

# “The Power of the Insignificant”

*The Rev. S. Shane Nanney – May 8, 2022*

*Acts 9:36-43 and John 10:22-30*

In many ways, my grandmother was not one who would have stood out. She was a product of the depression, and she lived her life very simply. She had what she needed, and she shared with any who had not. But the thing that will always stand out for me and her greatest influence on me was her love for God. There was never any question. Even when she lost her first child or her husband. Even when times of the depression got tough, and she wrote off thousands of dollars of debt when neighbors could not pay their bills at her county store. Or when she got fined for selling gas to a neighbor on Sunday so he could take his daughter to the doctor. What she had, she shared, and her greatest possession was her faith. She shared that with me, and for the past few years, I have shared mine with you.

She was the one who had the most impact upon my life. I found that in spite of my many flaws, my many mistakes – It was my grandmother who was the gentlest with me, the most generous, the most forgiving and the most kind – Now I can't put a finger on exactly what she did, yet she was the one who had the greatest impact upon my life, far above all the other important and impressive people in my life.

Why is that? Because through the Lord Jesus Christ, the insignificant became significant. Through the Lord Jesus Christ, the things that don't seem to matter at all, in fact, come to matter very much.

In our Scripture this morning we have the story of Tabitha. Tabitha was just an ordinary woman in the city of Joppa, who did ordinary everyday things, for ordinary everyday people. She didn't preach before thousands. She didn't stand before governors and kings. She didn't write a powerful theological set of commentaries or perform astounding feats - she simply served those who were in need. She simply did what needed to be done, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, for us, Tabitha is one of those people who is almost a footnote in Scripture. She is someone who many of us pass over when we read the Bible. For us, Tabitha, is a minor character in the building of the early church, a person of no real significance. But for God, Tabitha is so significant, that He raises her from the dead.

At this point in the early church, persecution has erupted. Christians have scattered, fleeing the wrath of Saul, who was charged with eliminating the church. Many, many people have died, martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ. Many faithful followers of Jesus Christ have already died as we arrive here at Chapter 9 in the *Book of Acts*, but none of them have been brought back to life, none of them have been resurrected from the dead. Even Stephen, a strong and powerful man of God, who was stoned to death for preaching the Word, even Stephen was not brought back from the dead.

Tabitha is the first person that God raises from the dead after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. You see, Tabitha is so significant in the eyes of God, so important to the continuing work of the building of the kingdom of God, that God needs to have this woman brought back. This woman, who others might pass by on the street without a second look is so significant in the building of the early church, it cannot go on without her. This woman whom we pass over as a footnote in the kingdom of God is the one who God deems the **only** one among thousands who is significant enough to bring back from the dead. Let us also note that not a single one of the twelve disciples were brought back from the dead – yet Tabitha was.

Significance in the kingdom of God, it turns out, is not defined by accomplishment, nor status, nor ecclesiastical power, popularity, impressive book sales or even massive global impact. Significance in the kingdom of God, it turns out, is defined by the Holy Spirit. Significance in the kingdom of God has nothing to do with our imagined concept of what is significant in life.

We live our lives and in various ways we attempt to become people of significance. We work hard and try to become the best at this or that or known for this thing or that thing. We believe, to be significant, we need to conform to our society's notion of success, or prominence, or even of reputation. Certainly, striving to be the best, and striving to accomplish is not a bad thing, in fact as

Christians we should strive for excellence in our work – but as Christians we should be very concerned with this question: Am I striving to be a person of significance for my own benefit, or am I striving to be a person of significance for the benefit of my Lord Jesus Christ?

Could our striving for significance be in vain? Our society teaches us that the more significant we are, the more impact we can have. Is that true? Our Scripture this morning doesn't seem to be saying that, does it?

Looking at Verse 36 in our text we see that Tabitha lived in Joppa. Joppa is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and now is part of modern-day Tel-Aviv in the state of Israel.

The name Tabitha is Aramaic for gazelle, which in Hebrew Tabitha would be Zambia. The *Book of Acts* translates her name into the Greek, Dorcas, which also means gazelle. Now Dorcas isn't the most romantic way to say gazelle among the three languages, is it? Why would Acts emphasize the name Dorcas? We see that the name Dorcas comes from a root word meaning "to see." Luke, who wrote this book, is pointing out to us right up front that Tabitha is a woman who can "see" what the kingdom of God is truly about.

Tabitha is noted as a person who is willing to help out those in need. She is a person of faith in action.

She becomes sick and dies and they ready her for burial (*Verse 37*). So, they bring her up to the upper room in the house, perhaps those who bring her upstairs are thinking of the prophet Elijah, who, in the *Book of 1 Kings 17:19*, takes the widow's son to the upper room where God heals her son. Perhaps they are hoping for the impossible. They place Tabitha upstairs in the upper room and call Peter (*Verse 38*).

What were they expecting? Why are they calling Peter? Up to this point in the history of the church, many had been healed, but no one had been raised from the dead other than Jesus Christ himself. Maybe they are not sure what to expect, but they call Peter anyway. They may even realize that if Jesus was raised from the dead, perhaps others will be raised as well.

Peter arrives and heads up to the upper room. There the women are gathered, and they present to Peter what Tabitha had done for them. This is not some sort of a fashion show, in fact, these clothes may be the only clothes these women own. They are in effect saying, “I literally had nothing to wear but rags, and this woman before you gave us our dignity back.” Now it appears she did sew for them, but it is more likely that she did a lot more than just sewing. It appears that she met quite a bit of their needs. And I want us to note that Tabitha didn’t write a check, Tabitha just did what needed to be done. They need food, I’ll find it. They need housing I’ll get it. They need something to wear – I’ll not only get it, but I’ll also make it.

Peter gets down on his knees and prays for Tabitha and he tells her to get up – and the second resurrection of the early church occurs right in front of their eyes. *Acts 9:42* “THIS BECAME KNOWN ALL OVER JOPPA, AND MANY PEOPLE BELIEVED IN THE LORD.”

I have used this Scripture on Mother’s Day because I think it represents what our mothers have done for us throughout the years. If you are a mother, I’m sure that you can compile a long list of minor, insignificant things that you do for your family everyday – things that society, as a whole, would ignore, walk by and deem as ordinary and insignificant. But I think that you of all people know how untrue such a sentiment is. You know that the small ordinary things that are done for your family and others are not a waste of time, nor are they things that can be ignored. And you know that in spite of many in our society deeming the things you do as insignificant – you know how powerful they can be.

But I also want to point out for all of us here that it is not simply that Tabitha did ordinary things for others that makes her life a powerful life – NO, it is that Tabitha did ordinary things for others in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that made her life a powerful life, so powerful that God brought her back from the dead. The insignificant becomes significant through the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me end with this: on this Mother’s Day, let us remember the insignificant, let us remember the ordinary, let us remember to step out and attend to those things others ignore, for in the kingdom of God, through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the insignificant, becomes the significant. Amen.