

PROVERBS 31:20-31

She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. ²¹ When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet. ²² She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple. ²³ Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land. ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. ²⁵ She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. ²⁶ She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue. ²⁷ She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. ²⁸ Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ²⁹ “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.” ³⁰ Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. ³¹ Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

ACTS 9:36-42 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ 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!”. ³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. ⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

A HYMN ABOUT THE PURPOSE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH PROCLAIMS:

“LORD, WHOSE LOVE THROUGH HUMBLE SERVICE BORE THE WEIGHT OF HUMAN NEED, WHO UPON THE CROSS, FORSAKEN, OFFERED MERCY’S PERFECT DEED.

WE, YOUR SERVANTS, BRING THE WORSHIP NOT OF VOICE ALONE, BUT OF HEART, CONSECRATING TO YOUR PURPOSE EVERY GIFT THAT YOU IMPART.”

CALLED FROM WORSHIP TO YOUR SERVICE, FORTH IN YOUR DEAR NAME WE GO, TO THE CHILD, THE YOUTH, THE AGED, LOVE IN LIVING DEEDS TO SHOW.

HOPE AND HEALTH, GOODWILL AND COMFORT, COUNSEL, AID, AND PEACE WE GIVE, THAT YOUR SERVANTS LORD, IN FREEDOM, MAY YOUR MERCY KNOW AND LIVE.”

SOME OF THESE LYRICS MAY BRING TO MIND, NOT ONLY CHRIST’S WORK BUT ALSO MAY BE SEEN AS TRAITS OF CHRISTIAN MOTHERHOOD.

THEY ALSO SPEAK ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY THAT PUTS FAITH INTO ACTION.

THE CHURCH DOES THIS, OF COURSE, THROUGH INDIVIDUALS WORKING TOGETHER, AS WELL AS ON THEIR OWN.

IF WE COMBINE THE OLD TESTAMENT READING FROM PROVERBS 31 AND THE NEW TESTAMENT ONE FROM ACTS 9- WE FIND FOUR EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE WHO LIVE OUT THEIR FAITH IN GOD.

MOTHER TERESA DESCRIBED THE IMPORTANCE OF EVEN SMALL DEEDS OF ACTIVE FAITH.

SHE SAID: “NOT ALL OF US CAN DO GREAT THINGS. BUT WE CAN DO SMALL THINGS WITH GREAT LOVE.”

THE ACTIONS MENTIONED IN THE SCRIPTURE READINGS POINT TO MANY SMALL DEEDS OF LOVE AND ONE GREAT DEED.

WE BEGIN WITH PROVERBS 31, AND THE VIRTUES OF A CAPABLE WIFE AND MOTHER.

BUT THE PASSAGE IS BEST UNDERSTOOD BY LOOKING AT BOTH PROVERBS 1:7 AND 31:30.

THE FIRST SAYS “THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM.” AND IN PROVERBS 31, IT PROCLAIMS: “A WOMAN WHO FEARS THE LORD IS GREATLY TO BE PRAISED.”

THE WOMAN OF PROVERBS 31 LIVES OUT HER FAITH IN CARING FOR HER FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD AND NEIGHBORS.

WE CAN SEE IN HER THE PERSONIFICATION OF THE BIBLICAL DESCRIPTION OF LADY WISDOM HERSELF.

CHRISTIANS MIGHT ALSO LOOK UPON HER AS A MODEL FOR HOW WE CAN LIVE AS WOMEN AND MEN OF FAITH.

OF COURSE, FEW IF ANY OF US WILL LIKELY LIVE UP TO THE IDEAL WOMAN DESCRIBED IN PROVERBS 31

SHE IS INDUSTRIOUS TO AN EXTREME, WORKS DAY AND NIGHT, IS A SHREWD INVESTOR, A GOOD SAVER OF RESOURCES TO HAVE ON HAND IN TIMES OF TROUBLE.

SHE SUPERVISES HER SERVANTS AND DOES HER OWN HOUSEHOLD CORES, AND IS ALSO A BUSINESS WOMAN, AS WELL AS A WIFE AND MOTHER.

LET’S FACE IT, NO ONE PERSON FEMALE OR MALE COULD EXACTLY MIRROR EVERY ONE OF HER VIRTUES.

FORTUNATELY, NO ONE IS MEANT TO BECOME JUST LIKE HER OR DIE TRYING.

HOWEVER, WE CAN AND SHOULD LOOK TO THE WAYS, WE AS PEOPLE OF FAITH CAN, IN OUR OWN WAY, EXHIBIT HER KEY VIRTUES.

FIRST, THERE IS FAITHFULNESS TO AND CARE FOR FAMILY: WHICH CAN BE BIOLOGICAL OR ADOPTED FAMILY, CHURCH FAMILY, OR OTHERS WE CONSIDER TO BE LIKE FAMILY.

NEXT, WE ARE TO DO OUR BEST IN OUR LABORS, WHETHER WE GET PAID MONEY OR THINGS FOR OUR WORK, OR NOT.

ANOTHER THING WE LEARN IS BE WISE IN THE USE OF OUR RESOURCES AND SET ASIDE WHAT WE CAN FOR A RAINY DAY.

AND YET WE ARE TO BE GENEROUS TO THE POOR AND SHARE WHAT WE CAN WITH OTHERS.

WE SHOULD ALSO PRACTICE KINDNESS AND SPEAK WISELY RATHER THAN FOOLISHLY, SO AS TO BE AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS.

THERE IS, AS WELL, AN OFTEN-OVERLOOKED VIRTUE FOUND IN THIS WOMAN’S CHARACTER. IT IS RECORDED IN VERSE 22: “SHE MAKES HERSELF COVERINGS, HER CLOTHING IS FINE LINEN AND PURPLE.”

LINEN, AND PURPLE CLOTH WERE VERY EXPENSIVE IN ANCIENT TIMES, WHICH MEANS THE VERSE IS POINTING OUT THIS WOMAN ALSO PRACTICED SELF-CARE.

YES INDEED, SELF CARE IS SOMETHING TOO MANY PEOPLE FEEL GUILTY ABOUT, OR NEVER SEEM TO FIND THE TIME TO DO. AND YET THE BIBLE SAYS THIS IS IMPORTANT ALSO.

FINALLY, WE COME TO THE GREATEST TRAIT THIS WOMAN PRACTICED, WHICH IS “FEAR OF THE LORD.”

IT IS HELPFUL TO REMEMBER-THE BIBLICAL EXPRESSION: “FEAR OF THE LORD”, IS NOT ABOUT BEING FRIGHTENED OF GOD.

INSTEAD, IT MEANS FEARING IN THE SENSE OF SHOWING RESPECT, FEELING AWE, AND EXHIBITING BOTH HUMILITY TOWARDS GOD, AND LOVE FOR GOD, OTHERS, AND SELF.

CHRISTIANS, IN PARTICULAR ARE CALLED TO SHOW CHRIST-LIKE LOVE IN OUR WORDS AND ACTIONS.

THIS BRINGS US TO THE PASSAGE FROM ACTS AND A WOMAN NAMED DORCUS, ALSO CALLED TABITHA. SINCE THERE IS NO MENTION OF ANY FAMILY MEMBERS, WE DO NOT KNOW IF SHE WAS A MOTHER, OR EVEN MARRIED.

BUT WHAT IS CLEAR FROM THE BRIEF MENTION OF HER IS THAT SHE SHARED MANY OF THE VIRTUES OF THE WOMAN OF PROVERBS.

SHE EXHIBITED REVERENCE FOR THE LORD, AND PUT HER FAITH INTO ACTION BY SHOWING CHARITY TOWARDS OTHERS ON A CONSISTENT BASIS.

WE ARE ALSO TOLD SOMETHING ABOUT DORCUS THAT IS NOT FOUND IN SCRIPTURE ABOUT ANY OTHER WOMAN. SHE IS GIVEN THE TITLE OF “DISCIPLE.”

MANY WOMEN MENTIONED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CERTAINLY COULD BE CLASSIFIED AS THOSE WHO LEARNED FROM AND FOLLOWED JESUS LIKE THE MALE DISCIPLES.

BUT DORCUS WAS THE ONLY WOMAN, IN THE BIBLE, ACTUALLY GIVEN THE TITLE OF DISCIPLE.

THIS SHOWS THE IMPACT AMONG OTHERS OF HER FAITH, WHICH SHE PUT INTO ACTION.

SHE NOT ONLY MADE CLOTHING FOR WIDOWS WHO WERE AN EXTREMELY VULNERABLE GROUP IN THAT TIME.

SHE ALSO IS DESCRIBED AS A WOMAN WHO WAS “FULL OF GOOD WORKS AND GIVING ALMS.”

THIS SUGGESTS SHE OPENED HER HAND TO THE POOR IN A VARIETY OF WAYS, AS WELL AS DID OTHER DEEDS OF KINDNESS.

WE MIGHT EVEN SAY SHE “MOTHERED” MANY OF HER NEIGHBORS OF ALL AGES, SHOWING IN HER ACTIONS HER LOVE FOR JESUS.

THE OTHER CHRISTIANS OF JOPPA ALSO DEMONSTRATED THEIR ACTIVE FAITH, AFTER HER SUDDEN DEATH.

THEY HEARD PETER WAS IN A TOWN NEARBY-AND SENT SOME MEN TO GO TO HIM AND ASK HIM TO COME TO JOPPA.

THEN, RATHER THAN BURYING HER RIGHT AWAY, AS WAS THE CUSTOM, THEY LAID HER OUT IN A ROOM, WAITING FOR THE MEN TO FIND PETER.

THE APOSTLE WAS STAYING WAS ABOUT TEN MILES FORM THEM-WHICH MEANT WOULD HAVE TAKEN ALL DAY AT THE VERY LEAST TO MAKE THE JOURNEY THERE AND BACK.

WE MAY ASSUME THEIR HOPE WAS PETER COULD RESTORE HER TO LIFE.

REMEMBER, IT HAD NOT BEEN TOO LONG SINCE CHRIST’S RESURRECTION AND PENTECOST. AND SURELY NEWS OF PETER MIRACULOUS HEALINGS HAD REACHED THEM.

THESE CHRISTIANS BELIEVED STRONGLY IN THE POWER OF CHRIST WHICH WAS WORKING THROUGH PETER AND THE OTHER APOSTLES, AND SO THEY SENT FOR HIM.

THERE WAS, OF COURSE, NO GUARANTEE HE COULD BRING HER BACK TO LIFE.

BUT STILL, THE CHRISTIANS OF JOPPA ASKED FOR HIM IN THE HOPE GOD WOULD GRANT HER RESURRECTION. THIS BRINGS US TO PETER’S ACTIVE FAITH.

WE HAVE MANY STORIES ABOUT HIM FULFILLING JESUS’ COMMAND TO HIM TO LOVE. PETER INDEED, SPENT THE REST OF HIS LIFE FEEDING AND TENDING CHRIST’S FOLLOWERS.

HE HEARD AND OBEYED THE LORD’S CALL FOR HIM TO GO TO JOPPA THROUGH THE REQUEST MADE BY THAT CHURCH.

PETER ARRIVED AND LISTENED TO THE TESTIMONY OF THE FAITH COMMUNITY.

HE ALSO HEARD THE WORDS OF MANY WIDOWS WHOM DORCUS HAD BEFRIENDED AND MINISTERED TO ACCORDING TO HER GIFTS.

NEXT, PETER, REMINISCENT OF JESUS RAISING JAIRUS’ DAUGHTER OF BACK TO LIFE, SENDS THE MOURNERS OUT OF THE ROOM. HE KNEELS AND PRAYS.

WE MAY IMAGINE HE PRAYS FOR THE CHURCH IN JOPPA,
THOSE WHO MOURN THE DEATH OF DORCUS, AND PRAYS FOR
GOD'S WILL TO BE DONE THROUGH HIM

THEN, LIKE JESUS DID WITH THE LITTLE GIRL, PETER CALLS
HER BY HER JEWISH NAME TABITHA-AND COMMANDS HER TO
GET UP.

SHE IS GIFTED WITH MORE YEARS OF SERVICE TO HER LORD.
AND, THROUGH HER RESURRECTION, MANY MORE PEOPLE
CAME TO FAITH IN CHRIST.

THIS BRINGS US TO CONSIDER HOW CHRISTIANS TODAY CAN
PUT THEIR FAITH INTO ACTION.

THE DRAMATIC KIND OF MIRACLES GOD WORKED THROUGH
THE APOSTLES ARE NOT PRESENTLY PART OF GOD'S PLAN.

HOWEVER, PETER DID GIVE US SOME DIRECTION WHEN IT
COMES TO HOW WE CAN SHARE OUR FAITH BY CARING FOR
OTHERS.

IN 1 PETER 4:10, IT SAYS: "EACH ONE SHOULD USE WHATEVER
GIFTS HE OR SHE HAS RECEIVED TO SERVE OTHERS,
FAITHFULLY ADMINISTERING GRACE IN VARIOUS FORMS."

ONE EXAMPLE OF SMALL AND YET POWERFUL ACTS OF LOVE
CAN BE FOUND IN THE STORY OF A WOMAN NAMED LILLIAN,
SHARED BY HER PASTOR.

LILLIAN'S GIFT WAS THE TALENT TO MAKE QUILTS. SHE WAS
ALWAYS EITHER SEWING ONE OR PLANNING OUT A NEW ONE.

THIS WOMAN GAVE HER WORKS OF LOVE TO HER CHILDREN,
GRANDCHILDREN, AND GREAT GRANDCHILDREN, AS WELL AS
OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS.

SHE ALSO GIFTED MANY OTHER PEOPLE WITH QUILTS OF
VARIOUS DESIGNS AND SIZES.

HER PASTOR SHARED SOMETHING HE LEARNED FROM HER
THROUGH HER QUILTS.

HE EXPLAINED SHE, SPOKE OFTEN OF HOW GOOD THE LORD
HAD BEEN TO HER IN HER LIFETIME.

THE WOMAN SAW GOD'S CARE EVEN THROUGH TIMES OF
CHALLENGE AND HEARTACHE.

AND HER FAITH HELPED HER TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT,
BECAUSE SHE GAVE HER CONCERNS OVER TO THE LORD.

THEN HE POINTED OUT THAT IF WE LOOK AT THE BACK OF A
QUILT TOP BEFORE IT IS FINISHED, WE SEE ALL THE KNOTS
THAT WERE TIED AND STRINGS HANGING LOOSE.

HE ALSO OBSERVED THAT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN OUR
LIVES LOOK A LITTLE LIKE THE BACK OF AN UNFINISHED
QUILT.

OTHERS MAY SEE OUR LIVES AS A LOVELY PATTERN, AND
YET HIDDEN FROM SIGHT, THERE CAN BE LOOSE STRINGS AND
KNOTS WHICH DO NOT LOOK PRETTY.

BUT HERE IS WHAT THE PASTOR WROTE CONCERNING THE
LESSON WE CAN LEARN FROM QUILTS:

"YOU KNOW, BY PUTTING YOUR FAITH AND TRUST IN CHRIST,
HE CAN TAKE THE ...PIECES OF YOUR LIFE, NO MATTER HOW
RAGGED, NO MATTER HOW TORN, NO MATTER WHAT HAS
HAPPENED...

AND TURN YOU INTO A PIECE OF BEAUTIFUL ART, PLEASING
AND ACCEPTABLE TO THE LORD OUR GOD."

WHAT A WONDERFUL IMAGE TO REFLECT ON. WE SHOULD
ALSO THINK ABOUT HOW JESUS OFTEN USES HIS FOLLOWERS
TO BE THE ONES TO HELP TO GOD DO THIS.

MAY WE SEEK THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO PUT OUR
FAITH INTO ACTION, ACCORDING TO OUR GIFTS AND GOD'S
DIRECTION, SO THAT THROUGH US OTHERS MAY BE DRAWN
TO JESUS CHRIST. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: PROVERBS 31:20-31 & ACTS 9:36-43

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