loss and celebrate her generosity. Some held coats. Others held robes. They admired the skill of her fingers. They would miss their dear friend and fellow saint, but most of all they would miss her sweet and gentle heart. Her friends called for the apostle Peter that he might bring them comfort and perhaps even a miracle. Each mourner held some evidence of her handiwork and eagerly shared with Peter the overflowing kindness that marked her life. These tunics and garments were monuments to her many deeds of kindness and charity. Rivers of tears ran down their faces as they mourned the loss of Tabitha, a kindly and godly seamstress (Acts 9:36-43). There are many lessons for us to learn from this godly seamstress — lessons that can change our relationship with our fellowman as well as God.

Tabitha's faith did not dwell in mere words, it was translated into deeds. Her deeds of kindness and charity were not few and sporadic, but continual and numerous. Tabitha had a faith that was working through love (Galatians 5:6). She did not love in words alone, but in deeds and truth (1 John 3:18). The making and mending of garments for the benefit of others was something to which she continually gave herself. It was not sporadic, haphazard, or infrequent. Her heart continually directed her fingers to work selflessly for the benefit of others. What a blessing thoughtful Tabitha had been.

Every family and every congregation needs the kind of overflowing thoughtfulness contributed by Tabitha. What a blessing it is to have someone with a knack for doing the beautifully helpful thing just at the right moment. A cup of cold water, a kindly smile, a heart-soothing word of encouragement, a gentle rebuke that stops your wayward feet cold in their tracks, a mended garment — whatever the need, whenever the moment, the right word, the right deed, at the right moment — what a blessing!

Tabitha became sick and died. Luke chose not to give us the details of her illness. Her body was treated with respect and dignity as the women washed it and laid it in the upper room. No other preparations for burial were made. Did they anticipate that Peter would bring her back to life?

Death comes to all without discrimination. It is appointed unto all men — righteous and unrighteous — to die (Hebrews 9:27). The illness that took Tabitha's precious life was not some unusual thing. With the introduction of sin in the world came sickness and death. When a righteous person becomes sick or dies, they are not being picked on by God or being treated unfairly by God. Sadly, they are simply suffering the consequences of living in a sin-stained, sin-filled world. God is not the author of death, but of life. It was man (who gave into Satan) who introduced death (Romans 5:1-2).

When death comes and takes the physical life of a person, their deeds do follow them. Each person will be repaid according to the deeds done in the body "whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). Thus following death our deeds live on. God takes note of the many deeds of love and service performed by His children and promises not to forget

them (Hebrews 6:10). Not a single cup of cold water offered in His name will be forgotten (Matthew 10:42). Every cup of cold water, every tunic or cloak, every kind word spoken will find its reward.

We all leave monuments or remembrances to our life. Tabitha left garments as evidence of her charity and kindness. These garments were the tangible evidence of a heart of compassion and kindness. Like the worthy woman of old, Tabitha extended her hands to the poor and stretched out her hands to the needy (cp. Proverbs 31:20). What kind of monuments will I leave? What kind of representations of my life have been provided?

Tabitha came back to life! Speaking almost the same words used by Jesus in raising the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:41), Peter called upon Tabitha to arise. Immediately she opened her eyes and sat up. Peter called her precious friends to join them in the upper room as he presented this godly woman to them — once dead, but now alive! Commenting on this scene, McGarvey wrote, “Here the narration closes, as well it might; for not even Luke’s graphic pen could describe the scene which followed. And if the restoration of one saint to the little band which she has left is indescribable, what shall we say or think of that hour when all the sainted dead shall rise in glory and greet one another on the shores of life?”

While we do not look for the dead of our generation to be raised as was Tabitha, they will nonetheless be resurrected. All men will be resurrected (John 5:28-29) — for some this is a good thing, for others it is a bad thing. Indeed righteous people like Tabitha get sick and die but that is not their end. Those who are “asleep in Jesus” will arise to live together with Him (1 Thessalonians 5:10). They will be raised to put on immortal, imperishable bodies (1 Corinthians 15:50-58). When the last trumpet sounds and the Lord of glory returns to judge the world, the dead in Christ shall rise and with the transformed living meet Jesus in the air to begin an eternity of rest and reward (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 14:13). Will we be ready for that day?

If Tabitha had remained dead, the story would have had a happy ending. She would have been with her Lord in Paradise. Though absent from the body she would have been at home with the Lord (Philippians 1:21-23). Tabitha’s death would have marked her escape from this sin-filled world. Free from all temptations, she could have rested while awaiting her crown of life (2 Timothy 4:8).

This godly seamstress taught us well. Will we take it to heart? I normally do not dedicate articles to particular people, but with this article I am breaking with that tradition. I cannot read Acts 9:36-39 without thinking of my mother. In her own quiet way, without fanfare or praise, she has lived her life in selfless service to others. With her quiet grace and warm smile, she opened her home to dozens of preachers and visitors who needed a place of comfort and rest. I dare not try to guess the number of people, known and unknown, who have sat at her table and enjoyed her culinary gifts. The grateful and the ungrateful, the sweet and the sour — all were treated graciously, respectfully, kindly, and lovingly. She has hemmed, mended, and created garments for a huge host of people. Scores of homes have been made brighter and lovelier by the addition of a quilt, doll, or other craft item that came from her precious hands.

Mom taught us how to be patient and understanding with people, especially when they were irritating. More by example than words, she taught us not to be judgmental and harshly critical of others. With a deeply genuine humility, she taught us how to laugh at ourselves, find amusement in our own mistakes, and not take ourselves too seriously. Through the struggles of her life, she taught us how endure injustices, cruelties, and disappointments without becoming bitter and cynical. Now, she teaches us how to cope with serious illness with a faith and trust in God that grows stronger with the passage of time.

Mom also taught us to give our flowers to the living so they might enjoy these wonders of nature. Mom, I hope you enjoy and are strengthened by this bouquet of well-deserved praise! Your children arise up and call you blessed (Proverbs 31:28).

Adapted from John A. Smith