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– (MARCH 28. – S.S. LESSON, REVIEW) –

MIRACLES AT LYDDA AND JOPPA.

– APRIL 4. – ACTS 9:32-43. –

"Jesus Christ maketh thee whole." – Acts 9:34.

THIS lesson calls us back to the period when the Church had rest from persecution – probably about A.D. 40. In divine providence it was a time for the rooting and establishing of the Christian faith. The general dispersion of believers noted in a previous lesson had not yet taken place; but the apostles were actively circulating throughout the towns and villages of Palestine; – as is here stated of Peter's visit to the believers at Lydda. We pause to remark that believers in the days of the apostles lived lives so separated from the world, that the name "saints" (holy ones) was appropriate to them. So let all true Christians today live – consecrated, holy, separated lives, copies of God's dear Son, to the extent of their ability. The habit in the Roman Catholic Church is to wait several centuries; until his evil deeds are forgotten, and then to canonize a man or woman as a "saint," often in recognition of services rendered to Papacy and against the truth.

The healing of the paralytic, Eneas, was a very notable evidence of the power of the Lord, very similar to the healing at the temple gate, Beautiful. Here, as always, the great Apostle made sure that none should think the power exercised to be his own; – distinctly affirming that Jesus, the Messiah, whom their rulers had crucified, had performed the cure and was therefore not dead, as they supposed, but risen.

The valley called Sharon, very fertile, was thickly settled, and Lydda was one of its towns. We are not to presume that all the people became true Christians, but that they were convinced of the power of Jesus; and doubtless some of them consecrated themselves to him and became true disciples.

The holy spirit was evidently guiding the apostle and using these occasional miracles to draw attention to the Gospel which Peter preached. Thus he "found" the man who, under divine providence, was to be cured. Thus also at the right time, when he was near (about nine miles away), Tabitha (*Aramic* language) or Dorcas (*Greek*) died, and afforded the opportunity for one of the most remarkable miracles ever performed; – a parallel to our Lord's greatest. It would not, however, be correct to suppose that thus our Lord's words were fulfilled, which say, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do, shall he do also; and *greater works* than these shall he do." (John 14:12.) These words can only be understood to refer either (1) to a future work, in which the Church will share with her Lord, during the Millennium, or (2) it may be understood as ranking the works of spiritual quickening and revival as higher than physical healing and revival. Our Lord's ministry was prior to his offering of the sin-offering, and the general impartation of the holy spirit to believers; and hence his work was chiefly physical healing and the uttering of parables and dark sayings not to be fully understood by any not imbued with the spirit of adoption.

We must dissent also from the views of some, that this power or gift, exercised so readily by the Apostle Peter, is a general power possessed by all of God's people – then or now. Peter did not upbraid the believers, the "saints," saying, Why did you not heal Dorcas, when sick, or revive her, when she died? Even Peter himself healed comparatively few; probably there were plenty of palsied and blind and otherwise sick in the valley of Sharon; surely, there were multitudes of dead. But every evidence proves that these powers were special and for a special purpose – to introduce the Gospel to the attention of the people, and not for the purpose of dispelling sickness and death, either in or out of the Church. On the contrary, the Apostles taught that this age is the time in which the faithful are to suffer, if, by and by, they would reign with Christ: to rejoice in tribulations, knowing that these, rightly endured and enjoyed, will work out for the faithful a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, in the Kingdom.

The name Tabitha signifies *Gazelle*; "called Dorcas by the Greeks on account of its bright, flashing [R2126 : page 91] eyes." Whether or not this name was appropriate, whether Dorcas was a graceful, bright and beautiful woman, we cannot know; but it evidently fitted her well as a noble Christian woman. Nay, her face must have beamed and her eyes must have sparkled; for she had a warm, generous spirit, as testified by her sympathetic and energetic helpfulness of others. O that the spirit of loving self-sacrifice for others might more and more abound in God's people, male and female! O that more might be able to surround the coffins of true Christians and testify to evidences of loving service – earthly food or clothing or, better still, spiritual food and robes of Christ's righteousness or, still better, if possible, – both.
