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Introduction/Neighbor Nudge: If you could pick one character quality to be known for, what would you pick & why?

Love, mercy, graciousness, faith, joy, hope, patience? What would it be?

Transition: This morning we're going to be looking at a snippet from the life of a woman who was **known and continues to be known for her good deeds**. This fall we've been looking closely to see what the Bible has to say about the place/role of good deeds in the life of the Christian.

Good deeds won't get anyone to heaven, but good deeds are an expected response in view of all the goodness of God poured out in our lives. The Bible is clear that getting to heaven is only by faith in Christ. But the Bible is just as clear that those who have put their faith in Christ Jesus must give attention and care to doing good deeds:

This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men. Titus 3:8 (NASB-U)

Theme & memory Verse: *Let your light shine before men in such a way that **they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*** Matthew 5:16

The Bible tells us about a woman who was known for her good deeds. Acts 9:36.

I. Good deeds are the response of a grateful heart to a gracious God.

Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated in Greek is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. Acts 9:36 (NASB-U)

Why was Tabitha doing these acts of kindness, deeds of charity? Not so that she could go to heaven—she was already a disciple! She had already believed in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and an eternal home in heaven. Not in order to go to heaven, but as a way of saying “Thanks” for the overwhelming blessings of God; because God had blessed her so much.

If you want to say “Thanks” to God for his mercies, spend your life in doing good to others.

A. Tabitha was "full of" good works (pleres).

*this woman was **abounding** with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did. (NASB)*

Stephen was full of faith and power (6:8). The town of Ephesus was full of wrath (19:28). When your life becomes so characterized by an attitude, emotion or quality, we could say you are "full of" that thing. And Tabitha was full of good works!

Illustration of a cup that is filled with hot chocolate. When it gets bumped, what spills out? Hot chocolate. When you get jostled, whatever you're full of spills out!

B. Tabitha displayed the character of Christ, who "went around doing good." (10:37-38)

*[37] You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached-- [38] how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and **how he went around doing good** and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. (Acts 10)*

Think of all the things that Peter could have said about Jesus' life and ministry. Jesus walked on water, Jesus was transfigured and his clothes shone like the sun, Jesus

II. Doing good means you use your gifts and resources to meet the needs of others

Jump down to verse 39, "*The room was filled with widows who were weeping and showing him the coats and other garments Dorcas had made for them.*" (39)

A. The need: widows in the seaport of Joppa

Joppa was a sea port. Then, as well as today, sailors were regularly exposed to great risk. Ships were routinely lost at sea, and the families were bereft of husbands and fathers. There would have been a number of widows there in Joppa who had all suffered a similar tragedy. And Tabitha cared for them. She saw a need, and she did what she could to meet it.

B. Tabitha's readiness to meet the need

As we continue reading this passage, we're going to be attending a funeral. Not a sailor's funeral, but Tabitha's funeral. And the thing I want you to notice is that there's no mention of her family. We never read about a husband or children. Many believe—and I think with reason—that Tabitha was all alone. And who better than a single person to minister to others who were now single as well.

We don't know that Tabitha was all that wealthy. But she purchased fabric, she gave her time, she gave her ability, and she gave away coats and cloaks and tunics and robes. None of the widows was cold in winter because Tabitha cared for them so lovingly and faithfully.

The Bible gives us some specific examples of the characteristics of good deeds—what they look like.

C. Characteristics of good deeds

1. They meet pressing needs

Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful. Titus 3:14 [NASB-U]

2. They draw on our generosity and willingness to share

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 1 Tim. 6:18 (NIV)

3. They include ordinary things like taking care of children, menial things like washing feet, necessary things like hospitality, and unexpected things like helping those in trouble

and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds. 1 Tim. 5:10 (NIV)

III. Doing good doesn't give you immunity from difficulty

(9:37) *About this time she became ill and died.*

It is easy to adopt the mindset, “God, here I’ve done all these good things for You, and You let me suffer like this?”

We don't do good to earn our way to heaven. We don't do good to earn an exemption from suffering either.

- We do good because our God in heaven has given us the means: people have needs and God has blessed us with an abundance.
- We do good because our God in heaven has given us an example: He showers out his goodness on us all each day.
- We do good because our God in heaven is praised and glorified by it.
- We do good because it is a way we can express our gratitude for God's blessings (Thanksgiving)

You may be here this morning, looking back at all the time you spent teaching Sunday School, the years you spent on the Women's Auxiliary for the Union Gospel Mission, the money you've contributed to Samaritan's Purse, and you're tempted to

say, "God, I don't understand! If this is how you treat your friends..." Don't allow the devil to tempt you to bitterness, disillusionment.

Doing good doesn't give you immunity from difficulty; but it does give you support and sustenance in the midst of your difficulty. Do you think Tabitha's friends abandoned her during her sickness? Do you think her friends fled from her during her illness? Not at all. Let's continue reading.

IV. Doing good for others in their time of need often results in others doing good for you in your time of need

About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. [38] Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" Acts 9:37-38 (NIV)

A. The recipients of your good deeds will come to your aid

All the widows who were there in Joppa cared for her after her death. I think we have every reason to believe that they cared for her during her illness as well.

B. The recipients of your good deeds will enlist others to help you

Not just the widows, but the entire church was involved in calling for the Apostle Peter, who was just 10 miles away.

V. The good things you do in this lifetime will be an ongoing witness to your faith in Christ after your death

(9:39) So Peter returned with them; and as soon as he arrived, they took him to the upstairs room. The room was filled with widows who were weeping and showing him the coats and other garments Dorcas had made for them. (9:40) But Peter asked them all to leave the room; then he knelt and prayed. Turning to the body he said, "Get up, Tabitha." And she opened her eyes! When she saw Peter, she sat up! (9:41) He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then he called in the widows and all the believers, and he showed them that she was alive.

How did Peter know what to do? Years earlier Jairus, a synagogue ruler, came to Jesus and pled with him to come and heal his sick daughter. Jesus was interrupted while on the way, and during the delay the daughter died. Jesus went to Jairus's house anyway. Here's what we read in Mark 5:

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. [41] He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!").

[42] Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. Mark 5:40-42 (NIV)

So Peter puts out the mourners, prays, addresses the dead as though she were alive and says almost the same words that Jesus said, “Tabitha koum!” “Tabitha, time to get up!”

The Bible records seven incidents of people being brought back to life. Tabitha is the only adult woman who was raised to life again!

Tabitha had died, but the widows were giving testimony to her life, her deeds, her love. This incident took place in the first century. And here we are, over 1900 years later, and people around the world are still talking about Tabitha. Why? Because of her good deeds!

VI. Your good deeds open the door for many to come to faith in Jesus

(9:42) The news raced through the whole town, and many believed in the Lord. (9:43) And Peter stayed a long time in Joppa, living with Simon, a leatherworker.

We don't know that Tabitha was a gifted public speaker. We don't know that she was a great theologian, a teacher, an evangelist. All we know is that she knew how to use a needle and thread.

It would have been easy for Tabitha to have thought, “I can't preach like Peter; I can't be used by God.” “I can't reason like Paul; I can't be used by God.” But she didn't. Centuries earlier God asked Moses, “What do you have in your hand?” And Moses answered, “A rod.” And God used an ordinary rod in the hands of a yielded man to accomplish extraordinary things.

“What do you have in your hand, Tabitha?” “A needle and thread.” And God used an ordinary needle and thread in the hands of a yielded woman to accomplish great things, so much so that a door was opened in the hearts of widowed women. And ultimately a door was opened in the hearts of who knows how many others, “*the news raced through the whole town, and many believed in the Lord*” all because of her willingness to selflessly serve others with the ability God gave her, small as it might have seemed.

What's in your hand? The ability to garden? A camera?

What is it that God has placed in your hand that you can use to serve others? A soccer ball? A paintbrush?

Tabitha had a needle and thread. What do you have that if yielded to God, can make an eternal difference in the lives of men and women? A computer? A phone?

Conclusion/Applications

What should we learn from this passage?

A. There's no "one size fits all" approach to evangelism

We try to make "cookie cutter" Christians, when God has made us all different. Personality, background, gifts, experiences, interests, etc. Find out how God has made you, and work in harmony with His divine design.

Too often we think that unless we are skilled conversationalists, skilled communicators, skilled salesmen, extroverts, we could never be witnesses for Christ. NOT TRUE! Here's a woman who may not have possessed any of those qualities, but she knew how to sew. And she used that gift in the service of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Style	Example	Passage	Characteristics	
Confrontational	Peter	Acts 2	Confident, assertive, direct	Evangelism Explosion
Intellectual	Paul	Acts 17	Inquisitive, enjoys debating, analytical, logical	Reasons to Believe, apologetics
Testimonial	Blind man	John 9	Openly shares life experiences (good and bad)	Develop a 3 minute testimony
Invitational	Matthew, Woman at well	Luke 5, John 4	Relational, warm, friendly	"Come and see"
Serving	Tabitha	Acts 9	Enjoys meeting needs and patiently serving others	Deeds of Kindness

As you review the list of evangelistic styles, which one best describes you? Best fits you?

Most evangelism is geared to those with speaking ability. Deeds of kindness is geared to those with serving ability. Tabitha used what gifts and abilities she had in serving God. What skills do you possess that God could use for His glory in service to others?

B. In a skeptical society we must show, then tell

- 1. You're going to vote on this, so you better listen up: Do you think it was more difficult to be a Christian in 35 AD or more difficult to be a Christian in 2005 AD?**

How does 35 AD compare with 2005 AD? What can the church of 2005 learn from the church of 35 about reaching other with the gospel of Christ?

The situation we find ourselves in today roughly parallels that of the first century church in a number of ways:

2. Because it faced hostile people and persecution from the state, the church had to influence people to have a positive attitude toward Christianity.

How did they do that? Through the testimony of changed lives, ministries of service, love for one another, love for non-Christians. How did they break down barriers of mistrust, hostility, skepticism? Through doing deeds of kindness.

3. Because they faced a population with no knowledge of the gospel, early Christians had to inform people of the story of Jesus: the good news.

4. As they confronted an empire with several entrenched religions, Christians had to convince people of the truth of Christianity, or at least of its plausibility.

Reasoning from the scriptures, common sense apologetics

5. Since entry into the faith involves an act of the will, Christians had to invite people to adopt this faith, join the new community, and follow Jesus as Lord.

When Christianity became the dominant religion, it dominated life and culture. Most people were already informed in the basics of Christianity, were favorable disposed toward the faith, and already assumed its truth. So the Christian communicator could largely focus on inviting people to adopt the faith.

But with a growing secularization (religion is no longer a vital aspect of life) in our society, we today can't start at point 5. We need to plow the ground, plant the seed, cultivate and weed and water.

There are fewer and fewer people who will respond to a traditional evangelistic presentation. There are fewer and fewer people who will hear and go forward. So we need to step back and start with point one: influence, then two: informing, then three, convincing, and finally four: inviting.

C. Don't devalue the power of an ordinary gift yielded to Jesus Christ. Don't devalue the impact of an ordinary life yielded to Jesus Christ

Tabitha was a disciple (marturia--the only time the feminine form is used in the N.T.). She distinguished herself as a disciple of Jesus Christ. There were countless women who lived in the first century who were disciples of Jesus. But Tabitha is the only one given that title, given that honor, in the N.T.

D. God in heaven was glorified through a needle and thread!

*Let your light shine before men in such a way that **they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.** Matthew 5:16*