

THE LEGACY OF DORCAS

Acts 9:35-42

What We Learn from Experience

When Peter came to Joppa that day, they began showing him the garments and coats Dorcas had made. I venture to say, they did not do that because the garments were nicely made, although no doubt they were. I venture to say, they did not do that because she was a good seamstress, although she probably was. I venture to say, they did not do that because the garments were expensive, although she may have used the best material she could find.

What they showed Peter that day was the “added value,” the personal touch. They showed him that day, not garments particularly, but meaning and love. The same garment bought at a department store has not a chance of carrying with it the value of a dress made by loving hands and given to you.

What we see about garments in the legacy of Dorcas we see in the legacy of each person who passes through our experience and shares

The stark experiences of life have a way of ordering the endless details of human existence, the seemingly endless muddle of apparently chaotic particulars that fill up disordered lives. But the stark experiences of life—by the very loss that we invariably sense attendant to them—force us to note what is important here. Priorities and patterns emerge from the seemingly cluttered page much like what happens when you put back the removed tabs on a page full of numerical data.

Today we know what is important because the loss of a part of it reminds us of how important is the presence of the personal touch, the “added value,” that another’s life makes. It is the difference between a \$50 dress and a priceless gift. Today we cannot help resolving—and should not help resolving—to live henceforth in light of what impresses itself on us irresistibly the morning. This much we can know from down-to-earth experience.

What We Know

We know now that it is not so much what we do as who we do it for.

... how hard we work as who we work hard for.

... what we have as who we have it for.

... what we earn as who we earn it for.

The work eventually comes to nothing. The earnings from the work eventually come to nothing. The possessions bought with the earnings eventually come to nothing. The physical will come to nothing. But the “added value” remains in the fond memories and the enriched lives. The what always passes away, but the who remains.

Experience is a great teacher, and it teaches us that “persons for others” are what is important. But experience can teach us only what it knows.

What We Cannot Know

We are a small part of a vast thing we call reality. What the rest of it is like we can only imagine. We cannot know from experience how much of it there really is. “*We walk by faith and not by sight*” (2 Corinthians 5:7); that is, we conduct life by trust more than by personal experience.

The rest of reality and the rest of endless time we must know by TRUST/FAITH. And that is not surprising.

What happened on the Plains of Marathon we cannot see; and so, to know it, we must trust testimony (PAST).

What is happening in Trafalgar Square, London, at the moment we cannot know. What is happening in Nagano (the winter Olympic games) we cannot know; and so, to know it, we must trust testimony (PRESENT).

What will happen tomorrow we cannot know by sight; and so, to know it, we must trust the One who is in charge of it (FUTURE).

Only a fraction of what we know about our own subset do we know by sight: 2 Corinthians 5:7.

The value of the incarnation is to tell us that this is but the first inning; this is but the twilight of the first day. He who came from beyond us informs us of a reason to hope. He adds the word tomorrow to our felt vocabulary. And confirms it with his own resurrection, by which he materializes his words with an act of confirmation.

His whole coming was for us like a garment is made and given by loving hands to materialize for us the invisible bonds of personal love.

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