

Acts 9:36-43

Aim of lesson

To show that in order to put Christianity into practice we must use the gifts God has given us to help others; and to show that God gave power to the Apostles to help them in their work of preaching the gospel.

Background study

Proverbs 31:29-31. Try to find a map and pictures of Joppa.

Suggested outline of lesson

Joppa or Jaffa

Set the scene by describing Joppa, the seaside town where Dorcas lived. It was a busy Mediterranean sea port, the only natural harbour on the coast of Israel south of the Bay of Haifa. Today it is known as Jaffa and provides the trade name for citrus fruit from Israel.

A virtuous woman

Introduce Dorcas who, together with some other people, had become a follower of Jesus. Her Christian beliefs made her want to help others. She must have had an exceptionally generous and loving nature because we are told she was “full of good works and acts of charity” and she was much loved. The help she gave was obviously of a very practical nature, and much of her time and money must have been spent in buying cloth and making clothes to give to those in need. Draw on the children’s imagination as to the kind of people she might have helped in this way.

Dorcas restored to life by a miracle

The death of Dorcas had a profound effect upon the disciples in Joppa. They were filled with sorrow and a deep sense of loss. How could they manage without her? Who would take her place? What could they do? Their immediate thought was to send for Peter whom they knew to be at Lydda, only a few miles away. Peter did not hesitate. He went with the messengers immediately. Describe the scene when he arrived at Dorcas’ house and was taken upstairs to the room where she lay. Picture the sad women who surrounded him with tears in their eyes, showing him all the garments Dorcas had made and talking of her kindness and goodness. The children may have had some experience of death - a friend, a member of the family, a pet, or perhaps a bird found in the garden. Even at this age they can recognize the finality of death and the inability of the bereaved to restore life. Having established this point, the raising of Dorcas will be seen to be truly miraculous.

Peter gently sent the believers outside and then, in the quietness that followed, he knelt down and prayed to God, the creator and sustainer of life. He must have felt that God had given him special power in answer to his prayer, because he went over to the dead

body of Dorcas, spoke to her and told her to rise. Imagine his joy when her eyes opened and she sat up. He helped her to her feet, and then called in the group of disciples and friends who had been waiting, grieving outside her house. It is hard for us to imagine what the feelings of her friends were as the door opened, for today we have no instances of the dead being raised; but there would be a little fear, perhaps awe, then a great feeling of overwhelming joy at seeing their beloved friend again, alive and well.

A miracle reinforces the preaching

Encourage the children to talk about what they think the friends of Dorcas would have said and done. Use their answers to show how the news spread quickly through Joppa. This miracle not only gave Dorcas more years to serve God and help her neighbours, but also helped to spread the gospel message in Joppa and beyond.

Relevance to the children's lives

Jesus taught us to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves. This means, among other things, using the gifts he has given us to help other people. In what practical ways can we help people, both those who live near and those who live far away? Who knows what our own actions may do in helping others to do what is right?

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you for our health and strength and all our abilities. Help us to use these for the good of other people. Amen.

Memory verse

“do good, ... be rich in good works, ... be generous and ready to share” (1 Timothy 6:18).