



# Tabitha!

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Alive #2 | Mar 10, 2024 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell

## *Opening<sup>1</sup>*

### *Introduction*



A little over a month before I was born, on September 5, 1977, the **Voyager 1** space probe was launched into space on an incredible journey toward the outer edges of our solar system! On its first day, it took the first spacecraft photo of the earth and moon as it sped away. In 1979, it reached Jupiter...in 1980 it reached Saturn...and then it kept going!

While the probe had an anticipated 4-year lifespan, for nearly *47 years* now(!), Voyager 1 has continued to send data as it speeds away...definitely lasting longer than expected! The spacecraft is now over 15 billion miles away from home and will continue to travel indefinitely.

However, since November of 2023, Voyager hasn't been sending back valid data. It's been sending gibberish. "Instead of sending messages home in binary code, Voyager 1 is now just sending back alternating 1s and 0s."<sup>2</sup> The fear is that its onboard computer may be dead.

#### **How do you bring it back to life?**

NASA engineers keep trying to revive Voyager. They are sending commands trying to fix or reboot 1970s technology that has less computing power than the key fob you use to start your car! It is a difficult process, made monumentally more challenging by the fact that it takes nearly a full day for the signal to reach the probe and another day for them to hear a reply!

How do you bring something back to life? That's a great question. But the bigger question is worth asking...

#### **If you can bring it back, *why* bring it back?**

The hunk of metal flying through space doesn't care. It's not for Voyager's sake that we want to revive it. No, the reason for bringing it back is for Voyager's *creators*. We have a vested interest, and so we will continue to take action to bring Voyager back from the dead.

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<sup>1</sup> Optional – watch video of launch [Bing Videos](#)

<sup>2</sup> [NASA is trying to fix Voyager 1, but the old spacecraft's days are numbered : NPR](#)

## Review



I thought that was a fitting news story and a good lead-in as we continue our sermon series on resurrection. Resurrection – the kind Jesus talks about – is our future! So, as a church, we want to be *ready for resurrection*.

In this series, we are jumping into stories of resurrection that we see in the Bible. We are exploring the details and learning lessons about **God’s character, priorities, and goals** in each resurrection story... because those ideas can **inform** and **transform** our daily lives.

- Last week we heard the story of **Elijah and the widow’s son** in 1 Kings 17. In that resurrection tale, we were reminded that **life comes from God**. Whether created or resurrected, there is no other source that we can trust for future life!

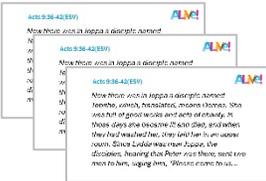
Today as we explore another resurrection story, we’re going to explore the “why” of resurrection. And in that answer, we’ll see that **it’s not about us!** To help us learn that truth, we are heading back to our favorite book (Acts – make some noise) to hear the story of **Tabitha**, aka Dorcas.



*Note: I’m going to stick with the **Tabitha** name as I talk about her, because it feels like I’m insulting her by calling her Dorcas. Both words translate as “Gazelle,” one in Aramaic and one in Greek...but the first name definitely sounds better in English!*

## Tabitha! (Acts 9:36-42)

Turn in your Bible to Acts 9:36-42 to follow along with Tabitha’s story.



*“Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.*

*Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, “Please come to us without delay.” So Peter rose and went with them.*

*And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside, 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. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.” (Acts 9:36–42, ESV)*



## ***Resurrection is Not (Just) BY Us***

The first point I want you to hear in this story is that *resurrection is not (just) by us*.

Last week, when we looked at the story of Elijah and the widow, one of the things we mentioned was that it was *unfamiliar* territory. It was the first resurrection account in the Bible, and as Elijah prayed for the boy's life to return, he didn't know what to expect.

But as we read today's story in the New Testament, it lacks the novelty of that first Old Testament miracle. By now, readers of the Bible have seen resurrection occur several times. It's still impressive, but it seems more *familiar*.

Scripture has a way of doing this. The miraculous becomes commonplace as God's Kingdom grows and expands. Consider:



- **David**, the Lord's anointed one, shockingly **defeats the giant**, Goliath! (1 Samuel 17)
  - o But **later**, other Philistine giants fall easily at the hands of ordinary soldiers! (1 Chronicles 20:4-8)
- **Saul** is given the **Spirit of God** in a special, temporary indwelling as a sign that he is God's chosen king for the nation of Israel (1 Samuel 10)
  - o But **later**, the Holy Spirit is given as a lasting gift to **everyone** who repents and is baptized in the name of Jesus! (Acts 2:38)

The same is true of **resurrection**. It was a unique occurrence...until it started to become more frequent (...and it will become universal when Jesus returns)! Tabitha's story fits into the time when resurrection has become more frequent. Jesus had set the stage by miraculously raising others and himself from the grave (we'll talk about those resurrections in other sermons soon). Now, it was His disciples' turn.



## ***Disciples Couldn't Do It by Themselves***

But there was a problem: Jesus' disciples couldn't do a resurrection on their own!

In these resurrection stories, we sometimes find a person involved as the human agent – Elijah, Peter, Paul. Resurrection involves them, even though it is not *just* by them. So who could be involved in Tabitha's return to life?

The passage talks about disciples (aka "followers") of Jesus in this coastal town. We don't know specifically who they were, but when Acts calls people by this term, we do know that it refers to Christians who follow Jesus as Lord and Savior.

One disciple is Tabitha, this woman who does good deeds and epitomizes Christian character. Others are unnamed, but similarly follow Jesus. And yet when Tabitha passes away, these other disciples felt powerless to do anything about it. Certainly, Tabitha is unable to raise herself, but the other disciples don't believe they have the power or the gifting to be a part of a miracle either.

They couldn't do it by themselves...so they called in Peter.



## Peter Couldn't Do It by Himself

Peter had a reputation as being the lead apostle. He had done amazing things and had experienced much learning as a disciple of Jesus. In the prior chapters of Acts, we hear about Peter's involvement in amazing healings, bold confrontations, daring escapes, and more. In fact, in the passage immediately preceding this one, Peter was in a town (Lydda) about 10 miles away from Tabitha's town (Joppa) and while he was there, he was involved in a healing of a man paralyzed for eight years!

If you need a guy for this job, Peter is the man!

Yet Peter wasn't special because he was "Peter." He couldn't do it himself. Peter was able to do what he did because the Spirit was at work in Him...applying the power of Jesus to his situations. At Lydda, the paralyzed man was healed for one reason:

*"And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, **Jesus Christ** heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose." (Acts 9:34, ESV)*

That power of Jesus in his ministry draws Tabitha's friends to Peter. They send for him to come quickly, to make the ten-mile hike to Joppa and help. Peter agrees.

When he finally arrives in Joppa later that day and encounters Tabitha's lifeless body, Peter returns to his source of power. He goes yet again to Jesus.

***Interruption: "Wait a second – it doesn't say that, Steve. Peter doesn't mention Jesus at all. He just says, 'Tabitha, arise,' takes her hand and she gets up."***

Good catch! Peter does NOT mention Jesus verbally. But even without the verbal acknowledgement, Peter clearly submits to Jesus here in two clear ways.

1. Peter **prays** before doing anything (Acts 9:40). That act alone shows that Peter isn't relying on his own power, but even more striking is that...
2. Peter **copies Jesus** (Mark 5:41)



## ***Jairus' Daughter – Mark 5***

If you remember the gospels, you can't help but see the connection between Peter's approach with Tabitha and Jesus' approach with another girl in need of resurrection. In Mark 5, we find the story of Jairus. He was a synagogue ruler with a young daughter. His daughter fell sick, and Jairus wanted Jesus to heal her. On their way to the house, though, the girl tragically died, and all hope seemed lost. Yet Jesus didn't give up. "Do not fear," He said. "Only believe" (Mark 5:36). Jesus went to see her anyway...accompanied by a few disciples, including Peter himself (Mark 5:37).

*"They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's*



father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, “**Talitha cumi**,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement.” (Mark 5:38–42, ESV)

**Did you catch the parallels?**

	Jesus	Peter
Mourners Outside	no	yes
Taken by the Hand	no	yes
“...arise!”	yes	no
Gets up, alive!	yes	no

- The mourners are put outside the room.
- The dead girl is taken by the hand.
- A phrase is stated, “Little girl/Tabitha arise.”
  - Note the Aramaic that Mark includes: “*Talitha cumi*.” It would only be one letter off between Jesus’ and Peter’s words (*Talitha/Tabitha*)
- The girl gets up, alive!

While the circumstances of Peter’s situation are slightly different, his actions show that he was imitating Jesus in humility and submission. He copies Jesus, trusting Jesus’ power, as he commands Tabitha to rise..

Peter (and the other disciples) know that **resurrection is not just by us...it is by Jesus!**

## ***Resurrection is Not (Just) FOR Us***



The second point I want you to hear in this story is that *resurrection is not (just) for us*.

We tend to think about resurrection from this side of the grave, but think for a moment about what Tabitha went through.

### ***Tabitha’s After Death Experience***



In last weeks’ sermon, we discussed the ancient Hebrew view of the afterlife – the “pit” of Sheol. Resurrection wasn’t considered, and the present was viewed as the only time and place that mattered.

Yet as Scripture moves forward from 1 Kings, it slowly and surely peels back more for us to see. As the Bible progresses, we see that the afterlife is not just a “pit!” We get glimpses of an afterlife that is more!



*“For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.”* (Psalm 86:13, ESV)



*“Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.”* (Psalm 16:9–10, ESV)



*“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,”* (Job 19:25–26, ESV)

When we reach the New Testament, conversations about resurrection and the afterlife become more explicit and clearer. We are told about the afterlife; we get a glimpse of our future.

“Christian theology teaches that when we die our bodies decay, but we continue to exist as persons in God’s presence and will one day be raised to undying life with glorified bodies.”<sup>3</sup> So, for the person who dies, there is an immediate welcome into the presence of God!

*“Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:8, ESV)*

This means that Tabitha wasn’t just in the grave. She was experiencing the initial glimpses of eternity. As a Christian, she was discovering the joy of being with Jesus!

Have you ever had an amazing dream where you didn’t want to wake up? Where you are in an amazing place, or where you are having an interaction with someone you truly appreciate (maybe even a loved one who had passed away)? And then the alarm clock hits, and you are pulled back into the dreariness of early morning. No tropical island conversation with your favorite grandmother who you’ve missed for years...just a groggy Monday morning in the dark.

That’s Tabitha! She was with the Lord, in the presence of God. She was experiencing Paradise. And she blinks and next thing she knows she is in a scratchy bed, looking at some guy she doesn’t know in a 1<sup>st</sup> century apartment that smells a little like a dead person has been there!

Before was better! Before that moment, Tabitha was alive in the presence of Jesus; now, she is alive but back in the mundane reality of her everyday life. This is not an improvement from her point of view. So, resurrection was not FOR Tabitha. But if you consider some of the people waiting outside, it may have been FOR them.

## *Tabitha’s New Life Impact*

Resurrection meant more to the people around Tabitha, the ones impacted by her new life.

### **Widows**

We read about widows in the room as they grieve. Our brief description of Tabitha shows her to be an amazing woman prior to her death. *“She was full of good works and acts of charity.”* Apparently she must have been a skilled seamstress, because her handiwork is on display as they try to remember her (*Note: In that day, there were no pictures or slideshows, so this was the best way to honor and display her memory*). And those who are remembering her are *widows* – a strong hint that she was caring for those who needed help.



<sup>3</sup> Bray, G. (2018). [Life after Death](#). In M. Ward, J. Parks, B. Ellis, & T. Hains (Eds.), *Lexham Survey of Theology*. Lexham Press.

Their tears mattered. Their grief needed comfort. And by allowing Tabitha to return, the widows would be given continued care and support. Resurrection may have been FOR them.

But they aren't the only beneficiaries.

## ***The "many"***

Look also at who was impacted after Tabitha rose.

*"And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."  
(Acts 9:42, ESV)*

Tabitha's second life resulted in others gaining new life! Her miraculous story of being dead, yet alive again would have gained attention. And I can imagine that her testimony of what she might have experienced in God's presence after she died would have been compelling! Whatever she said or whatever was said about her, others believed in Jesus and became followers!

After the brief intro we had to Tabitha's character, do you think she was upset about coming back or glad that God could use her? Was she fine with sacrificing some personal happiness, (temporarily) if it would bring others to Jesus? I'm going to guess "yes."

Tabitha learned that **resurrection was not just for her – it was to benefit others and to benefit the Kingdom.**



## ***Resurrection is Not (Just) ABOUT Us***

*Resurrection is not (just) by us. Resurrection is not (just) for us.*

And that means that resurrection is not (just) *about* us.

## ***Resurrection Benefits Us***



To be sure, resurrection benefits us! It is glorious! It is something to look forward to. The abode of our glorified, resurrected bodies will be a place of perfection. And knowing that, many people speculate about what heaven will be like when they get there. Maybe you've done the same, during a daydream. Maybe you've pictured:

- **Time with loved ones** who have passed on – a father, a grandmother, a friend.
- **Learning from the great minds and masters** of their craft – Da Vinci, Louis Armstrong, the guy who invented shoes.
- **Fun, enjoyable experiences** – golf better than Pebble Beach, food better than a Michelin-star restaurant.
- **Beautiful vistas** – more stunning than a Hawaiian beach at sunset or a Nordic night with the Northern lights.
- **Cool stuff that was previously impossible** – flying puppies, flowers that smell like love.

Those are fun daydreams. But they tend to be very human-centric. They have a bit of a selfish vibe to them. They imagine heaven as catering to our every whim.



## *Resurrection Highlights Jesus*

But when we read about resurrection in Scripture, there is a different focus. Consider this excerpt from Revelation as it talks about heaven:

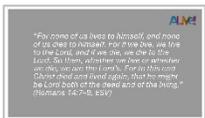


*“And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” (Revelation 21:22–23, ESV)*

What is our focus in resurrection? It’s not about you. It’s about Him!

- He will be the most splendid thing to comprehend.
- He will be the focus of our attention.
- He will be the source of our joy.

When we are resurrected, we will go into the presence of God to worship and enjoy him...because He is the pinnacle of everything! Heaven, with our resurrected, glorified bodies will be very much Jesus-centric! And this has been God’s purpose all along.



*“For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.” (Romans 14:7–9, ESV)*

- **Resurrection is not (just) by us.**
- **Resurrection is not (just) for us.**
- **Resurrection is not (just) about us.**

## *Not About Us...Before or After Death*



If this is the truth we learn about resurrection today, that **it’s not about us**, then that attitude needs to be ours *before* we resurrect. It should be our focus now, as we live, to prepare us for an eternal life that is focused on God instead of us.

In his immensely popular book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, author and pastor Rick Warren shared this memorable opening that ties in with what we’ve just discovered from Tabitha’s story.

*“IT’S NOT ABOUT YOU. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose.”*

So how are you putting that purpose in place now?

Let me give you three **practical** suggestions from Tabitha's experience to help you:



1. **Make a phone call to someone daily.** Maybe it's a widow in our congregation. Maybe it's a neighbor. Maybe it's a person who needs a friend. If you prioritize a relationship (not just a text, but real human contact!) to talk and even pray together, you can be an encourager, a spiritual support, and a person to help when there is trouble.

**Like Tabitha**, this will build a reputation of **doing good for others**. I don't want you to do a few nice things every now and then. I want you to make it part of your routine, and therefore part of your character.



2. **Feed a meal to someone weekly.** Maybe you have someone from church over for dinner. Maybe you take them out to Taco Bell. Maybe you sit with them at the Wednesday Nite Life meal. If you prioritize that time, you'll connect and focus more on their needs than your own. You don't have to be a good cook; you just have to share a meal with them.

**Like Tabitha**, this will be an **act of charity** – food's getting less cheap! But you can make a mealtime a setting where it's not about you.



3. **Share a skill monthly.** Take a Saturday each month and put your talents to work. Where? What talents? Maybe you're good with cars. Talk to a friend who needs a brake job and offer to do the labor with them. Maybe you're good at making jewelry. Spend a day making some new earrings and take them to the residents at Vintage Park so they can be fancy. Maybe you're good at baking. Make some cookies and take them around the block to deliver. You know what you can do – mowing a yard, canning vegetables, playing music.

**Like Tabitha's clothes and garments she made**, your skills can bless others and meet needs.

## ***Conclusion***



Those actions might help you cultivate a resurrection focus, realizing that we are not our own. They might help you remember, in the words of John Calvin:

*We are God's: Let us therefore live for him and die for him.*

*We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions.*

*We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.7.1

This is the “why” of the resurrection. God gives us second life for His own purposes. We might enjoy the benefits, but the plan and the goal are His alone. Be ready for resurrection by remembering, “It’s not about us!”

## ***Prayer***

## ***Invitation***

Let’s stand and sing our invitation song together. If you have a prayer request, a need, or a decision to share, we invite you to come forward and share that with us during this time.

## ***PRAYER REQUESTS:***

# Notes

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## ***Tabitha! (Acts 9:36-42)***

### ***Resurrection is Not (Just) BY Us***

*Disciples Couldn't Do It by Themselves*

*Peter Couldn't Do It by Himself (Acts 9:34; Mark 5:38-42)*

### ***Resurrection is Not (Just) FOR Us***

*Tabitha's After Death Experience (Psalm 86:13; Psalm 16:9-10; Job 19:25-26; 2 Corinthians 5:8)*

*Tabitha's New Life Impact (Acts 9:42)*

### ***Resurrection is Not (Just) ABOUT Us***

*Resurrection Benefits Us*

*Resurrection Highlights Jesus (Revelation 21:22-23; Romans 14:7-9)*

*Not About Us... Before or After Death*

# Discussion Questions

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*Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.*

## ***Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose***

- TCC's vision statements starts with "TCC exists for Him..." Do you think that the church is focused on "Him" more than it is focused on "us?" How do you contribute to this focus?

## ***Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters***

- Read Acts 9:36-42. What are your first impressions of this miracle?
- Why do you think the disciples wanted to get Peter instead of praying for Tabitha's resurrection themselves? Is there a difference in spiritual power between the "experts" and the "normal people?" Explain your answer.
- Based on the descriptions of her, why do you think they wanted Tabitha back? Were they being selfish? Why or why not?
- Compare Tabitha's story to the raising of Jairus' daughter by Jesus in Mark 5:21-43. List the similarities. What does this tell you about Peter's attitude and focus with Tabitha?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:8. Why is it better to be "home with the Lord?" Does a focus on resurrection and heaven diminish our time on earth?
- How would news of Tabitha's resurrection have spread? What impact do you think it would make if a similar miracle took place at TCC?
- Who is your view of heaven centered around – yourself or God? Explain your answer. Does your view need to change? In what ways?
- Read Romans 14:7-9. Spend a few minutes reflecting on the passage and its impact on your life now. Share any insights God gives you.

## ***Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God***

- Pray that God will help you see beyond yourself. Pray for a focus on Him in all things.